CHURCHILL AND THE ARCHANGEL FIASCO

November 1918 – July 1919

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At the German Armistice (with which the second volume in this series ended), smallscale Allied intervention in Russia (designed to thwart the Germans, save the Czechs, and overthrow the Bolsheviks) had completely failed. But the presence of Allied troops had enabled some White groups to come together, while Allied finance had kept others alive. Now the Great War was over. Were Allied troops to be withdrawn—or reinforced? All would be decided at the coming Peace Conference. But before it even met, Britain had already decided to supply the Whites in South Russia and Siberia, while France had actually launched a military invasion in the Odessa region.

The Peace Conference never properly addressed the Russian problem. After President Wilson’s final effort to make peace with Moscow had failed, and the Whites had started an advance in Siberia, and French troops, in open mutiny, had abandoned Odessa, the British were left to carry on single-handed.

On the main South Russian, Siberian and Baltic fronts, Churchill and Lloyd George now turned the White forces into expendable British pawns in a temporary forward holding operation, designed to contain the Bolshevik inferno within Russia, and burn it out there, and thus give a prostrate Europe time to recover. This medium British intervention (which the Peace Conference had already been carefully warned was doomed to failure) was thus to prolong the Russian civil war, and cause a further 14 million Russian deaths—due not to the haphazard fighting, but to starvation, cholera and typhus, in turn due to the ever-growing dislocation within Russia, and its further ruin. Thus were sown the seeds of the Cold War.

But in North Russia (considered the special British sphere), Churchill was no more successful than the French. He insisted that, to avoid another ‘Odessa’ debacle at Archangel, more British troops must be sent out to link up with the White forces coming from Siberia. But as he omitted to inform the Admiralty of changed British plans in North Russia, too few river boats had been sent down the Dvina river to support them. As the Peace Conference ended, the Siberians were in retreat, the river ran dry, local North Russian troops mutinied, and Churchill’s operation ended in fiasco.
This book (written on a panoramic basis, not front by front) is designed, by including detailed documents from both sides, to give the reader an idea of what the leadership on both sides had to face, as the Russian kaleidoscope constantly changed; and demonstrates how Churchill (bent on restoring a Russia that had never existed) was completely out-generated by Trotsky.

Michael Kettle has had access to British Government papers never before seen by historians, including the last unpublished papers of Winston Churchill, and many hitherto unseen French documents in the British archives.
For

CLARE & ANDREW
I was sent forth from the Power.
Look upon me. Be on your guard!

For I am the first and the last,
I am the honoured one and the scorned one.
I am the whore and the holy one.
I am the wife and the virgin.
I am the barren one,
    and many are her sons.

I am the silence that is incomprehensible.
I am the voice whose sound is manifold.
I am the utterance of my name.

For I am knowledge and ignorance.
I am shame and boldness.
I am strength and I am fear.
I am war and peace.
Give heed to me.

I am the one whom they call Life,
    and you have called Death.
I am the one whom they call Law,
    and you have called Lawlessness.
I, I am godless,
    and I am one whose God is great.
I am peace and war.
I am the union and the dissolution.

Hear me in gentleness, and learn of me in roughness,
I am she who cries out.
I am the hearing that is attainable to everyone;
    I am the speech that cannot be grasped.
I am the name of the sound,
    and the sound of the name.

The Thunder, Perfect Mind
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When my researches into the British intervention during the Russian Civil War began, the first documents to come to light were those that appear in this volume. This was therefore the first that came to be written (before those that have already appeared as volumes 1 and 2).

When this volume was in draft form, I sent it (rather out of the blue) to Professor George F. Kennan at Princeton, since it was a remark in his book, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, to the effect that the British had played by far the greater role in the Russian Civil War, that first excited my interest in this subject. Professor Kennan read all my draft chapters in a very short time, and sent me back a long and detailed letter. He first said, ‘I must say that I am amazed at the importance and abundance of the material you have unearthed…For the period covered—from the (German) Armistice to roughly the end of the Peace Conference—this material does indeed pretty well complete the published record of the British relationship to the Russian scene, and sheds more light than anything else I have come across on the French intervention in the south of Russia.’ This was, he informed me, ‘an important body of material’. He gave me detailed advice on how to proceed, and concluded, ‘I hope what I have said to you here is not too discouraging. The path of the historical scholar is not smooth, even in the best of circumstances; and you have wandered, as it happens, into one of the most impenetrable thickets of confusion and perplexity to be found anywhere in the forests of recent history. Anyone who chooses to occupy himself with historical material which depends for its intelligibility on some understanding of the events of the Russian Civil War of 1918–1920 cannot expect to have an easy time of it.’

In answer to a further query from myself, Professor Kennan said that material to illustrate what was happening during this time on the other side (in Moscow, within the Red Army, and in Bolshevik Russia generally) must be brought in; and he expressly advised that I could, in his opinion, rely solely for this purpose on the ‘Trotsky Papers’. This I have done.

The late Michael Glenny translated such Russian texts as were necessary. At a later stage, some further translation was done for me by Barry Holland and Mary Seton-Watson, to whom I extend my thanks.
Photographs have been loaned to me, first and foremost, by Madame Marina Grey (General Denikin’s daughter), who has kindly allowed me to use her father’s unique collection. Other photographs have been loaned by the late Commander Kenneth Cohen R.N., by the late Mrs Oona Neilson, and by the Imperial War Museum.

I would also like to express my thanks to Martin Gilbert, and to William Heinemann Ltd, for kindly allowing me to make use of the companion documents to volume 4 of Martin Gilbert’s life of Winston Churchill.

This volume has been edited by Sarah-Jane Evans, and to her, and to my editor at Routledge, Claire l’Enfant, I express my sincere thanks. Publication of this volume has been assisted by a grant from the Crompton Bequest, for which I also extend my thanks. Two further volumes (which are already completed) bring this series to an end; and they will be published in due course.

Finally, I must admit that although, as Professor Kennan warned, I have not had an easy time of it, I hope that I have, in some way, justified the hopes and encouragement that he gave me when I set out on this long journey.
Map 1 North Russia
Map 2 South Russia and the Ukraine
Map 3 Kotlas and the Dvina River
Map 5 The Baltic
By mid-October 1918, Robert Bruce Lockhart (the War Cabinet’s special envoy to the Bolshevik Government) had returned to London from the confines of the Lubyanka prison in Moscow. In the course of a lengthy report on November 7, the first anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, he informed the War Cabinet that the Allies now had three possible courses of action in Russia:

1. The Allies could abandon intervention, and come to terms with the Bolsheviks, who might become more moderate, and then die a natural death. Such a course would also help to avoid serious labour unrest at home.
2. The Allies could intervene on a ‘proper scale’ by increasing Allied forces in North Russia and Siberia, and by the despatch of 50,000 Allied troops through the Black Sea to join Denikin (Commander of the Volunteer Army in South Russia), who would march at once on Moscow, with a further 50,000 Allied troops coming through the Urals from Siberia. The more troops the Allies sent, the more the Russian people would rally to the White Russian cause, Lockhart emphasised; but American support was absolutely essential.
3. The Allies could adopt a middle course of supplying the White Russians, and creating a chain of small states on Russia’s western border. This he rejected, as it was certain to end in disaster. For without the ‘active support’ of foreign troops, the White Russians would be too weak to overcome the Bolsheviks alone, and the border states would themselves go Bolshevik. By such a policy the Allies would, in fact, only be ‘prolonging civil war and unnecessary bloodshed in Russia’.

Bruce Lockhart thus urged Allied intervention on a ‘proper scale’, which would in fact be an humanitarian act in view of the Bolshevik Terror, which justified any measures. ‘For the success of such an intervention, American cooperation is essential, and operations should commence at once...If America would agree to send the bulk of the required troops, it would be possible to secure the necessary complement of French and British troops voluntarily.’ To abandon intervention, he argued, would stimulate Bolshevism in other countries, and all Europe might be ravaged before it died its natural death. But whichever
Russian group the Allies backed should at once promise land to the peasants; and intervention must be accompanied by economic relief, which would give the Allies a predominant position in the Russian economy.¹

Bruce Lockhart had been too long out of London to know how hopeless it would be to count on American support; the President had all along been adamantly opposed to any sort of ‘organised intervention’—even in wartime. This is probably the main reason why, although this able report drew complimentary remarks from individual members of the Cabinet, the War Cabinet itself never considered it. But among the myriad of reports on Russia, official and unofficial, Bruce Lockhart’s was to stand the test of time.

But Sir Henry Wilson, the CIGS, entirely rejected Bruce Lockhart’s belligerent advice when he wrote his first post-war Russian paper on November 13. The British Government, he wrote, had undertaken military intervention in Russia to retain German troops and material on the Eastern Front, and to prevent Germany obtaining either other troops and material (the reference is probably to German prisoners in Russia), or a major influence in post-war Russia. These aims had been largely reached; and now only the last objective remained valid, which could almost be described as the ‘war after the war’. But there would be little time during the armistice to complete any further operations. ‘We must be careful, therefore, to start nothing which we are not prepared to continue after peace is declared,’ he warned.

He said that those who urged continued intervention argued that:

a) Bolshevism was a world danger, and must be crushed.

b) If the Allies did not do so, the Germans in time would, and thus acquire a major influence in Russia.

c) The Allies could not leave their supporters to the Bolshevik mercy, and might not otherwise be able to extract some of their own troops.

The first point was mainly political. ‘Bolshevism is a cult if not a religion’, he wrote. ‘It flourishes in rank soil, such as exists in Russia owing to complete isolation from the outside world for several years...conditions which are abnormal, even in Russia.’ If radically unsound, as was thought, it would not long survive the restoration of order in the outside world. ‘If, however, it is better than we are prepared to admit, it will gradually develop into a higher organism and we cannot permanently stifle it by military action.’

The real Allied objective was to combat the danger inherent in the second point, which would entail German absorption of the border states, until Russia was strong enough to retake them. On the third point, provided the Allies first enabled their supporters to defend themselves, they would have done their duty. ‘If the Bolsheviks are the better men, we cannot indefinitely continue to protect the others’, he wrote; while the Bolsheviks would no doubt be ‘only too pleased’ to help in the withdrawal of British troops from Archangel—the only ones
who might be in difficulty—by land, if this was desired while Archangel was ice-bound.2

If the Allies decided that ‘continued or more efficient’ intervention was necessary, there were two alternatives. First, Allied troops could be sent to occupy the border states on the German withdrawal, before the Bolsheviks did so, and thus encircle Bolshevik Russia, deny it expansion, deprive it of supplies, and thus reduce it to exhaustion. This would entail large-scale starvation, and an indefinite Allied occupation of the border states. ‘From a purely military point of view such a plan is indefensible’, he wrote, ‘for it is one of passive resistance and of complete surrender of the initiative to the Bolsheviks.’ It might well lead to large-scale operations later, at a much less favourable time. ‘The second alternative is to grasp the nettle firmly by taking active military measures with a view to crushing Bolshevism definitely at the earliest possible date.’ (There is a definite tick in the margin against this paragraph.) This was the quicker and more certain way of checking German expansion, since the border states would then once more come under Russian influence; ‘but there are great difficulties in the way of such action’, he warned.

If the first plan were adopted, the necessary garrisons would have to remain after the Peace Treaty; but most British troops had only enlisted for war-time service, which ‘cannot be held to cover a desultory campaign of indefinite duration in Eastern Europe and Asia against an enemy with whom the British public has no particular quarrel’. The second plan would have to be carried out with sufficient force and against the large Russian towns, where Bolshevism mainly flourished. The main attack should be launched through the Baltic against Moscow, while other attacks should be made from the east and south. This would enable British troops and the Czechs to return home. ‘This plan constitutes the only certain method of dealing a fatal blow to Bolshevism within a definite time,’ he wrote, but there were grave political and military difficulties to face. First, they must obtain the support of British public opinion, which would be difficult; while such action would be opposed by America, which would weaken the British position at the Peace Conference. Secondly, the severe climate, the vastness of Russia, and the icebound ports presented great military problems—far greater than the Bolsheviks themselves—which might entail the retention of British troops in Russia until summer 1919, probably after peace was signed.

Sir Henry Wilson went on, ‘One course only remains, namely, to do all we can in the way of material to give our friends a fair start, and then to withdraw.’ He then went round the Russian clock. Poland would be the most important state, the only one likely to withstand Bolshevism unaided. The Polish Army, of 70,000 troops, must be supplied, and General Haller’s 30,000 Polish troops in France must return to Poland. The Ukraine, to the east, was likely to prove ‘thoroughly unsatisfactory’, however, as the German withdrawal would be followed by a Bolshevik invasion. Britain should support ‘stable elements’ once the Black Sea was opened, while Roumania should form a barrier to the west by occupying Bessarabia. The Baltic States, to the north, could be supplied with
arms on the German withdrawal, if \textit{de facto} governments emerged, and be given ‘moral support’ by British warships, while their future was being settled by the Peace Conference. In North Russia, Britain should promote a settlement between the Finns and the Karelians, so that Karelian ‘integrity’ no longer rested on British bayonets posted along the Murmansk railway. Archangel must be held through the coming winter, ‘but our commitment must in no way be increased’, and Russian troops must be enabled to hold their own unaided, if British troops withdrew in the spring.\textsuperscript{2}

In Siberia, where (he claimed wrongly) Bolshevik strength relied mainly on German prisoners, who should be repatriated at once, he stated, it was improbable that the Czechs would continue to fight on. But the mobilisation carried out by the new White Russian Government at the Siberian capital of Omsk had met with considerable success, and the British and French should give all possible help to form and train these new Russian armies; whereupon British troops could withdraw. Recognition of the Omsk Government would assist this process. In South Russia, the opening of the Black Sea would finally enable Britain to supply the ‘considerable’ forces of both Denikin in the Caucasus, and of the Don Cossack Ataman Krasnov on the Don, whose lack of arms had hitherto prevented them from taking the offensive against the Bolsheviks. Britain could then withdraw east of the Caspian, and probably abandon the Hamadan road through Persia; for a friendly Turkey would form an effective barrier to German expansion eastwards towards India, which was the sole object of the original British advance to the Caspian.

Sir Henry Wilson concluded that the British Government should withdraw all British troops from Russia ‘at the earliest possible moment’, and before the signature of the Peace Treaty, and set up a ‘firm’ Russian Government in Siberia at once. (It may be that Sir Henry Wilson added this final paragraph after the main paper was drafted, as this sentence is much stronger than the first reference to recognition of the Omsk Government). Second, Britain should make immediate use of the opening of the Baltic to supply ‘our friends’ there, and of the Black Sea to occupy certain eastern ports in order to help Russian forces in the Caucasus to set up a ‘stable’ Russian Government in South Russia.\textsuperscript{2}

That same afternoon (November 13), Balfour presided over a joint Foreign Office and War Office conference on Russia. Rejecting the War Office proposal that all British troops should be withdrawn from Russia before the Peace Treaty was signed, Balfour stated that Britain could not embark on an anti-Bolshevik ‘crusade’ in Russia, as the British people would not allow it; although it was natural that British advisers on the spot should favour one, as they were ‘obsessed’ with Bolshevik violence. But Britain should recognise and support the border states from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The General Staff, he went on, considered that when Russia was restored, she would inevitably retake them; but the League of Nations, ‘if it were to be of any value at all’, should be able to protect them. It was said that Bolshevism had already broken out there; but this was simply an agrarian revolution against the landlords. Lord Milner (Secretary of State for War)
stressed the danger of the armistice clause which required the German troops to police the border states, in view of the breakdown of German morale. In conclusion, Balfour urged that the new Omsk Government be supported in Siberia, and the Czechs extricated; and that Denikin and the Caucasus States be helped in South Russia.

Milner entirely agreed that Britain could not ‘crusade’ against Bolshevism in countries where it already prevailed, but should protect other countries from Bolshevist attack, ‘particularly when invited to do so’. Though Britain could not send troops, she must protect the Baltic States; and considerations of ‘honour and of interest’ demanded that Bolshevism be kept away from the Caucasus, the Don and Turkestan. But British military objectives must be limited. The spheres of British and French ‘activity in Russia’, defined in December 1917, should be renewed.

Lord Robert Cecil (Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office) partly agreed with Balfour and Milner, but said he would not protect the border states against Bolshevist attack. Britain must help the Russians help themselves, and thus do all possible to ‘support and strengthen existing organisations’. In Siberia, the British Government should recognise the new Omsk Government, encourage the Czechs to remain, send British officers and equipment, and, if possible, the Canadians. In South Russia, Britain should hold the Baku–Batoum line, and send arms and munitions, but not troops, to Denikin; and supply the existing Polish detachments, and send Polish troops in France back to Poland at once. Britain should also set up a Baltic federation; failing which, any competent local groups should be supplied. Admiral Hall (the DNI) urged the ‘maximum possible use’ of Allied control of food supplies in Russia; in his last letter, Captain Cromie (the Naval Attaché murdered at the British Embassy that summer) had stated that the ‘hand that feeds this country will rule it’.2

After some discussion, it was decided ‘to recognise the Omsk Directorate as a de facto Government’, to maintain ‘our present Siberian expedition to encourage the Czechs to remain and the Canadians to go out, to send out British officers, and approve the modus vivendi between the French General Janin and General Knox (head of the British military mission in Siberia). It was next agreed to remain at Archangel and Murmansk. In the Baltic, it was decided to send military supplies ‘if and when’ the Baltic States had governments which could put them to proper use. In South Russia, it was agreed ‘to establish touch with Denikin at Novorossisk, and afford him all possible assistance in military material’; to occupy the Baku–Batoum line; and to take over Krasnovodsk, on the eastern shore of the Caspian, if the India Office approved. It was finally agreed to adhere to the Anglo-French agreement of December 1917, ‘if possible extending the British sphere so as to include the country between the Don and the Volga’.2

Later that afternoon, Sir George Clerk minuted to his Foreign Office colleagues: ‘In view of the inter-departmental conference in Mr Balfour’s room this afternoon, I submit that we should at once inform the French, Italian, Japanese and American Govts that we propose to recognise the All-Russian
Provisional Govt at Omsk as the “de facto” ruling authority in the regions over which its authority is recognised/established.’

Lord Robert Cecil ticked this, and Balfour went ahead and told the Italian Ambassador during an interview; but, he stressed, such recognition ‘did not carry with it any attempt to define the frontiers within which we hold its authority to run’.

Lord Hardinge (Permanent Under-Secretary of State) thought all this too precipitate. ‘We must await the approval by the War Cabinet of the decisions taken yesterday’, he minuted the following morning.³

At noon on November 14, Balfour brought these matters before the War Cabinet. It was impossible to conduct an anti-Bolshevik crusade, he stated, but it was ‘still clear’ that the Germans were using Bolsheviks in Holland and ‘elsewhere’ for their own purposes; and even the Swiss had had to turn out Bolshevik agents. Britain could do nothing in Russia proper, but should give all support to those elements in Siberia and South Russia who had stood by Britain during the war. She also had to prevent Russia retaking the border states, whose people were of different race, language and religion, and ‘more civilised and cultivated’ than the Russians. ‘The danger lay in the combination of invasion and revolution.’ The Bolsheviks took no heed of boundaries, and would leave the border states alone, provided they had Soviet governments. But all had to cope with a land problem, for the peasants and the people hated the Baltic barons and the Polish counts; in the Ukraine, the small landowner had already plundered the big one. Balfour said he had tried hard to induce the Scandinavians to supply and police the border states, but all had refused. If anything was to be done, it had to be done by the Allies.

Milner interrupted that ‘under no circumstances’ could British troops be sent. Cecil agreed with Balfour again, but felt it was not the duty of the British to protect the Baltic States against Russian Bolshevism. Britain should just protect the ‘rich countries’ of South Russia, and those she had asked to help her in the war, like Denikin, ‘not because they were anti-Bolshevik, but because they had during the war been pro-Ally’. Nor was it their duty to support the pro-German Government in the Ukraine. Generally, Britain should use her control of world food supplies to back order against disorder; if there were Bolshevik outbreaks, Britain should tell that country that it would be given no food. (This was a curious argument in view of the fact that shortage of food contributed to outbreaks of Bolshevism. Compare also Balfour’s remark above.)⁴

The Prime Minister entirely agreed with Balfour. In Estonia, the German landowners had been a ‘curse’, had been used as an ‘alien garrison’ by the German Government; and the sooner the peasants got the land, the better, as they would then be a ‘strong anti-Bolshevik nucleus’.

Edwin Montagu (Secretary of State for India) asked if it was proposed to hold the Baku-Batoum railway, and abandon the Hamadan road through Persia to the Caspian. This he would approve, if it enabled Britain to withdraw from Persia. But what should Britain do in Transcaspia and Turkestan? Cecil urged that the
matter be settled by the War Office and the India Office, while Montagu and Milner should further discuss the occupation of Krasnovodsk. In Turkestan, Britain was supporting a government against the Bolsheviks, who were ‘the opposition’.

Milner stated that ‘it so happened’ that the areas east of the Don and the Volga, where anti-Bolshevik governments already existed, were those which ‘most closely’ affected the British Empire’s interests, ‘and were most easily got at’. Britain should help them resist the threatened Bolshevik ‘invasion’ from the west; there was no ‘alien landed aristocracy’ there to complicate matters. Montagu thereupon asked if the War Cabinet accepted Milner’s principle that ‘where there was in existence a friendly anti-Bolshevik Government which it was to our advantage to support, we should support it, and we ought to support it, even though it entailed anti-Bolshevik action’. Though the conference the day before had dealt with Bolshevism, it did not deal with Transcaspia; but this principle, if accepted, would apply to Transcaspia, and he would then so instruct the Indian Government. The War Cabinet then decided—that the principle stated by Lord Milner should be accepted.4

The Prime Minister then said that it was important that the British public should realise more fully what Bolshevism really meant. France had many small peasant proprietors, and was thus more secure against Bolshevism. But Briton had a ‘great, inflammable’ industrial population, who must realise that the Russian workers had suffered just as much as anyone else under the Bolsheviks. Austen Chamberlain (Minister without Portfolio) thought that Lockhart’s evidence about Bolshevik activities should now be given full publicity. Balfour remarked that the Bolsheviks had used their control of food supplies to starve their political opponents to death; and the people they had treated worst were those who would be regarded in England as ‘blood-red Socialists’. It was urged that the British press should give much more prominence to ‘Bolshevik excesses’. Cecil remarked that the Foreign Office had a good deal of information. It was decided that the Foreign Office should collect ‘as much material as possible’ on the subject, and ensure its ‘full and speedy’ publication. The War Cabinet then approved the decisions of the conference the day before, save for the occupation of Krasnovodsk, which was to be decided by Milner and Montagu.4

But the general wild excitement in London spilled over into the Cabinet room itself, and these discussions took place in a slightly feverish atmosphere. Chamberlain had opened the meeting by complaining that the Cabinet boxes had not been delivered the night before, as the cars had been seized in the streets, and their petrol taken to start bonfires in Trafalgar Square and burn German guns. This led to general expostulation. Balfour said there had been a bonfire in Piccadilly Circus as well. Lloyd George said it was all the fault of the Australians. Walter Long, a diehard Tory, urged that it was ‘important to get the Australians out of London as soon as possible. There had been a certain amount of trouble with them in Wiltshire. They had, for instance, forcibly removed the gates of Lord Pembroke’s house at Wilton Park.’ The General Staff said that young RAF
officers were also involved. The German guns, on exhibition in the Mall, were a considerable danger. ‘They might be used to barricade the streets, or be allowed to run loose down the Haymarket, or similar declines’, they warned. ‘The main difficulty was with the Australians, who apparently intended to make their behaviour in Cairo in 1915 a standard for future action.’ With that, the War Cabinet left this depressing subject; and went on to authorise the Admiralty to send a ship to rescue the Dowager Empress of Russia from the Crimea, whose life would be endangered ‘if the Germans left’.  

On return to the Foreign Office, Balfour saw Lord Hardinge’s minute, urging approval by the War Cabinet before informing the Allied governments of the British intention to recognise the new Russian Government at Omsk. ‘See today’s decisions’, wrote the Secretary of State. ‘Tel(egraph) as proposed.’

On November 16, the Russia Department put forward a draft wire to Sir Charles Eliot in Siberia, informing him that the British Government were about to advise the Allies that they intended to grant de facto recognition to the new Russian Government at Omsk in all regions in which the inhabitants admitted its authority, since it seemed to have secured the adhesion of all Russian parties in Siberia. ‘We think, however, that such recognition entitles us to insist upon the Omsk Government keeping its own house in order’, the draft went on, ‘and dealing firmly with all separatist tendencies, such as those manifested by (the Social Revolutionary leader) Chernov. We can only recognise if we can be fairly sure that we are dealing with a Government which has both the will and the power to keep its component parts united, and to take proper measures to prevent disruption.’ Eliot was asked to consult General Knox, and to reply as soon as possible whether they both thought such conditions should be attached to British recognition; and if so, how they should be made known.

Lord Hardinge disagreed. ‘Would it not be better to omit last para & impose this condition? If they fail to fulfil the condition, we can withdraw our recognition.’ ‘I hardly think we could settle the form of such a condition without local advice,’ replied Lord Robert Cecil. ‘Conceivably we might produce just the contrary affect to that desired. It had better go as it stands.’

The draft was accordingly despatched. Some of Lord Hardinge’s doubts were dispelled when Nabokov informed the Foreign Office that he had recently wired to Omsk for further details of the new Russian Government’s position and prospects, their relations with the Volunteer Army in South Russia, and of ‘the methods which they intended to adopt in the creation of a new Army’. Nabokov had now had this reply, dated November 9: ‘Monsieur Vologodsky and Chaikovsky are members of the Directorate. We have not yet entered into communication with General Denikin [General Alexeiev’s successor], but are making every effort to do so. The Army is being created on the basis of strong discipline. The influence of political parties is being eliminated. No political organisations within the ranks of the armed forces will be permitted.’

But the Foreign Office’s guarded optimism about recognition received a sharp setback later on the 16th, when Lord Derby (British Ambassador in Paris) wired
that he had just consulted both Clemenceau and the French Foreign Minister about the British proposal. ‘French Government are not ready to recognise Omsk Provisional Government as United States Government are not prepared to do so’, stated the Ambassador. ‘They are in accord with the latter Government in thinking that Omsk Government is not one which differs materially from other Governments formed elsewhere, notably Archangel, Murman and Ufa, and which are in their opinion not sufficiently stable to warrant recognition. They are not prepared to risk danger of interfering in the internal politics of Russia by formal recognition of any Government, until quite satisfied that it is likely to be on permanent basis, and they are of opinion that most probable district for formation of such a Government is Ekaterinodar.’ The French Government were, however, in complete agreement with the British Government on the advisability of supporting the new Omsk Government in other ways, especially with finance, ‘but for the moment they must decline to officially recognise it’.

This telegram provoked a spate of comment in the Foreign Office, and an eventual adjustment of the British view. ‘It is quite absurd to compare the Omsk Govt with the organisations established at Archangel or Murmansk’, minuted the Russia Department in some exasperation, ‘while to compare it with the Ufa Conference shows ignorance of the fact that the All Russia Govt established at Omsk has absorbed the previous Ufa organisation. The Omsk Govt may not be over stable, but if we are to wait until: “quite satisfied” that anything in Russia is “on a permanent basis”, we shall wait till Doomsday. The Govt does in fact exercise some sort of control between the Urals & Vladivostok & our best hope of rendering it stable is to bring it the additional prestige which recognition would entail. It is rather difficult to see why such recognition should be regarded as “interfering in the internal politics of Russia” if the despatch of troops & the lending of money to that Govt are not so regarded, to say nothing of the occupation of Murmansk & Archangel, the contemplated holding of the Batoum-Baku line, the seizure of the Russian Black Sea Fleet etc. Are we not too deeply involved already to make a fetish of the theory of non-interference?’

J.D. Gregory (head of the Russia Department) offered some explanations. ‘This telegram is the reply to a private enquiry sent yesterday as to the alleged understanding with the French and US Govts not to recognise any Russian Govt.5

‘By their reference to Ekaterinodar, the French evidently hope under the new conditions to bring about the formation of a Russian Govt under Denikin’s auspices. But Denikin has only Rodzianko and Neratov with him as political advisers—and they will hardly be a sufficient nucleus for an All-Russian Govt. Moreover Denikin’s sympathies are bound to be with the Omsk Govt, and he will certainly cooperate with it as soon as he is able to. Our recognition of the Omsk Govt would settle the question for him.

‘The Omsk Govt is one which has arisen spontaneously from a remarkable combination of Russian parties. It is of course the same as the Ufa Govt and has the support of Archangel and Murmansk.
'We agree that its permanence and stability are in no way guaranteed, but we only propose to give it provisional recognition and, if it goes to pieces, no great harm is done.

'I suggest that we should return to the charge with the French Govt and endeavour to convert them.'

Lord Hardinge took the argument on from there:

'We may return to the charge, but it is doubtful whether we shall succeed in converting the French Govt to our views. It is however for consideration whether the objections of the French Govt should deter us from taking a step which we believe to be conducive to the restoration of order & good government in Russia. I think they should not. It should be remembered that the French Govt have not always acted with us in Russia. They recognised the independence of Finland, & gave more recognition to the Ukraine than we were ready to give.'

Balfour intervened briefly: 'I do not think the French objection conclusive, but I do not at the moment remember what Sir C.Eliot’s advice was about recognition or how strongly he put his views.'

'Please see Sir C.Eliot’s tel. [of the 6th]', answered Sir George Clerk on the 19th, 'from which I gather that he is inclined to support, but not to recognise. We have still to get his reply to our tel. [of the 16th].

‘On the other hand, the Omsk Govt have funds, an army, and a budget, and have in fact shewn that they are capable of exercising the functions of a government, and their position would no doubt be greatly helped by recognition, if, apart from the French attitude, this would not lead the Japanese to bring about their downfall.

‘The best thing would be an amalgamation of Denikin, and the politicians with him, with the Omsk Govt, and I think we should try to find out if that is possible.’

Lord Hardinge tried to sum up. ‘After conversation with the S of S, I gather that the policy of HMG is to recognise the Omsk Govt as a de facto Govt as far as its jurisdiction reaches, and as a Govt of All Russia provided that it can establish its claim to that position within a measurable limit of time. I should be glad if the Secretary of State would either confirm or modify above as he thinks right.'

Balfour modified it. ‘This quite accurately represents what I said & what the Cabinet decided. But since then the French have refused to recognise the Omsk Govt & (for quite different reasons) I think we should hold our hand for the moment & content ourselves with assisting it. Sir C.Eliot seems to share my present doubts.'

The Russia Department accordingly drafted a telegram for the French Government, beginning: ‘We do not propose to recognise Omsk Govt for the moment.'

But on November 20, an urgent wire arrived from Sir Charles Eliot announcing that there had been a coup d'état at Omsk early on the 18th (while these Foreign Office deliberations were proceeding): the new Omsk Government
had been overthrown—and Admiral Kolchak (the former War Minister) had emerged as Russian Dictator.

Across the draft wire to Paris, Sir George Clerk scribbled in blue pencil: ‘Unnecessary now…’ Balfour, the oldest man in the Foreign Office, had indeed been right to restrain his young lions.⁵

On his departure from Omsk early in November, to meet the French General Janin on his arrival at Vladivostok, General Knox knew that Admiral Kolchak (War Minister in the new All-Russian Provisional Government) was being urged by the right wing to carry out a coup d’état at Omsk. Knox wired the War Office that he had told Kolchak that ‘any attempt of this sort would at present be fatal’.⁶

General Knox had left behind him in Omsk two British officers, Captain Steveni and Lt-Col. J.F.Neilson, of the 10th Hussars. ‘Nilghai’ Neilson was an amateur painter and photographer of some talent; and his water-colours of birds and his photographs of Siberia and India are very fine. But his main interest was in training young polo ponies, which won the Inter-Regimental six years in succession for the 10th Hussars. Before the war, however, he had become an interpreter in Russian; and from August 1914, he had been attached to General Knox’s staff in Petrograd, and had married the daughter of William Cazalet, a wealthy English trader in Moscow.⁷

Neilson has left a very full account of what happened at Omsk. ‘Previous to the crisis’, he wrote, ‘I frequently saw General Boldyrev and was in the Staff every day. To the former I transmitted messages received from General Knox, and from the latter gained such information as was required…Only occasionally at social functions I met Ministers and civilians, except when I met Mr Vologodsky [the Prime Minister]. I did not frequent political houses and had no friends among political parties.’⁸

‘During my visits to the Staff, I became aware of a general discontent directed against the C-in-C and, like everyone else, realised that the existing state of affairs could not continue. The 1st QMG [Colonel Serimatnikov] always received Allied Representatives except when their business was sufficiently important to require an interview with the C-in-C or the Chief of the Staff. My relations with the above mentioned officers were most cordial, and no difficulties were ever put in my way.

‘During these interviews, I became aware that a coup d’état was contemplated. I do not know what other officers were aware of this, as I never mentioned the subject to anyone except to Captain Steveni. It must have been foreseen by many who know the Russians and followed current events.’

Neilson wrote that from the moment he gained his first suspicions of what was in progress, he had based his statements and actions on the following principles:

1) ‘Neither I personally, nor as British Military Representative, nor the Government I represent, can take any part, direct or indirect, in the formation of new Governments, or the destruction of old.
2) British troops will not take one side or the other.
3) My work is to assist the existing Military Power.
4) While the coup d’état is in progress, it is an illegal act. When it has become an accomplished fact, I give my assistance as usual, unless I receive instructions to the contrary.’

Neilson went on. ‘I made this perfectly clear to all concerned, and they understood me perfectly. When asked for an opinion, I never gave an official one, but in the course of conversations I could not help agreeing that the existing state of affairs was most unsatisfactory, and that Admiral Kolchak was the only man capable of saving the country. This was at the time common talk, and was so obviously true that to express another opinion would have been futile. When asked if I thought the British Government would support Admiral Kolchak when he had assumed power, I always replied: ‘We are not concerned with individuals, or the composition of governments, but we desire to see, and support, a government capable of restoring order and carrying on the war.’ In the course of conversations, I could not deny that the probability was that this would be the case, for it was clear that the Admiral’s policy would be precisely the policy the British Government favoured. In the course of these conversations, I repeatedly stated that if there was bloodshed or murder, the whole world would be against Admiral Kolchak.’

Neilson was thus in possession of the facts regarding the coup d’état, but this was his only connection with it, he underlined. The fact that he saw Colonel Serimatnikov daily was unavoidable, as he was in charge of the Foreign Representatives. Neilson had only casually met General Andogsky (former Director of the Academy of the General Staff at Petrograd), and Mr Mikhailov only once accidentally at a dinner party, a long time after the coup. ‘These three were, to the best of my belief, the three chief movers in the coup d’état’, stated Neilson. He may have been right. (Varneck and Fisher commented that Mikhailov was a ‘prominent participant in most of the important political plots during the time of the Siberian anti-Bolshevik Government, including’ they added, ‘the plot to make Kolchak “constitutional dictator”’.)

‘I did not see Admiral Kolchak during this period’, Neilson underlined. ‘I made it clear that the British would take no part in the coup d’état, and if it was carried out on the assumption that the new Government would ultimately have the support of the British Government, this was logical, as it was known that the British Government had confidence in the Admiral personally, and that his policy would further the aims of the Allies.’

This was highly satisfactory to the plotters. For in London, the Russian charge d’affaires Nabokov (a Cadet), who had known for some time that British recognition was in the air, had no doubt at once been informed of the War Cabinet’s decision of November 14 to grant de facto recognition to the Omsk Directorate, and had passed it on in his special cypher to Omsk, where it would first come to the attention of the Prime Minister Vologodsky (also a Cadet), and members of the former right-wing Omsk Government (who had taken over most
of the administration), and not to members of the Directorate. (It is of interest that Nabokov had just flatly refused to allow Kerensky, then in London, to reply to a message from Avksentiev, the SR Chairman of the Directorate at Omsk, in this special cypher, which had just been restored to Nabokov by the Foreign Office, now that events in Russia seemed slightly less chaotic.)

On the 15th, a Cadet Party Conference at Omsk pronounced in favour of Dictatorship. Kolchak, accompanied by the Labour MP Colonel John Ward and a party of his Middlesex Regiment, returned to Omsk late on the 16th from Ekaterinburg, where he had been trying to hearten the Siberian Army, and encourage the Czechs to fight on. (He had not, it seems, been successful. On the 17th, *The Times* correspondent at Omsk wired underlining that the military forces were being manipulated by the strong reactionary element in Siberia. ‘The Czechs, though sticking to their guns, are thoroughly tired of this situation.’ It was they who were bolstering up the ‘feeble’ Russian troops in the field, who were mainly officered by Russian NCOs, since all the Russian officers were after staff jobs.)

On his return to Omsk, many Russian officers from the Stavka came to see Kolchak, as also did representatives of the Cossacks, ‘who said positively that the Directorate did not have many days to live’, and that it was imperative to create a united power (as Varneck and Fisher record). When Kolchak asked whom they wished to put forward as a single head, they said outright: ‘You must do it.’ Kolchak replied: ‘I cannot do it, for the simple reason that I have no army at my disposal and no armed force…I have no army. I am a newcomer here…Furthermore, I am still ignorant of the attitude of the Siberian Government…[which], as far as I can understand, opposes the Directorate, and desires to keep power for itself, and to preserve the situation which existed before the arrival of the Directorate.’ None of the politicians, however, Kolchak adds, approached him about taking over power.

When thus informed of the situation, Kolchak wanted to refuse even the post of War Minister; and on the day of his return from the front, he said so in the Council of Ministers, stating that under existing circumstances, it was impossible for him to continue his work. His decision was ‘almost final’, but he would not actually resign until the return of Boldyrev, the Commander-in-Chief.

At this point, Neilson was apparently asked point-blank by the conspirators for his advice. He appears to have been told that a coup d’état was on the point of being launched, but that they were anxious to choose people who would find favour with the British Government. Admiral Kolchak had to have advisers. If they found favour in London, would British recognition (which they knew had now been granted in principle to the All-Russia Provisional Government), be definitely passed on to the next regime? ‘I think perhaps I lay myself open to the accusation’, Neilson later wrote on January 24 about this crucial period at Omsk, ‘of having moved slightly in advance of the very halting policy, or rather lack of policy, of our Government. I had a most difficult task with no one to help me, and with no precedent to guide me. In full charge [sic] of the British interests
during by far the most difficult period up to date’, he wrote. ‘I picked my men, backed them, and consider that I chose the right men’, he stated firmly. ‘What they can give to history now remains with them. I personally am certain that I adopted the right course.’

There is a slight mystery here, as this statement does not tally with what Neilson wrote two months later in the official account of his action previous to the crisis, which was as follows: ‘I have never written to anyone on this subject, there is nothing in my diary, and I did not report it by telegraph, as I feared that the Russians, Czechs, or Japanese might be able to read my cypher.’ Nor is it clear, from a study of Neilson’s papers, to whom this typed note of January 24 is addressed: whether it was a draft wire to General Knox, a letter to his wife or someone else, or even a draft note for his diary. Maybe two months later he had simply forgotten he had written it. But some of the phraseology in this note is markedly similar to the opening remarks of his ‘Conclusion’.

Early in the morning of November 18th, the conspirators struck. Cossack officers kidnapped the SR members of the new All-Russia Provisional Government.

Rumours of this overturn had been circulating freely, Kolchak comments; naval officers reported to him privately, but no one could fix the day or hour. He learned of the accomplished fact at 4 am, when awakened by Vologodsky on the telephone, who said that at about 1 or 2 am the members of the Directorate, Avksentiev, Zenzinov, Argunov and Rogovsky, had been arrested, and taken out of town. Vologodsky was immediately summoning the Council of Ministers, and begged Kolchak to come.

There was complete calm in the town, he records. (This, in fact, was assured by Colonel John Ward. As soon as he heard of the arrests, he turned out the Middlesex Regiment, who covered all the neighbouring streets—including the one in which the Ministers were to meet—with their machine guns. Ward took this action without consulting Colonel Neilson.)

About 6 am, the whole Council of Ministers gathered in the Governor’s house near the Cathedral. Vologodsky could not provide many details, but reported that the house where the four SRs had been was surrounded in the night by a strong squad of Cossacks from the First Siberian Cossack Regiment; there were also units of Krasilnikov’s partisan detachment. The question naturally arose of the whereabouts of those arrested. No one could give a definite answer, but a later arrival said they were in the Agricultural Institute, near a park outside the town, where Krasilnikov’s partisan detachment was stationed.

Vologodsky asked for the views of the Council of Ministers. Several opinions were expressed. The first was that the arrests signified nothing, since three members of the Directorate, or a majority, still remained: Vinogradov, Vologodsky and Boldyrev. The second opinion was that after what had happened, the Directorate could not remain in power, which should be transferred to the Siberian Government. The third opinion was that all power must be transferred to the Council of Ministers, since the power of the Directorate
had collapsed of itself. Vinogradov then said that he considered it impossible to remain in the Directorate after what had happened, and resigned his post. The question of the Directorate remaining in power was thus resolved.

At about 8 am, there was a discussion about an appeal to the population, because anarchy might ensue from such a transitional moment. So far, everything was quiet; but all the Cossack troops were under arms, and were sending out patrols into the town; and if such an uncertain situation continued, ‘some momentous and serious occurrences’ could be expected. Then the whole question arose about how to react to the new situation. The question was put thus: to continue the armed struggle, it was now necessary to hand over to the military command, and the Government should be headed by a military officer uniting both military and civil power. When Kolchak’s opinion was asked, he said that he, too, considered this the only possible way out. Most of the Council of Ministers spoke in favour of a single military authority, one specific person, taking over the Government at once, at least temporarily. There were no contradictions from anyone. As Boldyrev was Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Kolchak said all military and civil authority should be handed to him. The C-in-C should be in charge. The entire Council of Ministers agreed without any objection. But then the question was raised about who should be the Commander-in-Chief. The majority of the Council of Ministers decided to offer the post to Kolchak.

Kolchak said that first of all, they ought to try to preserve what already existed, and had proved satisfactory, and that was the authority of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, General Boldyrev. He had organised the staff, and there would be no particular objection to him from the troops. It would be much simpler for the army to preserve the person already in place. Kolchak emphasised that he himself was a new man. Authority must be backed by widespread popularity and confidence among the troops. Neither the Cossacks nor the army knew him, and he did not know how they would respond. If any resistance was shown by the army, it would place him in a most difficult position.

Vologodsky then asked Kolchak to leave, as they would have to discuss the question in more detail, ‘and since we shall have to speak of you, it would be inconvenient for you to be present’. Kolchak thereupon left the session, which continued a ‘fairly long time’. After a while, he was asked to come back. The Council of Ministers had unanimously decided that the Directorate was non-existent; it had assumed complete authority; and it had resolved to hand power over to one person, who would head the whole Government as Supreme Ruler; it asked Kolchak to accept the post. ‘Then I saw that there was nothing more to say, and gave my consent, stating that I accepted this authority’, he stated.

Kolchak then went down to the Stavka, where he saw Colonel Serimatsnikov. He first asked which units had taken action the night before. The Colonel told him. Kolchak then asked where the members of the Directorate were. The Colonel replied that they were with the Krasilnikov detachment in the Agricultural Institute. Kolchak asked whether there had been any murder or violence during the night. The Colonel said there had not, that the disarming of
Rogovsky’s militia had occasioned no resistance. Kolchak then gave orders that the arrested men should be brought into town, and placed in their own apartments, which should be well guarded. Soon after this, Kolchak discovered who had taken an active part in the overthrow of the Directorate. ‘There were three’, he states enigmatically (thus agreeing with Colonel Neilson); but he forbade the Stavka to give him their names, he records.¹⁰

The first thing Colonel Neilson heard of the arrests of the SRs was from Captain Peshkov, of the French Army (a natural son of Maxim Gorky), who woke Neilson in his railway carriage about 7.30 am. Neilson had not been out the night before, and had heard nothing from the Russians. Neilson did not go to the Staff that morning, but sent Captain Steveni instead, who was given the official story of the coup d’état. Colonel Ward then came to see Neilson, who appears to have been unaware that Ward had turned out the Middlesex early that morning. Neilson told Ward what had happened, and advised him to keep his battalion in barracks. Ward does not seem initially to have believed Neilson’s account, and sent his interpreter, a Russian officer called Colonel Frank, to the Staff. When Colonel Frank came back, and confirmed Neilson’s account, Colonel Ward was furious: he, a British Labour MP and Trade Unionist, had helped bring about a Tsarist restoration. He came back to see Neilson in a ‘most inimical’ state, and roundly accused Neilson of having ‘misled’ him. Neilson calmed him down, and added further explanation. But it was only Admiral Kolchak’s personal assurance, given to Ward later, that convinced him that it was not a royalist plot.¹¹

About 3 pm that afternoon, Neilson heard that Admiral Kolchak would be in the Staff at about 4 pm, but he did not go to see him. In fact, at 4 pm there was a further session of the Council of Ministers, which Kolchak was asked to attend. He reported to the Council on the orders he had issued. A plan was then outlined for organising a council to be attached to him for discussing urgent questions, principally questions of foreign policy—the so-called Council of the Supreme Ruler, which was to consist of five members. Then the question arose about what was to be done immediately. Kolchak said that a ‘multitude of most fantastic rumours’ were being spread in town, and the fact of the overturn must be made public. This seems to have been agreed. The Council of Ministers also decided the personal fate of the members of the Directorate. Kolchak reported that he had given orders that they were to be returned to their apartments, and their safety assured; and that the only reasonable decision was to allow them to live abroad. This was generally agreed.¹¹

About 6 pm, Neilson was told that Admiral Kolchak wished to see him in his house. Neilson, believing that certain Allied Representatives had called on the Admiral that afternoon, accordingly went round, and Admiral Kolchak gave Neilson his version of what had happened, and read out his telegraphic conversation with General Boldyrev at the front (a somewhat heated exchange).

As the coup d’état was now an accomplished fact, Colonel Neilson decided that it was his duty to assist in the restoration of order, and the carrying on of the
war—which entailed the support of Kolchak, since it would now be impossible if Kolchak failed. Neilson therefore gave him what help he could, pending instructions from London. When talking to Kolchak, he stressed that the sympathies of the British Government would be alienated if there was bloodshed, murder or reprisals, or any attempt at reaction or Tsarist restoration. Assurances on these points were necessary by means of a proclamation to the Russian people, and a personal declaration to the Allies. The proclamation was printed that night; but Kolchak decided to make his personal declaration to the French and British representatives immediately.\footnote{11}

Kolchak, under the impression that Colonel Ward was the British representative, asked Neilson to be present, and offered to drive him in his car to the French High Commissioner’s train. Neilson accepted, and they both arrived together—Neilson’s major public error, which created a very bad impression on the French. Neilson asked Captain Peshkov, who spoke English, to explain matters to the French High Commissioner, but it was clear that the explanation was ‘unsatisfactory, or not understood’, Neilson comments. (This incident forms the basis for French accusations against the British in the coup d’état.) Admiral Kolchak duly made the declaration, with Neilson a silent witness.\footnote{11}

The Admiral then went to see Colonel Ward. Neilson twice warned Ward to be careful, as he feared that Ward’s lack of knowledge of Russian, and the advice of his interpreter, Colonel Frank, whom Neilson did not trust, might lead Ward to go too far. Present at the interview, as well as the Admiral and Colonel Ward, were Neilson, Captain Steveni, Colonel Frank and David Fraser (\textit{The Times} correspondent). Admiral Kolchak made his declaration, and Colonel Ward then asked about the whereabouts of the captured SRs. The Admiral said that he did not know, but would find out and inform Ward, who thereupon took it upon himself to warn the Admiral ‘that the free peoples of the world would resist any attempt to force the Russian people back under a system of tyranny and despair’.\footnote{12}

Two Czech delegates then called on Kolchak to find out what he proposed to do. Kolchak replied that he intended to continue the struggle on the Ural front. He did not intend to make any sweeping reforms, ‘because I regarded my power as temporary’, he said. Neither would he side with any Russian parties, nor aim at any restoration, but simply create an army of the ‘regular type’, since only a regular army could emerge victorious. One of the Czechs asked: ‘Why did you not speak of this before? Why did you not ask our opinion?’ Kolchak replied: ‘What business is this of yours?’ To which the Czechs retorted: ‘We took part in fighting the war.’ Kolchak replied: ‘Yes, but now you take no part whatever; now you are leaving the front’ The Czechs were thus offended, and they and Kolchak parted on bad terms.\footnote{13}

Colonel Neilson resumed his daily visits to the Staff; but two days later had to retire to bed with tonsillitis, which kept him incapacitated for a fortnight. When General Boldyrev returned to Omsk, Neilson sent Captain Steveni to see him. Steveni, reported Neilson, ‘was very well received, and General Boldyrev gave
him his opinion on recent events. He thought the coup d’état came too early, and was clumsily executed, but now that it was an accomplished fact, he hoped it would succeed. If Admiral Kolchak failed, it meant chaos. It was a case of Kolchak or anarchy. He considered the Admiral would have the sympathy of the Allies, and hoped that they would stand by him. General Boldyrev spoke about me [Neilson] in the most friendly manner.’ Neilson continued to press through Steveni that no harm must come to General Boldyrev, or the captured SRs, ‘and that the British Government would not favour any attempt at restoration or reaction. After this, the subject was never mentioned by Admiral Kolchak, and seldom by the officers of the Staff? Steveni, he insisted, took no action without his instructions, and was only in the Staff on his own on a few occasions. ‘He fully understood the seriousness of the position, and his discretion can be relied on’, wrote Neilson.14

He did not have such a good opinion of Colonel Ward, who visited the Staff almost daily, and frequently saw the Admiral. Neilson had to explain that he was the British Representative, and that there must be a boundary between his duties and Neilson’s. Later, Neilson had to explain this both to the Admiral and the Staff. Neilson was particularly apprehensive about the influence which the interpreter Colonel Frank had over Ward, as he did not trust Frank. Matters only became worse when Mrs Frank arrived. As Colonel Ward spoke no Russian at all, he was completely in the hands of the Franks and Fraser for his information; and it was this combination which kept the British public informed of events in the columns of The Times. The objects of Colonel Ward’s visits to the Staff ‘were doubtless to expound the principles of democratic government, and I am sure he did much good, and always acted in the best faith’, recorded Neilson; but the fact that he was constantly announced to be the official British Representative ‘points to the two Franks playing too important a part’. Colonel Ward then offered to take the captured SRs by train under guard to the Chinese border; and this was arranged without Neilson’s knowledge. The train finally left on November 21st. ‘I asked Colonel Ward to come to me for information and advice’, concluded Neilson, ‘but he relied on his more immediate friends, and I think it better that he himself should give an account of what subsequently happened.’14

At the Foreign Office in London, they were quite in the dark about the coup d’état. ‘We have yet to learn the inner meaning of this [coup]’, minuted Sir George Clerk on November 20th, ‘but it probably knocks any idea of recognising the Omsk Govt on the head, at any rate for the present.’15 Lord Robert Cecil ticked this. Lord Hardinge added: ‘The S of S has decided that recognition is to be withheld for the present.’ This Balfour initialled.

On the 21st, wires from both Colonel Neilson and Sir Charles Eliot (both sent on the 19th) arrived, reporting on the coup d’état. Neilson stated that it was an ‘absolutely honest attempt’ to restore order, and that he believed Kolchak to be sincere, and was ‘prepared to guarantee this’. Eliot was pessimistic. Kolchak, he wired from Vladivostok, would not remain long in power as an All-Russian leader, once links were restored with South Russia. Meanwhile, he would have two
enemies: the Japanese, who were opposed to any strong central Russian Government; and the Czechs, who now saw that their exertions along the Volga had merely helped to set up a Dictator. ‘[Kolchak’s] appointment must really have been contemplated for some time, for it is practically admitted by Kolchak’s partisans that he made a tour to front in order to ascertain temper of troops’, added Eliot.  

‘This is evidently a thoroughly unfortunate performance’, minuted Gregory, ‘and a great setback to our plans. Of many bad results, one of the worst will be clearly that all prospects of cooperation between Omsk & Denikin will disappear. It looks like a real calamity.’

‘Much will depend on General Denikin’s success in the near future,’ added Lord Hardinge. ‘These events must make us even more wary.’

On November 22, the New York Times had this headline:

**Coup Pleases Washington**  
*Strong head of Siberian Government considered essential*

But the fall of the Omsk Directorate was lamented in a New York Times editorial on the 24th. It had been the ‘nearest approach’ to a democratic Russian Government since the Bolshevnik revolution, and one which the Allies ‘could most easily recognise’. But Kolchak’s coup might not really have changed things. ‘In the group around him, is certainly to be found the nearest approach to “Russia” at the present moment,’ it was stated ambiguously.

On November 25, The Times in London announced the news of Kolchak’s coup in their main news summary. ‘There has been a coup d’état in Siberia’, it was stated flatly. The report, sent from Omsk on the 18th, admitted that the Directorate had ‘died a violent death’, and that Kolchak was now ‘assuming practically absolute power, and virtually becoming Dictator of Russia’. But the only apparent change was that the ‘All-Russia Government now consists of one member instead of five’. (The Times also quoted ‘trust-worthy reports’, which had come via The Hague from Berlin, that the Bolshevnik Government had ordered the cruiser ‘Aurora’ to be kept permanently under steam in the river Neva, so that it could take the 14 leading Bolshevnik Commissars, if in danger, to Copenhagen—or even on to Brazil!)

On the 25th, a wire reached the Foreign Office from Colonel Neilson, despatched from Omsk on the 21st, and forwarded by General Knox from Vladivostok. ‘All goes well,’ stated Neilson. ‘Boldyrev is returning, an order has been issued by Syrov [the Czech Commander] to carry on and to take strict measures against agitators. Ivanov-Rinov [the Cossack Commander] and Lvov [the former Prime Minister] have acknowledged Kolchak and congratulated him… Kolchak’s position is getting stronger. The four socialists have been sent secretly under a reliable guard to China via Harbin.’

Another wire from Neilson, sent on the 22nd, and forwarded by Knox, also arrived on the 25th: ‘Boldyrev arrives tonight. He was to have a job but had words by direct wire with Kolchak and now I am not sure what he will get…
Krasilnikov and company [the actual perpetrators of the coup d’état] have been acquitted.’

The arrival of these two wires coincided with the arrival of a private and very confidential telegram from Sir Charles Eliot at Vladivostok. ‘General Knox left Colonel Neilson at Omsk without consulting me and I thought he was exclusively concerned with such matters as equipment and training’, stated the High Commissioner. ‘But he has lately manifested a most indiscreet political activity. For instance he states he called on French High Commissioner with Kolchak and joined with Kolchak in requesting him to advise Czechs to make certain arrests. If telegrams from him which General Knox has shown me were published in full, everyone would suppose recent coup d’état at Omsk had been prepared and executed under supervision of British Government’

Eliot thought it would be better if Neilson were removed from Omsk, and assigned purely military duties elsewhere. ‘General Knox does not quite agree to this though he admits Colonel Neilson has been indiscreet. I am most anxious not to have any personal difficulty with General Knox but I do not think that he realises to what an extent he has already incurred suspicion of the Japanese and even of French.’

These telegrams were considered in the Foreign Office on November 26th. ‘I attach two tels. from General Knox which may certainly be read as shewing that Colonel Neilson’s sympathies are with Admiral Kolchak’, minuted Sir George Clerk, ‘and the despatch of a detachment of the Middlesex Regiment with the 4 Socialist prisoners to Harbin was clearly wrong. On the other hand, Colonel Neilson is one of the best men we have for dealing with Russians, and I think that a strong warning to him from the D.M.O. to refrain from political activity would meet the case, unless he is proved to have compromised himself more deeply that we know at present.

‘As regards the last paragraph [of Sir Charles Eliot’s wire], the behaviour of the Japanese in Siberia has with good reason made General Knox, and everyone else, suspicious of them, and they are naturally opposed to him. French suspicion is probably due to the difficulty there has been in arranging the relations between him and General Janin, and will, I hope, disappear as soon as that is definitely settled. Moreover, Gen. Knox is a strong and competent personality, with great influence over Russians, and I expect that jealousy is a more appropriate term than suspicion.’

Lord Hardinge minuted underneath. ‘We should ask D.M.O. to send a warning to Colonel Neilson.’

Balfour agreed. ‘This should be done. But we must also ask Sir Charles Eliot whether he thinks it sufficient. Remember General Poole!’

On November 29, the Foreign Office accordingly sent a reply to Eliot that the War Office had been asked to convey a strong warning to Colonel Neilson to refrain from all political action. This, as far as the facts were known, it was felt should be sufficient, ‘and I should be reluctant to press for the removal of Colonel Neilson from Omsk, as he is one of the most efficient and best qualified
of officers whom we have for dealing with Russians. If, however, you have
further evidence to show that Colonel Neilson’s action has definitely
compromised H.M.G., and makes them appear to have interfered on behalf of
one particular party in Siberia, and if in consequence you consider it necessary
that we should show an open disavowal of Colonel Neilson’s action, you should
transmit your evidence to me in order that I may suggest further steps to the War
Office.’ The wire concluded that little importance was attached to Japanese or
French suspicion of General Knox.

At the same time, the Foreign Office wrote to the DMO, enclosing Eliot’s
wire received on the 25th, and asking for an urgent warning to be sent to Colonel
Neilson. The contents of the above wire to Eliot were summarised, including the
request for further evidence, if any, ‘for the effect of that coup d’état on General
Denikin may be unfortunate, and Mr Lindley anticipates that it will certainly be
so on the Archangel Government, and, if this proves to be the case, it may be
necessary to dissociate H.M.G. more completely by transferring Colonel Neilson
from Omsk.’

The effect of the coup d’état on the Archangel Government was indeed
marked. Just after it took place, the Russian Embassy in Washington sent this
warning to the State Department: ‘The whole incident is very similar to what
happened some time ago in Archangel.’ On December 1, Lindley wired that he had
just had a long conversation about the coup d’état with the French Ambassador
and the Foreign Minister, who was ‘much disturbed and wished to protest
publicly at coup d’état’. But the Archangel Government were divided over the
matter of a protest. The Foreign Minister was thus persuaded to do nothing for
the present which might compromise future reconciliation, and the French
Ambassador promised to wire to Paris recommending that everything possible
should be done in Siberia to bring the various parties together. ‘There is some
effervescence here among [Russian] officers’, Lindley went on, ‘but General
Marushevsky [Commander of Russian troops at Archangel] can be relied on to
discourage it, and General Needham [Ironside’s Chief of Staff] is, at our request,
sending Captain Chaplin, who has been here for a week, back to the front today.’
Lindley concluded: ‘Both French Ambassador and I agree that a second coup
d’état [at Archangel] should not be tolerated, and I do not consider there is any
chance of its being attempted.’

Angry complaints from London then began to reach Siberia. On November 28,
General Knox forwarded this sharp message from the War Office to Colonel
Neilson at Omsk: ‘On no account must British officers or British troops take any
part in any operations of a political character.’ This, of course, was a warning for
Colonel Ward as much as for Colonel Neilson. Next day (the 29th), Neilson
wired Knox to ask whether it was realised in London that Admiral Kolchak could

* This refers to General Poole’s involvement with the attempted coup d’état at Archangel in September, when President Wison had insisted on his removal.
only be kept in power by strong British and French support. ‘Is it impossible to recognize him in some way?’ he asked. ‘Could not some more visible sign of our “inward approval” be given?’ Knox passed this message on to London without comment. On the 30th, Knox was further instructed to inform Neilson that his ‘recent activities in political matters’ were considered ‘highly indiscreet’ by the Foreign Office, since it made it appear that the British Government were ‘intervening on behalf of one particular party’ in Siberia (presumably the Cadet party). The War Office wire ended pointedly: ‘While, therefore, Neilson’s zeal and energy are thoroughly appreciated, he must be cautioned against further action of this nature.’ When passing the message on to Neilson, Knox added that this was not the result of anything that he or Eliot had said. ‘In fact, you would have got it in the neck if your messages had not been expurgated.’

But after these complaints from London, Neilson soon left Omsk. ‘I have played my role of scapegoat during the coup d’état—just scraped through by the hundredth part of an inch’, he wrote shortly after in another of his typed notes, ‘and with that behind me, I became a most undesirable person to have near the seat of Government.’

One must have some sympathy for Neilson. One wonders whether Knox did not purposely leave him at Omsk, seeing what was likely to happen, and hoping that a pro-British Russian Dictator would be duly installed, and that it would be all over by the time his French counterpart, General Janin, arrived on the scene. For it had been agreed in London and Paris that Janin and Knox were to propose to the Russians that Janin should become C-in-C of all Russian and Allied forces in western Siberia, and Janin was known to be friendly with General Boldyrev, the Russian C-in-C. Admiral Kolchak, markedly pro-British, would not tolerate handing over command of his troops to a French General.

In London, Lord Robert Cecil and the CIGS were no doubt highly pleased by these recent events at Omsk.

But Kolchak’s coup d’état caused bitter resentment in many parts of Siberia. On the 26th, The Times correspondent was reporting from Omsk that the SR members of the Constituent Assembly at Ekaterinburg had at once denounced the coup at Omsk in a proclamation, ‘which declares that Admiral Kolchak is the head of a counter-revolutionary movement, and asserts that they as representing the Constituent Assembly are the only legal power in the land’. The Czechs had also protested. The workers in Ekaterinburg and in the Urals generally were ‘strongly hostile’ to the coup, ‘and many are likely to go over to the Bolsheviks’. The position in the Urals was serious, as matters largely depended on the Czechs; but Kolchak had stated that, ‘if he is allowed to remain in office for another month’, the new Russian Army could not only hold the Urals, ‘but will be in a position to take the offensive’. (Kolchak comments: ‘At that time, I at first hoped that if we achieved some success on the front, we should be invited to the Peace Conference.’)

But as soon as Chernov and the SR members of the Constituent Assembly at Ekaterinburg had denounced the coup d’état, they were surrounded in their hotel
by Siberian troops, and marched away. Though the Czechs managed to have them released, they told them to leave at once, and go to Chelyabinsk, which was in Czech hands. When the SRs finally saw that there was no hope of Czech support, they decided to go back to Ufa.19

Admiral Kolchak washed his hands of them. On November 30, *The Times* correspondent was reporting from Omsk that as regards the Constituent Assembly, Kolchak ‘takes the bull by the horns and throws it over altogether. He puts his faith in a National Assembly, to be convened when law and order are restored throughout the country.’ Kolchak was quoted as saying: ‘They call me a Dictator, but I am not afraid of the name.’

On December 2 (as *The Times* in London headlined: ‘Tangled Siberian Situation—Kolchak’s coup resented at the front’), a special troop train arrived at Ufa from Omsk, obviously to arrest the SRs. When they realised that the Czechs would not now even protect them, they left their hotel, and went into hiding in the town, Chernov amongst them; and the Siberian troops arrested the 13 who remained. After much indecision, the SRs (who had escaped capture) decided to try and negotiate with the advancing Bolsheviks, who adamantly refused. This marked the political disappearance of the last few members of the Constituent Assembly. On the 5th, it was reported from Omsk that 27 ‘Ufa recalcitrants’ had been brought under arrest to Omsk, of whom 13 were members of the Constituent Assembly.19

There were then bloody deeds. On the 21st, there was an uprising against Kolchak in Omsk, and in a suburb called Kulomzino; and the ‘Ufa recalcitrants’ were released from prison. After the rising had failed, most of them simply returned to the prison, *The Times* correspondent reported on the 22nd. But he did not add that all the imprisoned SRs, including five who were thereupon condemned to death by court-martial, were then simply taken out and butchered by a Russian officer, their bodies left on the banks of the river Irtysh. No action was taken against the officer. Kolchak was ill with pneumonia at the time; he claims this act was taken to discredit him, and infers that if in good health, he could have prevented it. It is unlikely.19

Thus, the last remnants of the Constituent Assembly disappeared, slaughtered not by the Bolsheviks, but by ‘our friends’ in Siberia, i.e. the henchmen of a self-confessed Russian Dictator, put in power with the connivance of the local British Mission.

The Siberian Army now consisted of the Southern Army, mostly unreliable Orenburg Cossacks under their Ataman Dutov; the Western Army, formed from the Constituent Assembly’s little force at Samara, under General Khanzin; and the new Northern Army, under the Czech General Gajda, who had now left the Czech Army to join Kolchak. But the Siberian High Command was in disarray. On General Janin’s arrival, he and Knox were to propose that Janin should become C-in-C of all Russian and Allied forces in western Siberia; while Knox, under his command, should organise, equip and train a Russian Army in the rear. But the Russians would come to no decision. After the coup d’état, Kolchak had
nominated Lebedev (one of General Kornilov’s young staff officers) as Chief of Staff to direct operations, while the new War Minister Stepanov was to control the rear. But there was no coordination.

‘Lebedev thought it was a matter of a few weeks to beat the Bolsheviks’, Knox later reported. ‘He was always in favour of what he called “elemental measures”—that is calling up thousands of men for whom there were prepared neither instructional cadres, clothing, equipment, nor accommodation, and of hurling them in their “elemental” state without training on the enemy. Stepanov…was a bureaucrat pure and simple, and thought he had a lifetime before him in which to accomplish his object…He did nothing except draw up and print establishments that had about as much relation to conditions in Siberia as they had to the Planet Mars…Kolchak had to send for them almost daily to compose differences.’

Gajda then started to drive on Perm, along the railway that led to Vyatka and Vologda, south of Archangel. (Gajda had informed Kolchak of this coming operation when he had visited the front, just prior to the coup d’état). Lenin wired urgently to Trotsky at Kursk on December 13th. ‘Perm is in danger. I fear that we have forgotten about the Urals.’ Later that day, he wired again that more troops must be sent. Trotsky must make the Military Revolutionary Council appreciate the ‘enormous importance’ of the Perm area, which supplied the factories and all the railways with coal; its loss would ‘bring traffic to a standstill’. But on the 24th, Gajda took Perm, with 30,000 prisoners and much material, seized the bridge across the Kama river intact, and advanced through to Glazov, halfway to Vyatka (in the direction of Archangel). Lenin was seriously alarmed. On the 31st, he wired Trotsky that the 3rd Red Army there was in a ‘catastrophic state’, and its Military Commander and all its leaders were drinking heavily. He was thinking of sending Stalin to sort matters out. Trotsky agreed to the despatch of Stalin; a new Military Commander would also be sent, he added pointedly. But as Stalin set off to carry out some ‘serious filtering’ among the drunkards, the Bolsheviks took Ufa, and thus cut Kolchak off from Orenburg, his only possible link with Denikin, and now also threatened by the Bolsheviks in Turkestan.

But this Bolshevik advance was largely due to a White Russian withdrawal. For when Janin finally reached a compromise with Kolchak over the command (which in fact resulted in Janin having no command and no influence on operations, and in Knox never receiving any orders), both tried to induce Stepanov and Lebedev to limit mobilisation to numbers with which it was possible to cope. It was first decided to bring Kappel’s Volga Corps, then at the front with 5,000 men, up to 3 divisions, and to raise 5 new divisions in the rear; and Knox agreed to equip Kappel’s Corps, and 3 of these 5 divisions. (General V.O.Kappel had risen to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Russian Army by the end of the First World War, and was attached to the Czech Legion. In July 1918, he was fighting for the Samara Government. He had then moved east with his troops, who were now part of the Western Army, and known as the ‘Volga Corps’. Kappel was a competent officer, then aged 38.)
Kappel’s troops had therefore been withdrawn from the Ufa front, and dumped under appalling conditions in villages from Chelyabinsk to Kurgan, where they were joined by Bolshevik prisoners from Perm, and ‘recruits’ from Gajda’s new territory, whom Kappel’s troops at once stripped of their clothing, and left to die of exposure. (Conditions in Siberia that winter were horrific. The Times correspondent at Omsk wired on December 30th that a temperature of 58 degrees below zero had been registered; that Omsk, which normally had 100,000 inhabitants, now had 600,000; and that typhus and cholera had already broken out. ‘On a still day, however, it is possible to be abroad if one closes one’s eyes and wears furs.’ But, he warned, ‘frostbite is an ever-present danger. So long as one’s face feels as if it were being pressed by a red-hot iron, all is well; but when the pain diminishes, one must rush to a snowdrift’.)

Allied troops took no part in these minor fluctuations. On December 28, Knox urged that all the Canadians be withdrawn to Vladivostok, and that no more be sent to Siberia. ‘Bolshevism has no lasting force behind it’, he wired the War Office, ‘and requires only 1 or 2 knocks to finish it, but the Allies, by their present conduct in the Far East’, he underlined, ‘are only increasing its strength by showing impossibility of our working together.’

More suspicions of British connivance in the Kolchak coup came to light in the Far East. On January 15, Sir Charles Eliot sent a further private and secret wire to the Foreign Office as follows: ‘[The Czech] General Stefaník informed Colonel Robertson [British Military Representative at Vladivostok] confidentially today that he has full documentary evidence of part taken by [British] in events leading to establishment of Kolchak Government’, stated the High Commissioner, ‘and that he proposes to deliver these documents to his Government in Bohemia for safe custody or for destruction as they think fit. In no case does he intend to allow them to be shown [to] other persons.’

The Foreign Office was naturally perturbed to receive this. ‘Have we got this evidence?’ asked the Russia Department on the 21st. As soon as it was discovered that they had not, they wired straight back to Eliot: ‘Please ascertain nature of documents referred to by General Stefaník.’

Sir Charles Eliot answered on January 30 in a further private and secret wire. ‘Stefaník informed Colonel Robertson that he had under consideration evidence of part played by British in establishing Kolchak: that he did not propose to publish this evidence here but to give it to his Government at Prague to be kept or destroyed as they think fit. He was perfectly friendly and seemed to think that he was refraining from publishing something disagreeable to His Majesty’s Government’, explained the High Commissioner. ‘He did not refer to any one document but spoke of “all the papers”. Conversation took place just before his departure. Colonel Robertson suggested that he should mention matter to me but he said it was too delicate and that he would rather not’, wired Eliot.

‘He must have referred to assistance which he believed had been given to Kolchak by our military authorities for there were no civilian British officials in Omsk between October 28th and December 27th except Vice Consul who is not
likely to have taken any part in politics.’ Sir Charles Eliot did not think it advisable to make further enquiries of such Czechs as were in the Far East now: ‘In a private telegram despatched some time in November’, he recalled, ‘I drew attention to deductions that might be drawn from Colonel Neilson’s telegrams to General Knox shown me by latter.’

The Foreign Office now understood what it was all about. ‘Evidently the reference is to Col Neilson’, minuted the Russia Department on February 2. ‘Apparently however the impression that H.M.G. had something to do with the Kolchak coup d’état is abroad. Three or four weeks ago, Dr Gavronsky, who was Kerensky’s first host in this country, came to see me on some matter & incidentally indicated that we had had a great deal to do with the Kolchak affair. I was so surprised at the suggestion that I told him that both he & Mr Kerensky were under a complete misapprehension & that there was not a shadow of truth in the imputation. I have never forgotten his smile.”

‘I think we should ask D.M.I. to ascertain exactly what Colonel Neilson did do’, minuted W.H.Selby. Gregory, Sir Ronald Graham and Lord Curzon all initialled this.

On February 11, the matter was put to the DMI, who replied on March 5 that he had wired to General Knox about Neilson’s activities. On March 13, he sent the Foreign Office the answer which Knox had given. Knox said that he would at once have made enquiries on the spot, if the High Commissioner, when forwarding the information from Omsk, had told him. He went on: ‘I have no more reason to think that Col Neilson and Captain Steveni who at the time were the military representatives at Omsk committed the folly suggested, than did Mr Jordan, the Vice-Consul. Neilson’s telegrams give no idea of the value of his work, and telegram writing is not everything’, stated Knox firmly. ‘During crisis in Omsk I believe he kept his head and without showing any partiality performed more valuable work than all the foreign civil and military representatives together.

‘In Neilson’s telegrams I can find no evidence that he ever put pen to paper during crisis except to telegraph me. The term “Documentary evidence”, I think, will be found to mean a document which was drawn up by Captain Kosek, the Czech representative at Omsk, summarising circumstantial evidence of our sympathy with Kolchak.’ Neilson and Kosek had had some difference of opinion previously, during the arrangement of an agreement between the Siberian Government and the Ufa Directorate. ‘Neilson strongly objected to Kolchak’s vetoing the appointment of the present Minister of Finance [i.e. Mr Mikhailov] and Russian Government reported Kolchak’s action to the Czech National Council.’ (This would appear to suggest that Neilson was interfering in Russian affairs even before the coup.)

Knox concluded: ‘I have asked Neilson to prepare an account of the whole matter…”

On March 22, Colonel Neilson, now back at Omsk, submitted the requested report, most of which forms the basis for the account of his activities during the
coup d’état, as detailed in this chapter. It is only necessary here to present his ‘Conclusion’, which, in view of its importance, is given verbatim: ‘This was a most difficult period for a soldier with no diplomatic training. I had to make important decisions, without being able to receive instructions. To make no decisions was impossible, and fully realising my responsibilities, I acted as I considered best after proper consideration.

‘I knew the coup d’état was coming, and I knew it was necessary. I could not prevent it, and perhaps my action, as detailed in this report, helped to restrain it, and prevent bloodshed. My advice to Admiral Kolchak, after his election as Dictator, may have contributed to the issue of his democratic declaration and proclamation. My action, previous to the coup d’état, did not commit the British Government to any definite line of action, and my unofficial conversations could not be construed as being an expression of policy, nor as binding the Government to any action.

‘I stood aside while the coup d’état was in progress, and when it was over, helped Admiral Kolchak. I considered this was the way I could best carry out my duty of furthering the continuation of the war. I did not commit the Government to the support of Admiral Kolchak, but it was impossible to make the Russians think I was personally against him, and if they gambled on the future support of the British Government, it was logical, and there was no other policy.

‘The presence of a British battalion in Omsk was probably looked on as a possible guarantee for the personal safety of the Admiral, and the promise of supplies as a valuable asset for the new Government.

‘I do not know what use the Russians made of my name, and that of Colonel Ward, but no one has the right to say I took any part in the coup d’état, except as stated in this report.

‘I am writing after a lapse of four months, and without notes, and have probably forgotten certain details, but the above is as full and accurate an account as I can give.’

On March 26, General Knox forwarded this to the War Office, with this comment: ‘I consider that the statement reported by the High Commissioner to the effect that there was in existence “documentary evidence of our engineering” the Kolchak coup d’état is quite unfounded. I consider that in difficult circumstances Colonel Neilson acted with prudence and judgment.’

This was passed by the DMO to the Foreign Office. ‘A clear and convincing report,’ minuted the Russia Department.

‘It seems to me that Colonel Neilson completely clears himself,’ wrote Selby. ‘I agree,’ added Lord Curzon.

But with a great deal more information now to hand, including Colonel Neilson’s own crucial ‘notes’, it is evident that the British are far from cleared from complicity in Admiral Kolchak’s coup d’état.
The Russian theatres: preparations for war

North Russia

On November 14, the War Cabinet had approved the War Office and Foreign Office decision to remain in North Russia. In fact, all hope of a peaceful withdrawal from Archangel had vanished on Armistice Day, when heavy fighting broke out on the Dvina river front. Though driving snow soon brought matters to a close, General Ironside then had to cope with the Russian winter as well. At the front line, he found the French troops exhausted, and the local Russians uninterested; the Allies, they thought, had some ‘private quarrel’ with the Bolsheviks. There was a terrible silence in the forests, broken only by the cracking of the branches in the intense cold: 87 degrees of frost was recorded one night. ‘It was all very weird’, wrote Ironside.

On December 6, Lindley commented scathingly to the Foreign Office on Kolchak’s coup. No Russian dictator who relied solely on the Russian officers and upper classes had any real chance, and would only alienate most of the people, and push the undecided over to the Bolsheviks. It was not a question of supporting ‘our friends’, but choosing between the discredited old regime, who simply wanted a restoration, and people who were ‘unpractical and difficult to work with’, but had real support and wanted a new order. The sole Allied aim should be to enable the Constituent Assembly, which was hated equally by the old regime and the Bolsheviks, to decide freely on the future Russian Government.1

But what real support did the Archangel Government have? When the new Russian recruits were summoned to their first parade, they shut themselves up in their barracks and waved red flags, and the Russian Commander had to open fire on them with mortars and shoot the ringleaders before some order was restored. At Christmas, Ironside told the Russian officers at a training camp pointedly what was expected of a British officer. He himself had often written letters home for his men: ‘Are we our men’s valets that we should do all this for them?’ he was asked indignantly. ‘Have any of your officers been shot at by their own men?’ He saw a ‘terrible hopelessness’ in their eyes. He decided to form the numerous Bolshevik prisoners into a special battalion, under British officers, called ‘Dyer’s’
(after its young Canadian commander), and gave them a Russian band. But things then went from bad to worse. His senior officers began to melt away. Finlayson, his Chief of Staff, had a complete breakdown, and there was a minor calamity on the Vologda railway front on New Year’s Day; when American troops attacked a village, British machine guns never opened fire, as the commander was drunk. But the American Consul Poole reported that Ironside commended the American action as ‘very gallant and excellently planned’. But though Bolshevik troops still showed a ‘marked inferiority’ to American troops, Poole warned that there was a ‘widespread’ rumour of a general Boshevik attack about Easter time to cut Murmansk off from Archangel, and then crush the Archangel force.1

At Murmansk, when it became impossible to link up with the Czechs on the Perm-Vologda railway, the War Office had ordered General Maynard to hold the Murmansk railway to maintain overland contact with Archangel, and to prepare to advance south. But as he was then told not to use his Allied troops and to remain on the defensive, he too tried to raise local recruits, and had as little success. There was much local discontent. When the workers were offered their back pay in British roubles, there was such an outcry that Maynard himself had to return for some real money to London (where he saw Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary, who reported in gloomy terms to Lloyd George). On his return, he found the Russians planning to advance south to obtain more recruits. Reindeer sledges had been got from the Laplanders, and dog teams were coming. Maynard wired at once for 1,000 more railway engineers to keep the Murmansk railway running; otherwise he would have to withdraw to Kandalaksha, and thus be cut off from Archangel. It seemed that the Bolshevik Easter attack would be unnecessary.2

The Baltic

On November 14, the War Cabinet had approved the War Office and Foreign Office decision that military supplies should be sent out to the Baltic ‘if and when’ the Baltic States had governments which could put them to proper use. In fact, the Admiralty had taken action at once.

On December 31, Admiral Fremantle (the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff) had informed the Cabinet about developments in the Baltic. The night before, he stated, a wire had come from Admiral Sinclair at Riga (the capital of Latvia) stating that Latvian troops there had mutinied, and further north, HMS Ceres had opened fire on Bolshevik troops, at the request of the Estonian Government. The mutineers had surrendered, and British naval patrols were keeping order. Sinclair’s orders were to land arms and give naval support as required, but not to land men unless unavoidable. In fact, he had landed 5,000 out of his 20,000 rifles only; and was daily training men alongside the ships, collecting the rifles again in the evening. But he was being besieged by requests from the Estonian Government3, and ‘all sorts of other bodies’. Admiral Fremantle wished to know whether to withdraw the British Squadron, ‘or to face intervention on a larger scale’. Britain might, he warned, be drawn into operations, from which it would
be difficult to disentangle herself. A decision must be reached quickly, as the warships had to leave Riga before mid-January, or they would be ice-bound. Libau, further south, was free both of ice and of Bolsheviks; but a withdrawal from Riga would entail a Boshevik massacre of all their opponents. The Latvian mutineers, it was stated, belonged to the Latvian Government, whom Britain was supporting against the invading Bolsheviks. This showed the ‘hoplessness’ of trying to prop up such a weak local government. This was the first time that Baltic complications were considered. It was agreed that a decision could not be postponed until the Peace Conference met. The Admiralty were instructed to withdraw British warships from Riga and Reval, though one ship could be left temporarily at Libau.

South Russia

On November 14, the War Cabinet had approved the War Office and Foreign Office recommendations for action in South Russia. It was decided ‘to establish touch with Denikin at Novorossisk, and afford him all possible assistance in military material’, to take over Krasnovodsk, to occupy the Batoum-Baku line, and to adhere to the Anglo-French agreement of December 1917, ‘if possible, extending the British sphere so as to include the country between the Don and the Volga’.

At the War Office, the DMO next day had two notes from the French General Staff in Paris. The first stated that Denikin had just sent General Erdeli to see General Franchet d’Esperey, the French C-in-C at Salonika, to ask for support. Erdeli had remarked that Denikin had a lot of wheat, as the Kuban harvest had been good, which he might send to raise morale in the Ukraine (in the French zone), where there was no wheat. Franchet d’Esperey had at once sent a ship with 20,000 rifles and 50 million rounds to Novorossisk, promising supplies and shells later. The second note urged that if it was still the Allied intention to occupy South Russia, Franchet d’Esperey should send all available French and British divisions to Odessa and Novorossisk; but the Allies should first agree on prospects and available resources, and revise the zones of influence.

The DMO saw where all this would lead. The French, in fact, were up to tricks. He at once put up a paper for the War Cabinet. ‘The opening of the Dardanelles’, he wrote, ‘will shortly throw open to the Allies possibilities of influencing the situation in Russia to which those offered by bases either in North Russia or Siberia are incomparable.’ As the French had already heard from Denikin’s envoy, General Poole should go out at once to report on General Denikin’s army, and other such movements, but not promise any support.

The DMO further requested:

1) That British and French zones of interest in South Russia, agreed in December 1917, should be respected:
2) That General Milne (the British Commander at Constantinople) should leave Franchet d’Esperey’s command:

3) That Britain should occupy Batoum, and the Batoum-Baku railway, to obtain a second link with the Caspian ports of Baku, Enzeli and Krasnovodsk.

On November 16, Sir Henry Wilson therefore sent Milne a personal wire that, though England could not embark on an anti-Bolshevik crusade, her object was to help the Russians help themselves. But England insisted on the December 1917 agreement with the French, which allotted:

To France—Bessarabia, the Ukraine, the Crimea.

To England—the Cossack areas, the North and South Caucasus.

In the Cossack areas and North Caucasus, Milne was now to be independent of Franchet d’Esperey, and should send ‘at once’ to Denikin, to whom England would give all support save British troops, ‘anything he urgently needs and which you can spare or get from Turkish sources’. General Poole would come out to report, while General Thomson would occupy Baku, and take over Krasnovodsk from the British Mission which had come up to Transcaspia from India.\(^4\)

In the south Caucasus, it was intended to occupy Batoum and the Batoum-Baku railway to ensure control of the Caspian and ‘enable us to support operations if necessary from Astrakhan up the Volga’. Milne, however, was not to move without definite orders.

\( (\text{But the December 1917 agreement with the French had also laid down that the French would support General Alexeiev’s operations in South Russia ‘until new arrangements are made in concert with England’. Was this also now reaffirmed, or presumed to have lapsed?}) \)

Immediate action was taken. On November 17, a British force duly occupied Baku, whereupon a smaller force was sent up the west Caspian coast to seize the port of Petrovsk, from which Colonel Bicherakhov (the pro-British Russian leader) had been forced to withdraw. At the same time, General Milne informed the War Office that Franchet d’Esperey had already asked him to make the Turks collect all the Russian arms and munitions in Turkey at the nearest port for despatch to Russia.\(^5\) In reply, he received an immediate personal reminder from Sir Henry Wilson that Milne himself must arrange for the disposal of these arms; Denikin must know that they had come on the orders of the British Government.

On the 18th, as the Cabinet approved the DMO’s recent paper, Milne sent two officers from Salonika by destroyer with a letter for Denikin. A Colonel Blackwood joined them at Chanak. At Constantinople, they went on board the cruiser \textit{Liverpool}, and together with a French Mission on the French cruiser \textit{Ernest Renan}, they then set sail for Novorossisk, which they reached on the 23rd, causing a ‘profound impression’, Blackwood reported—and the Volunteer Army proceeded to celebrate their first contact with their Allies in suitable fashion.

Dawn at last seemed to be breaking for the Volunteer Army. After a decisive three-week battle, they had taken Stavropol on November 20, and thus destroyed
half the 11th Red Army in the Caucasus; only some of the survivors, riddled with
curvy and typhus, managed to escape east toward the bleak South Astrakhan
desert. But the Bolshevik Command in Astrakhan, who had little idea of the real
situation, at once ordered the recapture of the Tsaritsin-Novorossisk railway, and
the port of Petrovsk. They also informed Lenin in Moscow that the railway line
from Mineralaya Vodi to Vladikavkaz and Grosni was in working order, and the
supply of petrol would shortly be resumed. But a British and French Mission had
arrived, ‘and the arrival of troops as well is expected any day now’. 

At Novorossisk on November 24, Colonel Blackwood and party were given
a civic and military reception on quay at 1300 [hours]. Lunch offered by town
and military authorities 1400–1900 hours.’ At midnight, they left, exhausted, on a
special train with Erdeli for Ekaterinodar, and ‘asked him to arrange that we
should be received by General Denikin at the earliest possible moment and be
excused from as much of the festivities as possible’.

This, however, was not to be. Though they met Denikin briefly in the
morning, there was then a ceremonial lunch from 1 to 3.30 pm, then a display by
the Cossacks from 3.30 to 4.30 pm, and then tea with the Kuban Ataman
at 4.45 pm. Only at 6 pm did they finally manage to see Denikin’s Chief of Staff,
General Romanovsky, who at once began grossly to exaggerate the number of
their troops, in order to boost their own importance, and make sure of large
quantities of Allied supplies. In the Kuban, Blackwood was told, the Volunteer
Army had about 50,000 men; but after mobilisation would have about 120,000.
The Don Cossacks (who, it was stressed, were not under Denikin), the Astrakhan
Corps and the Voronezh Corps had, all told, 130,000 troops. In the Ukraine, the
potential was considerable, for there were ‘320,000 available men’: while in the
Baltic, the Russian Northern Corps was ‘estimated at 5,000’; and the Russian
Staff thought that these two armies ‘could provide 150,000 bayonets’.

The total Russian forces, actual and potential, were presented to Blackwood
thus:

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<tr>
<td>Volunteer and Don Armies Astrakhan and Voronezh Corps</td>
<td>250,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ukrainian Army Russian Northern Corps</td>
<td>150,000</td>
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<td>‘Non-Combatants’</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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But, Blackwood was told, the Russian troops ‘at present available’ were quite
unable to carry on active operations against the Bolsheviks, and preserve order in
South Russia and the Ukraine to enable a general mobilisation to take place. So
Blackwood was begged not only for material and supplies to keep the present
Russian forces in the field, but also for the despatch of 18 Infantry and 4 Allied
Cavalry divisions to protect the Caucasus oilfields, garrison the mobilisation areas,
and ‘cover main lines of advance’ on Moscow and Petrograd. The time factor was
vital, as the Bolsheviks had to be thrown out of the Caucasus by the spring.
Blackwood at once pointed out that the employment of foreign troops was ‘highly undesirable’ in South Russia. It was also clear that there was bad blood between the Volunteer Army and the Don Cossacks, who were now heavily engaged on the upper Don, and were making for Kursk, Povorino (a railway junction between the Don and the Volga), and Kamyshin and Tsaritsin (on the Volga). By late November, they had defeated the 8th Red Army near Voronezh. But though General Krasnov, the Don Cossack Ataman, on December 1 sent an emissary to ask Blackwood to come to Novocherkask, he did not go, as he was told that the Don Cossacks were suspicious of the Allies, because they feared that once Russia was united, the Allies would dictate what form of Russian Government was to be set up: ‘a form which may possibly be distasteful to the Cossacks themselves’. (Nor in fact did the British Mission ever leave Ekaterinodar. Other rather fragmentary information was obtained from English commercial gentlemen who had either drifted or been forced down to South Russia by the Bolshevik upheaval; but it was largely hearsay, and mostly inaccurate.)

But Blackwood considered that the Volunteer Army was the ‘only body capable of coping with the situation’ The Allies must, however send war material, even in small quantities, at once; declare their Russian policy, which must be ‘resolute and determined’; send political envoys to induce the White Russians to unite; and study the questions of finance, trade, and especially the railways, which were in a terrible state. (They had, also, of course asked for money. A General Arpshoven had been sent to Persia to try to obtain Allied credit to buy up a ‘large quantity of Russian coinage’, which had ‘accumulated’ there during the war, and could be bought cheaply; but, they told Blackwood sadly, Arpshoven’s mission was ‘unfortunately unsuccessful’.

But though the Russian officer ‘does not concern himself with politics’, Blackwood warned in his report of December 6 that members of the old regime and of the former Provisional Government, ‘and the remnants of Petrograd society’, were all gathering round the Volunteer Army. It was, however, ‘inconceivable that any, except a very few of the above, are in favour of returning to the old form of autocratic government’, he added a little naively.7

This, the first official report on the White Russian Armies in South Russia, was quite fair. Blackwood accurately reported on their lack of men both for preserving order in the rear and for attacking the Bolsheviks at the front; and had made it clear that British troops could not be sent. But that bland statement of ‘1,200,000’ White Russian potential forces was to have grave consequences in London. For it was just what the War Office wanted to believe; and from there it was but a short step to their announcing a few weeks later in a paper to the War Cabinet that this number would, in fact, be on the ground in the spring.

General Poole, before sailing for South Russia, as authorised by the War Cabinet, wrote a rather curious paper for Sir Henry Wilson, containing his ‘Proposals for mission to South Russia.’ To prevent the ‘complete Germanisation’ of European Russia, he urged the Allied seizure of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, and all the Black Sea ports, which would cause an ‘incredible revulsion of feeling’
in favour of the Allies, and not only hearten ‘Alexeiev’s armies’, but cause large numbers of all Russian classes, who were sick of Bolshevism, to enlist. They should then advance on Kiev, Kharkov and Voronezh, linking up with the Roumanians on the west, and ‘Alexeiev’s forces at Tsaritsin’ to the east, which would have an ‘electrical’ effect, and probably result in the ‘downfall of anarchy’, he wrote. ‘The nerve centre of Bolshevism is Moscow and an advance on this town from South East and North and possibly W(est) will eventually be necessary to establish a central government’, he added. This paper of Poole’s underlines two important facts: first, that the War Office still regarded him as their ‘strong-arm man’ with the Russians; second, Poole’s continual harping on the ease with which a ‘revulsion of feeling’ in favour of the Allies could be obtained. This was indeed his favourite phrase, and he had singularly failed to obtain it with his attempted coup at Archangel; yet, blinded by the Czech example, he persisted in thinking that similar action by a small number of Allied troops would result in all the Russians coming over to the Allies and the White Russians. It is also difficult to make out why he did not know that Alexeiev was already dead—the War Office certainly did—or that his forces were not at Tsaritsin. This paper is undated, but its position in the file, and several uncomplimentary remarks upon it, point to Poole writing it on his departure. There is no indication, however, that Sir Henry Wilson took any notice of it.

On November 23, General Poole, accompanied by Colonel Terence Keyes (who had organised the Bank Schemes in Petrograd in early 1918), and John Picton Bagge (the British Consul in Odessa, who had been in England on leave), finally sailed for South Russia. At the same time, Captains Sidney Reilly and George Hill (the two leading British secret service agents in Bolshevik Russia in 1918, but now simply political agents) were taken into the Black Sea separately on a Greek destroyer, disguised as ‘English merchants’. Poole and party arrived at Novorossisk on December 3, and Colonel Blackwood sailed away on the same ship.

The Russians were overjoyed to receive the visit of a full British General, and gave Poole a big reception. The first thing he noticed at Ekaterinodar was the considerable friction between the Volunteer Army and the Cossacks: the Don Cossacks wanted the high command; the Kuban Cossacks wanted Kuban independence. Poole was not impressed by the Volunteer Army generals. Denikin, though a ‘thoroughly honest, reliable leader’, he reported, ‘does not stand out as a brilliant soldier or administrator’; while Romanovsky, (his Chief of Staff) though ‘hard working and devoted to his Chief’, was ‘not a very brilliant soldier’. He was much more taken by the Cavalrymen. Wrangel was a ‘very fine dashing Cavalry leader’, while Mamontov was a ‘most gallant soldier and very fine Cossack leader’, and a ‘great sportsman, and used to keep a pack of hounds at Moscow’. The Volunteer Army troops, however, were ‘keen and have fought with great courage’; and Poole felt that these various problems might be resolved provided British support to Denikin impressed General Krasnov (the Don Cossack Ataman).
But, as one of Poole’s officers wrote to a friend at the War Office, ‘there is the same utter lack of consideration for one’s inferiors socially that has always existed, e.g., the orgy given by the Kuban Cossacks to Poole which kept a band and waiters until 6 a.m., and such things as keeping motor cars waiting hours in the cold while the officers have a six course lunch…Sazonov [a former Tsarist Foreign Minister] talks to us as if he expects European diplomacy to return to pre-war style, and Denikin suggested that our troops, when and if they land, should requisition warm clothing from the inhabitants who are already in rags and only one suit of that’. But, he went on, ‘the Volunteer Army seems a hard, bitter lot and have done magnificently’, though he admitted that ‘everybody appears to be hoping we are going to do the dirty work for them, and that they will come in on the top’.9

‘The one thing that ought to be done quickly’, he urged, ‘is to take Astrakhan, if that is done Caucasus is completely ours as the only “comm” between Central Russia and Caucasus (for Bolsheviks) is via Astrakhan, besides this would link up Denikin and Kolchak at Omsk.’ But though Denikin claimed to have no differences with Kolchak, and Sazonov was acting as Foreign Minister for both Russian leaders, the ‘all Russian government that is in process of organisation here…is too tinged with reaction to have my full confidence…We are off for a three days’ shoot today, bear, deer and [?goat]. The place is tranquil, food and drink are plentiful,’ he added.9

The capture of Astrakhan was indeed vital. But as there was a vast, arid desert separating it from the Volunteer Army, the only way in was by sea; in fact, the capture of Astrakhan depended upon the control of the Caspian Sea, for which both sides were striving. The Bolsheviks had brought 9 destroyers and 4 submarines from the Baltic Sea down the Kama river, which were to be based at Petrovsk, to protect the oil supplies from Baku. But the British had beaten them to it. In early December, Commander Norris heard that the Bolshevik flotilla at Astrakhan was going to form a base on the mainland opposite Chechen Island. He thus sent 2 ships north to investigate; and a great deal of ammunition was expended between them and 3 Bolshevik vessels, who then made off. Both sides, in fact, were very weak; but after this moral victory, Norris transferred his base from Krasnovodsk to Baku itself. Lenin was most irritated by this naval defeat; and addressed a sharp message to Trotsky, who replied from Kursk on the 14th that he was out of touch with Astrakhan, and could give no reason ‘for the passivity’ of the Bolshevik flotilla. In fact, the Bolshevik Commander’s torpedo firing equipment had not arrived. He was urged to make a further attempt on Petrovsk on December 25.10

Meanwhile, Admiral Calthorpe (the British Naval Commander in the Black Sea) had sent Commander Bond (an Australian), of HMS Swan, to discover what was happening in the Sea of Azov—at Mariopol, Taganrog and Kertsch—and in the area of the Don mouth, warning him, it seems, not to involve himself with General Krasnov. But on arrival at Mariopol, Bond was more or less seized by the Don Cossacks, and whisked straight off to Novocherkask, where he had a long
interview on December 8 with Krasnov, who handed him a letter in French for General Poole, outlining his plan of campaign. In this, Krasnov stated that the regular Don Cossack army numbered 20,000 men. But mobilised, they had 78,000 men. The Voronezh Corps had 12,000 men, and the Saratov and Astrakhan Corps had 10,000 men each; making a total of 110,000 men in all. But the Don Cossacks were tired, and must be reinforced by fresh troops. The Bolsheviks, of course, were also tired; but feared to surrender to his Cossacks—though they would to Allied troops, he added craftily.¹¹

For a ‘decisive victory’, Krasnov first needed a great quantity of equipment; in fact, before the end of December, 50,000 boots, 100,000 sets of winter equipment, 20,000 Russian rifles, 70,000 revolvers, as well as swords and even bits, bridles and saddles; and more than 200 Maxim guns, and 24 artillery batteries and 24 tanks. Second, he needed 100,000 Allied troops, with a large amount of artillery. One Corps should occupy the Ukraine, one should help the Volunteer Army clear the Caucasus, a third should advance with the Don Cossacks via Voronezh and Ryazan on Moscow, where they would meet the fourth Allied Corps, who would advance via Kharkov and Kursk. He made no bones about the extent of his activities during this great march on Moscow. ‘The mobilised Don Army and part of the regular Don Army will remain after the capture of Tsaritsin on Don territory, safeguarding the rear of the Allied front’, while ‘another part of the regular Don Army, as well as the Southern [Cossack] Army, will advance with the Allies for the liberation of Russia’, he wrote. ‘Plus tôt ce plan se réalise—plus certain est le succès’, he ended. (These figures should be compared with the figures given by Blackwood.)

But it was soon clear to Commander Bond that the Don Cossacks were in a bad way. At an official dinner, when Bond replied warily to ‘speech after speech’ asking for the ‘active assistance’ of the Allies, Krasnov had his meagre statements censored in the local press; and when Bond went up by train to the Voronezh front, the Don Cossack officers told him that they had no ammunition or equipment at all, save what they could take from the Bolsheviks, who then broke through the Cossack front.¹²

This was confirmed when Bond visited the ‘Russian Baltic Works’, the big armament factory at Taganrog, which now only had some 1,200 instead of 10,000 workmen; they would not say how many shell cases they were now producing, but claimed a daily output of 300,000 rifle cartridges. But as the Bolsheviks held the big munition factory at Tula, they had no explosive; and could neither fill the shells, nor cap the cartridges. All other industry was ‘practically at a standstill’, noted Bond, who then went down to give Krasnov’s letter to Poole. He thereupon sailed back across the Euxine to report to Admiral Calthorpe. (But this report, which Calthorpe thought ‘very creditable to Commander Bond’, did not reach the Admiralty until December 29.)

Poole, having presumably listened to what Bond had told him, then went up to the Don himself just before Christmas; and Krasnov laid on a tremendous orgy for him, with plenty of gipsies, which must have impressed Poole, whose
weakness for these girls was well known. Next day, Krasnov showed him his best cavalry regiments, and then trotted him round his supply depots, with all the shells carefully laid out, which Poole—perhaps with a severe hangover—never noticed were empty! Don Cossack morale was once again breaking at this moment, and the Cossacks were in retreat. But Poole noticed nothing. This Don Cossack Army was of a ‘very much higher standard than anything else I have seen in Russia’, he reported. But when Krasnov asked for further supplies and the support of Allied troops, Poole was firm; Allied help—by which he included the despatch of Allied troops—depended upon unity of command among the White Russians. Though Krasnov could of course remain in command of the Don Cossacks, he must first recognise Denikin as C-in-C in South Russia. Krasnov rather grudgingly promised to comply. But Poole came away ‘most satisfied with all I saw in the Don’. In fact, General Krasnov ‘stands out both in ability and capacity far above any Russian officer’, he wrote; and with this comment, Poole left.

Reilly’s assessment of Krasnov was more just; he was a ‘stupid man’, Reilly later told Margulies, ‘but an impresario of genius’. On December 26, Ataman Krasnov duly signed a document recognising Denikin’s authority. It was agreed, however, that he should retain command of the Don Cossack Army under General Denikin, who thus became C-in-C of the Armed Forces in South Russia (to be known as the AFSR); and next day appointed General Wrangel as Commander of the Volunteer Army.

Picton Bagge, meanwhile, parted company with Captains Reilly and Hill at Sebastopol on Boxing Day, and returned to Odessa to resume his duties as British Consul; while the other two went on to Ekaterinodar, and then into the North Caucasus. But in Ekaterinodar, the ‘National Centre’ party told Reilly that Kolchak had ‘already agreed’ to cooperate with Denikin, ‘and when the right time comes to transfer to him the command over his forces’. Reilly therefore thought that any conflict with Kolchak, who was not a military leader, could be resolved by official British recognition of Denikin as Russian C-in-C.

The military problem of overcoming the Bolsheviks, Reilly stressed in his first report to the Foreign Office, was a comparatively easy one, as they would not stand up to regular troops, who were technically well equipped. It was a case for quick, decisive action. The question of unity of command was nearly settled. ‘General Krasnov is first and foremost an opportunist and once he is given to understand in a most decided manner that the way to Allied support in the matter of equipment, arms, goods, etc. lies via Denikin he will submit and being a clever man, he will do so with good grace and workable amount of bona fides…The [Don] Cossacks if well supplied in the matter of equipment and armament will follow Krasnov in a campaign against Moscow if the campaign promises to be short, but they will not remain in the field for an indefinite time’, warned Reilly.

He went on: ‘It will be fatal for Russia and probably for Europe if this task is not accomplished by next summer.’ There was great need for propaganda work in Allied countries, and men like Maurice Baring and R.C.Long, who knew Russia
well, should be induced to help. ‘Whatever the diversity of opinion may be about extending military and economic help to Russia, there can be only one opinion on the urgent necessity of world wide propaganda against Bolshevism, as the greatest danger that has ever threatened civilisation’, he urged.

Reilly and Hill then saw General Denikin, ‘a man of about 50, of fine presence, the dark Russian type with regular features; he has a dignified, very cultured manner, and could be classed as belonging rather to the “higher staff officer type” than to the “fighting type”. He gives one the impression of a broad-minded, high-thinking, determined and well-balanced man—but the impression of great power of intellect or of those characteristics which mark a ruler of men is lacking’, reported Reilly. (This is undoubtedly the best brief description of Denikin ever made.)

Denikin was not optimistic. ‘People think that in order to pacify Russia, all one has to do is to take Moscow. To hear again the sound of the Kremlin bells would, of course, be very pleasant, but we cannot save Russia through Moscow. Russia’, he said, ‘must be reconquered as a whole, and to do this we have to carry out a very wide sweeping movement from the South, moving right across Russia.’ The separatist movement in the Ukraine, he thought, was merely Bolshevism in Ukrainian garb, and must be fought at once before it spread.

‘We cannot do [all] this alone. We must have the assistance of the Allies’, he stressed. Munitions and supplies were not enough. They needed Allied troops to move behind them to hold the re-won territory, garrison the towns, and protect their rear. Only in this way could they mobilise fresh troops in newly won territory. ‘We will do all the fighting, but you must stand by and protect us from being struck in the back’, Denikin told Reilly. Soon, he added, he would move either to the Crimea or to Rostov.

Early in the new year, Denikin held a Council of War and outlined his plan of campaign to his generals. Originally, when the Don Cossacks were near Voronezh, he had intended to transfer the Volunteer Army from the Caucasus to the Tsaritsin front to occupy the lower Volga, and thus link up with Kolchak. But now that the Don Cossacks had withdrawn, and Allied troops were coming to Odessa and into the Ukraine, he decided that, after the Caucasus had been freed, all his troops were to concentrate near Kharkov to cover the Donetz coal field, save for those needed to protect the Kuban on the Manytsch river line. Wrangel violently disagreed. All available troops should be moved into the Manytsch lake district, and then move up the Volga to link up with Kolchak. Romanovsky, Denikin’s Chief of Staff, rejected this. The Donetz coal fields were indispensable, their left flank would be covered by the French; and since Moscow was their ultimate goal, the shortest way was via Kharkov. Wrangel persisted, but Denikin stuck to his point of view.

The Volunteer Army then launched a final attack to clear the Kuban. The Bolshevik centre was soon smashed, and only three Bolshevik groups remained: one at the river Manytsch, which was defeated in a few days; one at Sviatoj Krest; and the other at Mineralaya Vodi, both of which the Kuban Cossack General
Pokrovsky proceeded to sweep rapidly across the Terek towards the Caspian. The Bolsheviks crammed everything they could onto trains, even dismantled destroyers and submarines, which they had managed to remove from Novorossisk just before the Volunteer Army entered. The human torrent rolled incessantly eastward', wrote Denikin, ‘flooding all the roadways for scores of kilometres, obstructing them with broken wagons, abandoned luggage, corpses of men and beasts. Those who escaped death from bullet or sword fell victims to spotted typhus, which raged unrestrained. Many campaigners, inured one might think to the horrors of war, never could recall these nightmare visions without a shudder: wildly rushing crowds, trainloads of the sick and wounded abandoned on the sidings, thousands of people worn out with fever and delirium, crawling along the rails and railway banks, and ruthlessly crushed to death by the passing trains’.

But General Liakhov, who moved down at the same time towards Vladikavkaz and Grozni to clear the Caucasus oilfields, met stubborn resistance from both the Bolsheviks and the Ingushi tribesmen. (The choice of Liakhov for any sort of pacification anywhere near the Caucasus was exceedingly unfortunate, and may well have had something to do with the attitude of the Ingushi. For in June 1908, it was Colonel Liakhov who had launched a coup d’état in Teheran to suppress the Persian Parliament, the Majlis, and assist the Russian puppet Mohammed Ali to re-establish an autocracy. This had also caused much ill-feeling against Russia in England.)

In London, there was concern about the Caspian Flotilla at Baku, which had not been since Bicherakov’s subsidy had been stopped. As Commander Norris had intercepted their signals to the Bolshevik Commander at Astrakhan, who was being urged from Moscow to attack Petrovsk, the Admiralty had ordered Commander Norris to seize the Caspian Flotilla. But neither side took action. The Admiralty were sharply advised that it was ‘neither feasible nor necessary’, and would only ‘alienate sympathy’, while the Bolshevik attack was again called off, as their torpedo firing equipment had still not arrived.

All this led to considerable exasperation in both Moscow and London. In reply to a sharp message from Lenin, Trotsky urged that they be given more time: but he wired the Bolshevik Commander of his concern about the ‘weaker English fleet’ on the Caspian. ‘There never will be such a thing as ideal preparation’, Trotsky warned. Further delay would reduce their superiority. When would the attack begin? The Admiralty in London nipped this in the bud by ordering that the Bolshevik Flotilla be destroyed. But though Commander Norris burnt down their advance base on Chechen Island, the ice then sealed up the Bolshevik ships at Astrakhan.

Norris, ice-free to the south, then strengthened his bases at Baku and Petrovsk, twelve motor boats came up by rail, followed by the RAF, who set up their base on Chechen Island, from which to bomb Astrakhan when the ice broke up and the Volga reopened. British control of the Caspian Sea was increasing.

In mid-November, when the War Cabinet laid down British policy for South Russia, the most alarming news was coming from the Ukraine in the French
zone, where the situation was rapidly degenerating, and liable to infect other regions. After the fall of the pro-German puppet ruler Skoropadsky, the Bolshevik Government were undecided whether to fight the Ukrainian Directorate, which had then seized power, or try to come to terms with it. But in mid-November, an Ukrainian Bolshevik Government was set up in Kursk, and got together some small bands, which became known as the ‘Kursk Ukrainians’. They urged strong measures against Simon Petlura (the military leader of the Ukrainian Directorate); and, after making contact with the German troops, they agreed on a demarcation line, and began to allow them, on giving up their arms, to return to Germany. Trotsky, uncertain about Allied intentions, supported the ‘Kursk Ukrainians’. But it was agreed that though the despatch of Red Army troops to the Ukraine would simply raise cries of ‘Bolshevik Imperialism’, national Red Armies could be organised, and could be said to be local troops on their way back home.¹⁸

On November 15, General Franchet d’Esperey wired to Paris that some Ukrainians at Constantinople had asked the French Admiral Amet for French troops to be sent urgently to replace the departing Germans before the Bolsheviks did so; but, Franchet d’Esperey informed the French War Office, even with British troops he only had enough troops to hold Odessa and the nearby ports, and could not send men due for return to France, or for demobilisation. He would need 8,000 to 10,000 more troops if he had to go into the Ukraine as well.

But next day (November 16th), the Russian General Scherbatschev, after conferring with General Berthelot (head of the French Military Mission in Bucharest), informed Denikin that Berthelot had promised to send twelve French and Greek divisions to Odessa within a few days to occupy Kiev, Kharkov, the Donetz basin, Krivoi Rog and the Kuban, to give the Volunteer Army and Don Cossacks the ‘possibility of organising themselves more firmly, and of being free for wider active operations’. Franchet d’Esperey and Berthelot were thus at cross purposes from the start, and their exact relationship was never to be clarified—which mostly explains the disastrous outcome of military operations in the French zone in South Russia. Franchet d’Esperey, a flamboyant warrior—by birth a ‘pied noir’ from Mostaganem—was a hero of 1914, who had later commanded l’Armée de l’Orient at Salonica. His motto was ‘Sans Freins’, and he believed in action. He was known affectionately as ‘le General Désespéré,’ and by the British sailors in the Black Sea as ‘Desperate Frankie’. At the time of the Front Populaire, the old Marshal was believed to be the head of the Cagoule. General Berthelot had done much to assist Roumania after her defeat in 1916, and was held in high esteem in both London and Paris, where he had political influence, as his brother Phillippe Berthelot was Secretary General at the Quai d’Orsay.¹⁹

By early October, the Russian political groups in Kiev were splitting up and reforming as the First World War came to an end. In September, the Russian politicians there had warned the Allied diplomats in Jassy in Roumania of the disorder bound to arise on the departure of the German troops. At Jassy, the
French Consul Henno stated that as the Allies did not want the Germans to maintain order in the Ukraine, they were sending one and a half French divisions to occupy the Odessa and Kiev regions. The French Ambassador at Jassy confirmed this; there was talk of ‘Russia one and indivisible’, and the community of French and Russian interests was emphasised.

There were two main political groups in Kiev. Part of the ‘Right Centre’ and the ‘Union of Zemstva and Towns’ had formed the ‘National Centre’, while right SRs, left Cadets and some Mensheviks had formed the ‘Union for the Regeneration of Russia’ (or ‘Left Centre’). As the ‘National Centre’ was now thought to be finished in Kiev (because of their German connections), the various bourgeois politicians formed a new party, the ‘Council for the National Unification of Russia’ (the CNUR), of which Baron Meller-Zakomelsky, the former Chairman of the Progressive Bloc in the Duma, was elected President, assisted by the Cadets Krivoshein and Milyukov, and a Petrograd lawyer M.S.Margulies. But in mid-October, the former Minister of Trade and Industry, M.M.Fedorov, appeared in Kiev, and proceeded to resuscitate the ‘National Centre’. There were then more or less four Russian political groups in Kiev: the CNUR and the ‘National Centre’, and two ‘socialist’ parties, the ‘Union of Zemstva and Towns’ and the ‘Union for Regeneration’.

In early November, the Russian politicians in Kiev and Odessa had received invitations to come and confer with the Allied Ambassadors in Jassy; and a Russian delegation had been formed of 4 members of the CNUR, 2 members of the ‘National Centre’, 5 members of the ‘Union for Regeneration’, and various other people who had been privately invited. The ‘Union for Regeneration’ wanted a Directorate to rule Russia until the recall of the Constituent Assembly; the ‘National Centre’ wanted a Dictatorship, but could not decide between the Grand Duke Nicholas, General Denikin and General Krasnov; the CNUR was close to the ‘National Centre’. On the way to Jassy, the Russian delegation argued and argued, but could come to no decision.

But on arrival on November 17, it was agreed to ask the Allies to send 150,000 troops to replace the German cordon, and to give immediate help to the Volunteer Army; but the unity of Russia and of the Russian Command must be respected. There was then a discussion about the new Russian Army to be raised. The ‘National Centre’ at one moment wanted French troops to come under Russian Command; but this idea was soon abandoned. It had however been generally agreed that Petlura was a traitor, with whom there could be no dealings, when news reached Jassy that he was marching south, and that the Germans were refusing to keep order. The French Consul Henno was therefore sent to Kiev to stop the people from appealing to the ‘Bolshevik agents’ Vinnitchenko and Petlura (in fact, the two leading figures in the Ukrainian Directorate), to make the German Command keep order, as required by the Armistice, and to say that Allied troops were coming.

But ‘on the question of dictatorship—deadlock’, recorded Margulies in Jassy. ‘For two days discussions continue on this question. The Left wants a Directorate
and will not discuss the question of Denikin’s dictatorship.’ Finally, ‘having decided unanimously, with the Socialists abstaining, the question of the dictatorship, we move on to voting on the person of the Dictator’. The choice was now narrowed down to the Grand Duke Nicholas and Denikin. After General Scherbatschev had spoken strongly for Denikin, the vote was taken. Krivoshein (a former Tsarist Minister) and General Gurko (a former Russian Chief of Staff) voted for the Grand Duke; and there were 9 votes for Denikin.  

But at the end of the Jassy Conference on the 24th, Margulies wrote, ‘we don’t know what to do—there’s no general decision on the dictatorship and to submit two separate notes (bourgeois and socialist), would mean to demonstrate yet again a complete lack of unity among Russians even when it is a matter of saving one’s country and when we’ve met to summon foreigners to our aid’. General Ballard (the British Military Attaché) advised them to ‘throw out’ everything on which they were divided, and only ask for Allied troops. This they did, but the question of the future Russian regime thus remained undecided.

By now, Petlura controlled most of the Ukraine, and had cut off Kiev (where the pro-German General Skoropadsky was himself confined), and was marching on Odessa, where there was complete disorder. It was the same in the Crimea. On December 1, Admiral Calthorpe wired the Admiralty that he was alarmed about the Crimean ports. Though the German occupation had been orderly, the oil supplies were now entirely exhausted, the situation was chaotic, and the Russians could not take over. He urged Allied, or failing this, French occupation; and he wired Franchet d’Esperey to send French troops to Sebastopol at once. This was referred to Paris; Franchet d’Esperey suggested sending half a division to Sebastopol, and half to Odessa. Clemenceau merely replied that he was to hold a division in readiness. In London, the Foreign Office, who soon heard of this exchange, quickly reminded the Admiralty that no British troops could be sent into the French zone.

At Odessa, only two bodies had any effective support: the (mainly SR) Municipal Council, and the Bourse Committee (backed by the remains of the former pro-German government). As rumours spread of the imminent arrival of Allied troops, the French Consul Henno (the only Allied envoy in Odessa), was bombarded by every local politician, and soon blundered. Asked to resolve a local dispute, Henno sided with the Municipal Council, which angered the many Russian officers who had served under Skoropadsky, and were now thinking of joining Denikin. Wanting perhaps to placate them, he nevertheless blundered further by approving the ultra-reactionary Major-General Grishin-Almazov assuming command of the local Volunteer Army officers, instead of General Biskupsky, who had served under Skoropadsky. (Grishin-Almazov had been War Minister in the first Siberian Government at Omsk, which had dismissed him for his reactionary views, and criticism of the lack of Allied support—and even Knox described him as an ‘old regime policeman’.) This split the Russian troops even more. But though some 2,000 Russians remained loyal to Biskupsky, they could
neither prevent the local German troops from handing over their arms and supplies to the Bolsheviks, nor stop Petlura, who was rapidly approaching Odessa.24

As Petlura advanced, alarm gave way to panic in Odessa. Margulies described the scene on the evening of December 10. ‘We dined at the Hotel de Londres at 11 p.m. The large restaurant was almost empty…[when] the entire body of military and civilian defenders of the city appeared in the dining room—the refuge of all the afflicted…The hall, however, was a sort of military bedlam. There was a detachment of some kind of Volunteers—hard to say whether they were Polish-Lithuanians or Tartars…in front of the main staircase was a machine-gun, on the steps above it ten drums of machine-gun bullets and two hand-grenades. Beside them a young officer was lolling in a chair, his hands in his pockets and a lighted cigarette between his teeth…

‘Some type in a leather jerkin appeared in the restaurant and announced that the forces advancing on Odessa were not Petlurists but bands of marauding peasants who would join up with the local hooligans and cut everybody’s throats…I looked at my son, who was sitting beside me and felt my blood run cold with fear. Langeron was irrepressible; he was cheerful and unconcerned—he had two rifles, a revolver and about two hundred rounds of ammunition; he proposed to sell his life dearly. Biskupsky was gloomy; he could not count on anyone, while B —* went on talking to someone, obviously discussing plans for a bloodless surrender of the city. “How many Petlurists are advancing on us?” I asked. Nobody had the slightest idea. G—the Police Chief said to Princess V—before he left, “All is lost, I can already feel the rope round my neck.”’

‘We broke up in a very gloomy mood. In the corridor I bumped into S—he is beaming—he has just finished negotiations with the Petlurists; they persuaded them not to enter the town tomorrow before 11 a.m. or 12 noon; 10,000 men will march in in perfect order, they will guarantee absolute order in the city and there will be no violence. This news was confirmed by some character who joined us at that point who introduced himself as “Colonel Blavatny—aide-de-camp to the Hetman Skoropadsky.” He had also taken part in the parleys with Petlura’s troops and assured us that, after all, the Hetman too had been able to reach a peaceful settlement with them. Well, all appears to be well’, concluded Margulies, ‘we shall be able to negotiate an agreement—but it will still be wiser to get out while we can.’24

On December 11, Petlura occupied Odessa, save for the harbour area, to which the Volunteer Army detachment withdrew. On the 14th, Petlura took Kiev, and the Skoropadsky regime thus finally collapsed. But Petlura’s troops made no attempt to enter the Odessa harbour area, as they had strict instructions to

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* This scene, I consider, gives a good impression of the atmosphere at Odessa at the time. But as I do not wish to encumber the text with Russian names which do not ever reappear in the book, I have left four of those mentioned by Margulies designated simply by initials.
avoid conflict with the French, who were about to arrive, and from whom the Ukrainian Directorate hoped for recognition and support against the Russian Bolsheviks; and while business went on as usual, there was a firm demarcation line through the town. But it was the Volunteer detachment, though hemmed in, which was in close contact with the French. For the French Consul Henno and the French ship captains continued to meet in the Hotel de Londres, which was near the harbour; and it was there that some French officers, led by Captain Langeron (who came from an old French family long resident in Odessa), agreed with Grishin-Almazov that French troops on landing would back the ‘Russian cause’.24

On December 18, some 1,800 French troops finally arrived in Odessa, under a General Borius, who at once disembarked and walked through the Ukrainian sector, without any sign of hostility being shown, to confer rapidly with the French Consul Henno and the Russian officers. He appeared to have had no intention of attacking the Petlurists; but to forestall the French and deprive them of a pretext for a military occupation, Grishin-Almazov and Shulgin (another reactionary Russian politician) offered to clear the town with Russian troops only. Borius (probably under pressure from Langeron) agreed. Next day, the people of Odessa were startled to hear a ‘violent fusillade, together with the roar of artillery’. Based in the Hotel de Londres, Grishin-Almazov’s troops were briskly attacking the Petlurists, and bitter street fighting was taking place. French troops took no part, but simply occupied the town behind the Russian troops, and thus protected their rear. By 5 pm, the Russians had won. On the 20th, the whole of Odessa was thus occupied by Volunteer and French troops; and General Borius officially confirmed Grishin-Almazov as Military Governor of Odessa (which Denikin approved two days later), and Borius informed the Ukrainian Directorate that General Berthelot would hold Petlura and Vinnitchenko personally responsible for any hostile action taken against French or Russian forces in the Odessa region.

Thus, the day after they disembarked, the French had definitely allied themselves with the Volunteer Army, whose aim was the destruction of the Ukrainian movement. The Ukrainian movement was not only the main armed force in that part of South Russia, but one which the local people considered to be the only party which was both anti-Bolshevik and revolutionary; the Volunteer Army were simply thought of as counter-revolutionary agents, hoping for the complete restoration of the ancien régime.24

French officers were astonished at what had taken place. They had been told that Russia was divided into two camps: the Bolsheviks, and the Russian patriots. But ‘amidst the disorder which reigned in South Russia, it was difficult to define what one meant by “patriot”, and professional military officers, knowing nothing about the political parties, were ill-prepared for this delicate task’, comments Jean Xydias, a local pro-French Greek newspaper owner and banker; ‘It was not enough to choose between two detachments who were exchanging rifle shots in the Odessa streets.’ But the CNUR party at once consolidated their position. It was agreed on the 22nd to invite Shulgin to join the Jassy delegation.* This was much
resented by the two ‘Socialist’ parties, who demanded that it be reorganised equally between left and right. But Shulgin, with Grishin-Almazov’s support, insisted that it remained in its present form. The left and right were again at loggerheads. The Allied Ambassadors at Jassy in November had not foreseen the dangers of an alliance with Denikin to the exclusion of all the other Russian groups. Now it was too late.

Further north, Petlura was now also in difficulty. Though the Red Army was forbidden to enter the Ukraine, on December 14 the head Bolshevik Commissar in Orel was instructed to send all Ukrainian nationals to join the ‘Kursk Ukrainians’, who began to move on Kharkov and Chernigov, which were held by some 14,000 Galicians and 10,000 other Ukrainians under Petlura. General Denikin, however, remained out of touch with the Ukraine. On December 7, he had urged Franchet d’Esperey to rush two Allied divisions to Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav. As there was no response, he then urged the Allies to stop German troops evacuating Kharkov. Again, there was no reply. He therefore sent a Volunteer Army force under General Mai-Maievsky to Yuzovka to cover the Donetz coal basin, the Don Cossack left flank, and the road to Rostov; and another force to the Crimea in case the Bolshevik thrust came down the coast. But as the French refused to support Denikin’s attempted mobilisation in the Crimea, he then moved them north to Melitopol, where they held off the Bolsheviks for several weeks.25

In Odessa, the French troops (accompanied by some Greek regiments) received a rapturous welcome from the Russian bourgeoisie; and Russian refugees, politicians, businessmen and merchants of every description now poured into the already overcrowded town. Many of the South Russian financiers, industrialists and magnates in the sugar industry, like Jaroszynski, had initially remained at Kiev. But when Petlura took the town, and at once confiscated their safe deposits and current accounts, the enraged but frightened capitalists hurriedly departed, and joined the milling throng at Odessa.

In this chaotic situation, everyone had his own idea of what ought to be done, but no one could agree; and the French were deluged with petitions and memoranda from all sides. The numerous refugee writers, publicists, poets, journalists and critics tried to enlighten public opinion; and as there were no funds to start a newspaper, they hired a theatre, and an Editorial Committee was set up on the stage, which read out the latest telegrams as they arrived to the audience. Poets also read their poems, and critics their criticism.26

But the influx of refugees quickly led to a sharp swing to reaction, of which the English Club became the centre; and some rabidly reactionary speeches at an official

* The Jassy delegation had sent delegates to Paris; but as soon as Clemenceau found out that Miliykov (who had urged the Cadets in August 1918 to seek German support) was one of them, he not only refused to see them, but also had them expelled from France.
dinner given there for General Borius and his French officers created such an ‘extremely embarrassing atmosphere’ that General Borius left the club straight after dinner. (There were various clubs in Russia described as the ‘English Club’; but this merely signified that they were run in the manner in which Russians thought that an English club was run.) The Bourse Committee hastened to repair the damage. At a dinner which they gave, Jean Xydias (the local pro-French Greek banker and newspaper owner, and their Vice-President) strongly underlined the hopes based on the arrival of the French. In reply, the French Consul Henno stressed that the French Army, which was ready to help towards the regeneration of Russia, would never force this or that policy upon the Russian people; but the Russian parties must reach agreement, and form a Russian Government and a Russian Army.

On December 30, Margulies and Prince Kourakin (of the CNUR.) went to Bucharest to see Colonel Freidenburg, Chief of Staff to the French General d’Anselme, who was to take over at Odessa. Margulies spoke of the need to set up a South Russian Government. ‘At first Freidenburg was sceptical about the idea of a southern government’, records Margulies, ‘but later he began to be more enthusiastic. He demanded lists at once.’ A Russian Government was ‘absolutely essential’, otherwise the French Command, which was ignorant of local conditions, would make ‘irreparable mistakes’; in fact, because Denikin was a long way off, the French had already reported from Odessa that ‘disagreements with the V.A. would be inevitable’.

Margulies and Kourakin said that they had no lists; the matter was still being discussed, ‘but we promised to supply a list of members of the Jassy Conference and the C.N.U.R., from whom, obviously, candidates for the government would be drawn’. Freidenburg (whom Margulies describes as a ‘short man with a hooked nose, from which his pince-nez is continually falling off, and a facial tic’) urged the need for agreement with the Socialists, ‘and spoke of the pro-Bolshevik activities in Odessa “des juifs”’. I [Margulies] corrected him, referring instead to “israelites”; from then on he was more careful and avoided saying “juifs”.’ Margulies stressed that the Jewish question was ‘extremely important’ in South Russia, especially in Odessa, with its large Jewish population. Freidenburg asked them both to come back next day to ‘talk specially about this matter.’

On January 6, Picton Bagge outlined the situation in the Ukraine. There had been a definite split in the Ukrainian Directorate, he wired to the Foreign Office. Vinnitchenko wished to join up with the Bolsheviks; but Petlura, who did not, now only had some 4,000 Galicians and 4,000 regular (and some very irregular) troops at Nicolaiev and Kherson. (Both were ports to the north-east of Odessa: Nicolaiev was on the lower reaches of the river Bug, while Kherson was on the lower Dnieper.) The German troops, who were leaving, and were opposed to Petlura, were now near Kiev and Nicolaiev also. There was little, in fact, to stop the Bolsheviks.

On December 25, Clemenceau had instructed General Franchet d’Esperey to occupy Nicolaiev at once to prevent the German stores there falling into Petlura’s
hands, and to seize the radio station. But the British Military Attaché in Roumania was warned by the French Chief of Staff there that ‘many French troops are weary and have had a good deal of sickness’, while General Milne heard from a ‘very secret source’ that owing to lack of equipment and fear of Bolshevik influence on his French troops, General Berthelot had decided to postpone the whole expedition until the spring.26

On January 6, however, the French War Office asked Franchet d’Esperey how he intended to occupy Nicolaiev, as ‘British Government reports situation in town, to have been evacuated by Germans by end of December, is unsatisfactory’. Two days later, Clemenceau confirmed that Franchet d’Esperey should occupy certain maritime bases as instructed, and ‘étudier’ the occupation of the Dnieper and Donetz basins, but not move until so ordered; Clemenceau also approved his answer to Denikin that no French troops would go to Stavropol and Novorossisk in the British zone. Franchet d’Esperey replied to Clemenceau and Foch next day that Admiral Amet had been asked to send a strong French naval force to Nicolaiev; and when he had sufficient information, he would despatch a regiment due to leave Salonika on the 10th. But Admiral Amet could not guarantee to protect French troops on landing as the harbour was too shallow; and as Petlura held the Odessa-Nicolaiev railway, the immediate occupation of Nicolaiev was thought too difficult. Franchet d’Esperey, in fact, was not keen on this operation. Berthelot, however, confirmed to Milne that a French General, and French troops, would be sent to Odessa, Sebastopol and Nicolaiev; but owing to lack of shipping, the troops might take about three months to arrive. He requested Milne meanwhile to hand over the wireless station at Constantinople to the French Command. Milne complained bitterly that it was his only means of keeping in touch with the Caucasus; but Franchet d’Esperey wanted it to keep in touch with Denikin.26

Sir Henry Wilson heard of this on January 10. ‘You should on no account hand over wireless station to the French’, he instructed Milne firmly. The Allies, in fact, were already squabbling amongst themselves in South Russia.

Trotsky’s attention was thus divided between the Ukraine (in the French zone) and the Don (in the British zone). While the C-in-C Vatsetis wanted an offensive on the Don to prevent Denikin linking up with Kolchak (which Denikin, of course, had rejected), Trotsky favoured an offensive into the Ukraine—and was feverishly re-arming and re-equipping his troops: he wanted hay for the horses, rifle ammunition for his men, and martial law proclaimed on the railways (and enforced ‘with a rod of iron’) to hurry all necessary supplies to the Southern Front. His colleagues in Moscow, however, still thought they should come to terms with Petlura. But the ‘Kursk Ukrainians’ were meanwhile advancing into the Ukraine, and on December 20 they took Belgorod (between Kursk and Kharkov). Next day, a message reached Moscow that the German troops refused to hand over to ‘unorganised insurgents’; they would only hand over to regular Red Army troops—which were forbidden to enter the Ukraine. But Bolshevik influence there was spreading. On the 24th, one of Petlura’s officers wired to
Kiev that the situation near Chernigov and Poltava (on the right bank of the Dnieper) was alarming, for Bolshevik workers were making for Konotop (on the Kursk-Kiev railway), where the railway workers were on strike, and Petlura’s troops refused to march against ‘their own, as they put it, brothers’. In fact, it was German troops who were protecting Konotop. If this went on, Bolshevik troops might soon turn up, and help the ‘locals’ restore Bolshevik authority.27

But Trotsky’s attention was now diverted from strategy by more trouble with Stalin, and the general lack of almost everything. On the 25th, Pravda printed a strong attack on Trotsky by one of Stalin’s henchmen, who alleged that the Military Commissars were being blamed, and even shot, for the desertion of the ‘military specialists’. Trotsky at once protested strongly to the Central Committee at their being denounced as ‘Tsarist counter-revolutionaries’, and at the ‘most damning accusations’ against himself. It must be made clear that War Department policy was Party policy, and Pravda must be censured for printing such an article without making any enquiry beforehand. The Central Committee obliged. Trotsky then deluged Lenin with demands for his troops. There was no grease or oil for the guns, machine guns or rifles, and some could now hardly be used: there was no hay for the horses, and little bread for the men; in Petrograd, oats were being issued instead of bread. (The C-in-C Vatsetis had already raised this matter with Lenin on December 14, in a very strong wire, underneath which Lenin had minuted in dejection to Sklyansky, Trotsky’s Chief of Staff, ‘again and again: nothing for the west, a little bit for the east and all (almost) for the south.’)27

Though Trotsky knew that Krasnov was boasting of the arrival of Allied shells and rifle ammunition, he wired Lenin on January 2 that the ‘Kursk Ukrainians’ thought their position in the Ukraine was now favourable, and Petlura’s prospects ‘close to being non-existent’. Though they might be over-optimistic, he enclosed Petlura’s officer’s report of the 24th, which had been intercepted. There was thus a good chance of success if small forces made a determined attack. He asked for the necessary military directive to be issued, and for Podvoisky (an experienced Bolshevik) to become Military Commissar with the ‘Kursk Ukrainians’. Lenin replied sharply next day that he was ‘very disturbed’ at Trotsky becoming too absorbed in the Ukraine, and neglecting the offensive against Krasnov, on which Vatsetis insisted. Krasnov’s recent success at Tsaritsin might again delay it. They were losing the initiative in the Black Sea, at Astrakhan, Tsaritsin and in the East. Trotsky should devote his ‘entire effort’ to the offensive against Krasnov.

Trotsky replied at length on the 4th. Though their most important task was to clear Krasnov from the Don, they could not let matters simply take their course in the Ukraine, now that 150,000 Allied troops had begun to land on the Black Sea coast. If it was too risky for them to intervene, the partisans would have to be restrained, and agreement reached with the Ukrainian Directorate. But Petlura was powerless, and his troops were already deserting to them; and if the Allies really attacked, ‘Petlura is capable of betraying everyone and everything and rushing into their arms.’ The appointment of the ‘ultra-reactionary’ Grishin-
Almazov at Odessa showed that the Allies meant business. They must thus forestall an Allied advance by the immediate seizure of Kiev and the Dnieper left bank, and place the Ukrainian front under a single command.

In Moscow, there was some suspicion that Trotsky had already taken action. ‘I did not find the [Kursk] Ukrainians at Kursk’, he wired on the 10th. ‘Hence I did not conduct any talks.’ But, he went on, hitting back at Stalin, ‘I categorically state that the Tsaritsin way of conducting matters which resulted in the total collapse of the Tsaritsin Army cannot be permitted in the Ukraine’. Podvoisky must be appointed as Military Commissar and Antonov-Ovseenko as Military Commander, as the rivalry of various cliques had led to a collapse. Lenin urged a compromise.

‘A compromise, of course, is necessary, but not a rotten one’, Trotsky wired again on the 11th. The fact of the matter is that all the Tsaritsin men have gathered together in Kharkov.’ He emphasised: ‘I consider the protection given by Stalin to the Tsaritsin trend the most dangerous sort of ulcer, worse than any act of perfidy or treachery on the part of the military specialists.’ Owing to the Allied landing, they would now have to carry out ‘major operations’ within a month in the Ukraine, where ‘we shall have to bear the consequences of the Tsaritsin muddle, this time opposed not by the Cossacks but by the Anglo-French’. None of the culprits could be singled out, for ‘they cling tightly to one another and make a fetish of ignorance’. It was clearly now a race. Who would reach the Dnieper first—Trotsky or the French?

Thus, the implementation of British policy in the various Russian theatres, as laid down by the War Cabinet on November 14—and which was to be carried out in accordance with Lord Milner’s principle that ‘where there was in existence a friendly anti-Bolshevik Government which it was to our advantage to support, we should support it, and we ought to support it, even though it entailed anti-Bolshevik action’—was already leading to a good deal of difficulty and downright confusion between British officials in London and British envoys in the field. It was also leading to a good deal of misgiving and heart-searching among members of the War Cabinet. Was England at war with Bolshevik Russia?
Peacemaking: the Prinkipo proposal

On November 29, Balfour tried to clarify British policy for his harassed officials in the Foreign Office, who were asking why British troops were being kept in Russia, and for their equally harassed colleagues in the field, who were asking why these British troops were not being used to put down Bolshevism. While admitting that the Armistice had ‘profoundly’ modified the principal motive of the intervention, Balfour explained that it was not a ‘partial and imperfect’ effort to put down Bolshevism; while the clamour for reinforcements demonstrated a ‘complete misapprehension’ of what the British Government ‘are able to do, or desire to do’. After four years of war, the British people would never allow their troops to be scattered over Russia to carry out political reforms: ‘We have constantly asserted that it is for the Russians to choose their own form of government; that we have no desire to intervene in their domestic affairs.’ If, during anti-German operations, Britain had cooperated with pro-Ally Russian forces, ‘this does not imply that we deem ourselves to have any mission to establish, or disestablish, any particular political system among the Russian people’.¹

The British Government still held these views, he said. ‘But it does not follow that we can disinterest ourselves wholly from Russian affairs. Recent events have created obligations which last beyond the occasions which gave them birth’. The Czechs were Britain’s Allies, and Britain had also fostered the growth of certain Russian forces: ‘We are responsible for their existence and must endeavour to support them. How far we can do this, and how such a policy will ultimately develop, we cannot yet say.’ It must largely depend on Allied policy. Britain could only use the troops she had, supply arms, and protect the Baltic States with the British Fleet. ‘Such a policy must necessarily seem halting and imperfect to those who, on the spot, are resisting the invasion of militant Bolshevism’, admitted Balfour. ‘But it is all that we can accomplish in existing circumstances, or ought to attempt.’ Fine writing, in fact, could not disguise a thin case.

Next day, the British envoys at Archangel and Vladivostok were officially informed that British policy was ‘to remain in occupation at Murmansk and Archangel for the time being; to continue the Siberian expedition; to try to persuade the Czechs to remain in Western Siberia; to occupy…the Baku-Batoum
railway; to give General Denikin at Novorossisk all possible help in the way of military material; to supply the Baltic States with military material.\footnote{1}

Since the Omsk Directorate, the only legal Russian Government, which England had wished to recognise, had now been overthrown, there was an Allied discussion when Clemenceau and Marshal Foch, and Orlando and Sonnino (the Italian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister) visited London in early December, to decide whether Russia should be represented at the coming Peace Conference in Paris.

Balfour urged that Finland and the Baltic States should be, but not Bolshevik Russia. Curzon agreed. So did Clemenceau; France, he reminded them, had originally declared war in 1914 to help Russia, but it was her betrayal of the Allied cause in early 1918 that had almost caused a disaster; the Peace Conference thus did not even concern Russia.

Lloyd George stated that though the Allies could take no decision without consulting America, they could not ignore Russia, which comprised about two-thirds of Europe, and most of Asia. The Allies could not allow the Baltic States to come to the Peace Conference, and not the Bolsheviks, who seemed to have a hold over most of the Russian people, whatever might be thought of them. This might be an unpalatable fact, but it could not be ignored. Mr Pitt had expressed similar views in the same room 120 years ago about the French revolutionaries and the dissidents in the Vendée and in the south of France. The Allies should therefore not adopt any fixed attitude towards Central Russia.\footnote{2}

Borden (the Canadian Premier) supported Lloyd George; all the various Russian Governments should be represented. Sonnino advised caution. The Peace Conference would thus simply promote general European dissolution, and allow Germany to create the same trouble there as she had in the Balkans. The various Russian Governments should form a federation. It was generally agreed that the American Government must first be consulted. Discussion then turned to Germany. Foch urged a confederation of France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Rhineland of 54 million people; which, with British help, might thus cope in future with the 70 million Germans over the Rhine. But both Lloyd George and Bonar Law were opposed; this, they considered, would make the Rhineland into another Alsace-Lorraine.\footnote{2}

In England, however, popular interest was centred not on Russia, but first on the coming general election, and then on the coming Peace Conference. Lloyd George was wholly preoccupied with and much excited about his re-election prospects. On December 6, he so abused Lord Milner in front of a large gathering of Government officials for not speeding up demobilisation, that Milner decided to break with Lloyd George and resign. At a Cabinet meeting on the 10th, ‘we discussed how soldiers could vote’, wrote Sir Henry Wilson, ‘and Lloyd George insisted on men getting leave, etc. All bribes, and disgusting, as it is against the law’, he noted.\footnote{3}

The War Cabinet then considered a paper by Sir Henry Wilson on military policy in Russia, and a highly critical paper by H.A.L.Fisher (the Minister of
Education), who was not present. This stressed that British workers were dead against continued intervention, whose objective, they thought, was simply the restoration of Tsarism. There were also rumours that British troops there were starving. Though only a minority sympathised with Bolshevism, most workers felt that the Russians should settle their own affairs, ‘and that Russia should be left to stew in her own juice’. Fisher suggested that this hostility could be allayed if the Peace Conference in Paris also set up a special Russian Conference there to settle all problems to do with the former Russian Empire. This could be attended by all interested parties, including the Bolsheviks, the border states, etc.

Lord Curzon admitted that questions were continually being asked about British policy in Russia. Balfour stated that he had written a paper on this ‘very confused’ question. ‘Our own people in Russia naturally thought of nothing but Bolshevism’, but his paper ‘fully’ explained British policy. Curzon retorted that a great many British people objected to any British soldier remaining in Russia, as they thought they were there simply to fight Bolshevism. The Prime Minister remarked that he had a note from Mr Shaw, who was standing for Kilmarnock in Ayrshire, that he had been asked ‘what our boys were doing in Russia’. Balfour then read out his paper of November 29, which, he said, answered both sets of critics: those in Russia, who said Britain was not doing enough, and those at home, who asked why British troops were still there.

Curzon sympathised with Balfour’s predicament. If Britain withdrew from Transcaspia, her Allies there would almost certainly be massacred. The Prime Minister asked how many British troops were there. Curzon said it was difficult to say; it depended on what one meant by Transcaspia. It was stressed that people at home were more concerned about Siberia and Archangel; Britain had some 10,000 troops in North Russia. The Prime Minister said this was a very large number; England could not maintain troops there to protect some Russians from others. Milner emphasised that if Britain withdrew, there would be a massacre. Sir Henry Wilson said Britain could not withdraw, as winter had set in. The Prime Minister asked if the Murmansk force could support the Archangel force during the winter, if the Bolsheviks attacked it. Milner said it could, by moving along the White Sea shore; but the point was not the danger to the British force at Archangel, but the massacre of Britain’s friends if she withdrew. The Prime Minister said this was his very point; Britain could not keep troops in Russia just to protect some Russians from others. Chamberlain trusted that the War Cabinet would not come to a hasty decision on ‘such a big issue’, for Britain was under ‘no little obligation’ to people who had helped her in the war. He entirely agreed that British troops should be withdrawn at the ‘earliest possible moment’, but the matter needed very careful thought; the War Cabinet ought not to come to a decision ‘simply because certain people asked questions during the election’.

The Prime Minister said they had already reached a decision. Curzon retorted that the decision of November 14 was that British troops were to remain in North Russia. As soon as the local people could stand alone, Britain could withdraw; but a premature withdrawal would entail the butchery of her friends.
Britain’s obligations were thus ‘serious’, he warned. Milner stressed that the real difficulty was that people at home thought British troops were being used to suppress Bolshevism, ‘which was not actually the case’, as they were simply protecting Britain’s wartime friends.

Curzon stated that there were two ways to meet the problem. Either the Prime Minister or the Foreign Office should make a statement, as Balfour’s paper was primarily for British envoys in Russia. The Prime Minister said he understood the need to keep troops in Siberia and the Caucasus, but not at Archangel and Murmansk. Milner responded that Britain had made a treaty with the local people. Curzon thought that the climate would decide matters. If Britain could not withdraw in winter from Archangel, she should not withdraw from Murmansk.

The Prime Minister said it must be decided what British policy was to be. Was it suggested, ‘as a matter of honour’, that British troops should be retained in North Russia until the local people could stand alone? Milner inferred that it was. The Prime Minister doubted if they would be able to for some time; only the other day, he had been told that local Russian troops had refused to parade. Curzon referred to a note from General Maynard, stressing that British troops must ‘at all costs’ be kept in North Russia as agreed with the local people, as withdrawal would ‘simply mean massacre’. The Prime Minister asked Curzon what he made of this agreement; if it was against Bolshevism, there would be no limit to the length of Britain’s stay. Curzon said he did not have it. Balfour said he was quite sure it did not commit Britain to an ‘indefinite’ stay. The Foreign Office had always recognised this to be a ‘very difficult’ question. Some of the people Britain had worked with in North Russia had done ‘most excellent work’ for her in the war.

The Prime Minister again repeated that the British Government could not protect Russian people from Bolshevism; Britain had originally intervened to embarrass the Germans. There would be trouble in finding troops. Balfour again stated that there could be no question of keeping troops in North Russia for an ‘indefinite’ time. The Prime Minister said if it was a point of honour not to withdraw now, it might quite possibly be so in twelve months’ time. Balfour asked if it was known that a French division had just been sent to the Crimea to fight the Bolsheviks: ‘This was quite a new undertaking and not the result of any obligation on the part of the French.’ If Britain now betrayed ‘our friends’ in North Russia, harm would be done to British credit with ‘every orderly body’ in Russia. The Prime Minister said he did not for a moment consider Britain was under any obligation to keep 10,000 men in Russia until Bolshevism was defeated. If the Russian situation failed to improve, the same thing could be said in four years’ time. Balfour retorted that it should not be assumed that the local people would not become stronger, and be able to stand alone.

The Prime Minister said he was not for a moment pressing for a decision because of the election; but he could not agree to keep troops in North Russia until the local people were strong enough to fight Bolshevism alone. Balfour and Curzon entirely agreed; but they felt that troops should be retained there until they were
in a better position than at present. The Prime Minister retorted that he was not asking the War Cabinet to decide now; but he protested that no one should take it for granted that Britain would keep troops in North Russia until 3,000 Karelians could beat 50,000 Bolsheviks. There was no objection, however, to adjourning the discussion until next week. Curzon thought it better to wait until Fisher could attend. Chamberlain remarked that everyone agreed British troops should be withdrawn at the earliest possible moment; all that must be decided was 'when that moment was likely to arise'. The Prime Minister remarked that if Britain kept troops in so many places, there would be discontent in the Army. Lord Reading thought that America would 'very soon' want to withdraw all her troops from North Russia. Balfour concluded that if this happened, it would settle the matter, as British troops could not be kept there if American troops were withdrawn. The War Cabinet thereupon adjourned their discussion until the next week.3

Meanwhile, wild election promises were being made. The bribing of Lloyd George at this election is simply disgusting', recorded Sir Henry Wilson on the 13th 'I won't vote tomorrow.' Indeed not much pleased him at this time of transition. When Churchill called at the War Office on the 16th to announce that he was to become Secretary of State for War, the CIGS simply wrote 'Whew!' in his diary. On the 19th, when they had a first tentative discussion,3 The Times printed a long letter from the departing Minister Lord Milner (evidently written as a result of the War Cabinet discussions of December 10th), under the main headline: 'The Allies in Russia' 'British policy defended'. The letter stated that the Allies had intervened to stop the Bolsheviks handing over Russian resources and Allied supplies to the Germans, and to protect the Czechs on their way to the western front. But though both objectives had been achieved, the Allies could not now abandon those Russians who had helped them until they were able to protect themselves. This would not take long; but a premature evacuation, which would mean the spread of Bolshevism into central Asia, would entail a 'far greater strain' on the British Empire than her 'present commitments'.

The third Times leader, headed 'Allied Policy in Russia', supported Milner. 'In other words', it stated, 'we are in Russia in discharge of our moral obligations, and while we shall not out-stay their discharge, we cannot repudiate them as the Bolsheviks repudiated their moral obligations towards us. Besides, have not we and the United States both engaged to do what is possible to rehabilitate Russia?'

But Lord Milner's explanation was not generally well received. 'The country is entitled to more information than that', stated the Daily Telegraph in a leading article. What prospect was there of these 'protégés of the Alliance' ever being able to defend themselves? Were they not divided amongst themselves? Was not Allied intervention really assisting those people whom the Russian revolution overthrew? 'We have at present a war on our hands in Russia', it underlined.

On the 23rd, an Imperial War Cabinet considered the Russian question exhaustively. The Prime Minister said he had heard from the Labour Party that there was 'very strong feeling' about British intervention in the Caucasus. Barnes
(the Labour Minister without Portfolio) confirmed this. The Socialist press was going to make ‘our interference’ in Russia its ‘next big feature’. There should be much more Russian news in the press. The Prime Minister agreed. There should be as much full daily Russian as German news. If ‘enterprising’ correspondents would not go to Russia, the press must get the facts from people just back from Russia, ‘and present them in their own way’. A Manchester Guardian correspondent had just come back with a ‘glowing’ account of ‘Russian prosperity under Bolshevism’. The true state of affairs must be made public. Chamberlain recalled that the War Cabinet had twice discussed the release of information by the Foreign Office. It was first held back to protect British envoys in Russia, then because the Foreign Office claimed to be under an obligation to President Wilson not to publish its own information, ‘including all the true information from Foreign Office sources’, before it published the ‘American forged documents against the Bolsheviks’ (i.e. the ‘Sisson’ documents). Balfour protested. The British press had had the American documents, but had made little use of them, as their ‘unreliable character’ was known. Milner asked if his colleagues had read Bruce Lockhart’s report, which had not been circulated. Balfour undertook to circulate it to the Imperial War Cabinet. Hughes (the Australian Premier) undertook to get a story from the Australian troops now in London, who had escaped from Turkey through Russia.4

There then came the crucial clash between the departing and arriving Ministers at the War Office. That day, Litvinov (who was in Stockholm) informed the Allied Embassies there that the Bolshevik Government had just renewed its ‘formal offer’ of peace, made to the Allies in November, and had authorised him to open ‘preliminary peace negotiations’ with them. It is unclear whether Lord Milner, then on the way out, knew of this; but he had obviously noted the hostility to his letter in The Times justifying his policy in Russia, and did not wish to be blamed if it was now continued by Churchill. He now casually remarked that Litvinov had for some days been trying hard to offer Bolshevik peace terms to Britain. At this, Churchill intervened vigorously. What was British policy to be? Was Britain to ‘leave the Bolsheviks to “stew in their own juice”, or were we to attempt to break up Bolshevik power?’ If so, President Wilson’s intentions must first be discovered. If he was quite opposed, the first policy would have to be chosen. If Britain did take action, small detachments could do no good. Britain must act ‘thoroughly’ with large forces, ‘abundantly supplied’; for this, England would have to be ‘stirred up’, and a large volunteer army collected. Lloyd George interrupted that they would find barely 5,000 volunteers. Churchill went on that the British Government must make up its mind either to let the Russians freely murder each other, ‘or, in the name of order, to interfere and do it thoroughly’. Lloyd George wondered whether the Russians really were murdering each other; information was so confusing. Bonar Law remarked that the French had ‘embarked on a career of conquest’ in Russia, but not entirely at their own expense, since their Greek troops were being paid for by Britain. He had thus
directed that, pending a Cabinet decision on Russian policy, the Treasury were to make no further payments to these Greeks.\textsuperscript{4}

Hughes warned that ‘great principles’ were involved in these decisions. Were the victors to prescribe how others should live? New nations should choose their own way. ‘We should withdraw from Russia and allow the Russians to adopt what Government they liked.’ At least half Australia felt that the Allied professions of fighting for liberty and justice would be ‘entirely stultified’ by continued intervention in Russia. Balfour complained that the Foreign Office attitude was ‘continually misrepresented’. He had again and again, both in public and in private, laid down that the British Government felt that ‘Russia must choose its own regime’. If Russia chose to be Bolshevik, ‘we should not gainsay it’. British intervention was a war measure, undertaken—with France and Italy—to induce America and Japan to send troops to reconstruct an Eastern Front against Germany. ‘And to save the resources of Western Siberia from falling into German hands’, added Lloyd George. Balfour agreed. He would also circulate Bruce Lockhart’s instructions; but every Englishman sent to Russia, however instructed, was so shocked that he ‘inevitably became a politician in spite of official discouragement’. In Siberia, Balfour went on, there now remained a Czech force, ‘constantly’ subject to Bolshevik attack, but helped by small British and French forces; a large Japanese force, ‘with ideas differing, perhaps, from ours’, and a ‘somewhat inactive’ American force; there were also ‘nascent and unstable’ Siberian Governments. In the Caucasus, Britain was ‘deliberately threatened’ by the Bolsheviks, who even wished to attack India. In North Russia, Britain was now protecting ‘small democratic’ groups, threatened by the Bolsheviks. Britain could not withdraw until June, by when, as Churchill said, she might be faced by an overwhelming Bolshevik force, and have to withdraw ‘ignominiously’. If it was now stated that Britain would leave as soon as the weather allowed, it would spread despair; and the people under British protection would now have to make peace with the Bolsheviks.

Montagu asked why Britain should not make peace with them. Balfour retorted that it was ‘extremely difficult’. The neutral Scandinavians had had to break with them, and even the Swiss were about to do so. Britain, moreover, would have to check the spread of Bolshevism in self-defence: ‘It was one thing to let the Russians “stew in their own juice”, but quite another to submit to being stewed in theirs.’ Bolshevism was ‘deliberately aggressive’, and recruits were being forced, under threat of starvation, into a Bolshevik Army. The Prime Minister remarked that Lockhart’s report stated that the Russian workers were loyal to the Bolsheviks, and the Russian peasants would not act against them. This, interrupted Hughes, amounted to 80 per cent of the Russian people. Lockhart’s conclusion, added Lloyd George, was that the Bolsheviks were still the strongest Russian party; ‘and yet, on the strength of this document, we were to intervene in Russia’. This, retorted Balfour, was ‘not at all his policy’.\textsuperscript{4}

The Prime Minister stated that he had agreed, and still did, with Balfour on Russia. But others did not. Many wished to ‘interfere’ because of Bolshevism,
which would certainly cause trouble at home. Both Fisher and Shaw had told him that throughout England and Scotland, the question was repeatedly being asked why Britain was ‘interfering’ in Russia. He agreed with Balfour that Britain’s wartime policy had been correct, but British hopes of enlisting Russian supporters had been ‘grievously disappointed’. General Poole, as Milner would recollect, had estimated that he could raise 100,000 Russian recruits; and that this number would swell eventually to a million to support ‘his expedition from Archangel’. In fact, after several months’ operations, Poole had only raised some 3,000 ‘very half-hearted’ Russians. It was said that Britain should protect them from Bolshevism. What right had Britain to back a minority of British supporters against the majority? The example of the French Revolution should not be forgotten. Britain had then intervened in favour of minorities in the Vendée and at Toulon; and there was no reason to repeat that mistake.

The Prime Minister read out two wires from Stockholm, one of December 4, the other just arrived, stating that the Bolsheviks would come to terms with Britain. It was alleged that they were fighting Britain with Bolshevik propaganda; but Britain could scarcely complain, as she had four or five British Armies on Russian soil, which ‘not infrequently shot Bolsheviks’. Was Britain now to renew the campaign in the spring, and send more troops? Where were they to be found? Lord Reading (the British Ambassador in Washington) remarked that President Wilson had always opposed ‘interference’ in Russia, and was certainly anxious to withdraw American troops. He would doubtless refer to the earlier—unfulfilled—promise that Allied intervention would attract Russian sympathy. The Prime Minister went on that Hankey (the War Cabinet Secretary) had recently seen General Maynard, just back from Murmansk, who thought it would be difficult to keep his Allied troops together, and was ‘not altogether happy’ about his British troops, who did not want to go on fighting the Bolsheviks, who themselves ‘often fought well’. His Russians were not strongly anti-Bolshevik, ‘or very different from the Bolsheviks themselves’. Hankey had gathered that Maynard was ‘not averse’ to some arrangement with the Bolsheviks. Borden (the Canadian Prime Minister) agreed that the Allies could not fight on in Russia, but had obligations to the Czechs. He suggested an arrangement with the Bolsheviks whereby Czech and Allied troops could be withdrawn, and the Allies’ Russian supporters safeguarded. There were 2,500 Canadian troops in Siberia, which the Canadian Government were ‘very anxious’ to get home.

Bonar Law (the Chancellor of the Exchequer) enquired if it would be possible to obtain Litvinov’s terms in writing. Balfour made no objection, but urged that care be taken not to alarm our Allies; for French troops were being sent to support the Ukrainians. It was also said that the Bolsheviks would not keep any terms. They must therefore guarantee not to massacre people in North Russia, and to respect the Baltic States. Hughes asked if it was proposed to accept the Bolshevik terms in return for certain conditions. Lloyd George replied that it merely was proposed to discover what their terms were. Borden urged that they also be required to recognise their debts. Lloyd George said they agreed to do so. Lord
Reading enquired if this would involve recognition. Balfour stated that Britain had already recognised them de facto, and then broken off, when they imprisoned and murdered British envoys. But Britain could not act alone, as there were other Allied troops in Russia, whom Britain could not abandon; while France had loaned money to Russia, and was supplying the Greek troops in South Russia. (The French had tremendous investments in the Ukraine and elsewhere in Russia.) After General Botha (the Prime Minister of South Africa) had warned against another war in Russia, Lord Milner pronounced. He was ‘quite opposed’ to aggressive action against Bolshevism, which would simply rally its supporters. But he wished to confine it to the area ‘already ravaged’, and not allow the fire to spread to the Don, Turkestan or Siberia. He would, in fact, withdraw from Archangel, but ‘hold the marches’. He went on that he ‘would come to terms with the Bolsheviks if they agreed to remain within their own boundaries’.

It was thereupon decided that Balfour should authorise Mr Clive in Stockholm to obtain Litvinov’s proposals in writing, which would then be submitted to the Imperial War Cabinet. Lloyd George remarked that they could then consider what safeguards might be necessary.

Curzon underlined that none of this applied to the Caucasus, which affected ‘our position in the East’. These ‘nascent native’ peoples constantly asked for British protection against all Russians, who had taken a century to subdue them. Curzon urged that a British cordon be left on the Baku-Batoum line until a mandatory power took over. Lloyd George asked who they expected would attack them. Curzon replied that the Omsk Government had instructed Bicherakhov to do so. To this Lloyd George remarked that Britain seemed committed to fight both Bolsheviks and anti-Bolsheviks.

Montagu said he would only agree to retain British troops until the Germans and Turks withdrew. There was little danger to India; and these small nations must ‘rise on their own roots’ without British help. Curzon stated that British withdrawal would reopen the Persian frontier, and lose Britain the Caspian. Milner agreed. Britain should remain and keep order until its future was settled: ‘The spread of chaos was the great danger threatening the Peace Conference.’ Lloyd George asked where the troops were to come from. Canada and Australia would send none. Curzon retorted that, apart from outside invasion, premature withdrawal would mean that the Tartars and Armenians would ‘fly at each other’s throats’. Lloyd George said Britain could not keep conscripts in Georgia. Churchill said it simply entailed keeping 10,000 men for a few weeks to secure a ‘valuable country’ pending a Peace Conference decision. Lloyd George thought a few weeks ‘optimistic’. These sort of operations would have a disastrous effect on recruiting. Milner retorted that he would rather British troops did not occupy Germany at all, than abandon areas in which they kept order. Lloyd George remarked that conscription could never be extended, if the men thought they were to be sent to Murmansk or Georgia. Did the War Office still wish to send two divisions to the Caucasus? Milner said one would be enough. Lloyd George asked how long they would be kept there; if Britain waited for the Peace
Conference to decide, she might have to wait a long time. The discussion petered out on the understanding that British troops should not be withdrawn from the Caucasus before the Turks and Germans left; and that a second division should not be sent without Cabinet authority.4

On Christmas Eve, Sir Henry Wilson attended a further Cabinet meeting, ‘at which they all talked about peace and the League of Nations, and the whole thing such rubbish that I went away’. (The CIGS had already heard quite enough hot air talked on this subject, so he thought, on a recent visit to Paris, where President Wilson had tried, quite unsuccessfully, to make friends with this soldier-politician. The two Wilsons had met at the British Embassy. The President told the CIGS that his grandfather and grandmother both came from Ulster, and that he had a ‘keen sense of humour’. Sir Henry Wilson commented: ‘He has not yet been for his trip round the devastated country.’ The President, he recorded, ‘did not impress me in the least’.)

So Sir Henry Wilson came back to the War Office, and gave an interview to Colonel Boyle (whose saboteurs had blown up much of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, and some of the Ukraine), who succeeded in both interesting and frightening the CIGS considerably. ‘Boyle firmly believes that if we don’t attack and crush Bolshevism in Russia it will spread all over Europe and lead to a most frightful state of affairs’, he wrote. ‘He really was very terrifying.’ But Sir Henry Wilson would give no opinion about sanctioning the payments which Boyle had made to his saboteurs, and passed the file with great rapidity back to the Foreign Office.5

That day, Litvinov wired direct to President Wilson that the ‘Russian workers and peasants’ could not understand how foreign countries, which had never interfered ‘when Czarist barbarism and militarism ruled supreme’, could feel justified in interfering in Russia now. The Allies had two alternatives. They could either continue their ‘open or disguised intervention’ on the present ‘or on a larger scale’, or come to an ‘understanding’ with the Bolshevik Government, withdraw Allied troops, raise the blockade, and help Russia ‘regain her own source of supply’, and give her technical advice on how to exploit it.

The ‘dictatorship of toilers and producers’ was not an aim in itself, but the means of building up a new social system under which ‘useful work and equal rights’ would be provided for all. ‘One may believe in this or not’, wired Litvinov, ‘but it surely gives no justification for sending foreign troops to fight against it, or for arming and supporting classes interested in the restoration of the old system of exploitation of man by man’, he stated. ‘I venture to appeal to your sense of justice and impartiality’, wired Litvinov.

This subtle message reached the President in Paris on Christmas Day, as it was meant to; and he at once decided to send someone to Stockholm to see Litvinov. On Boxing Day, President Wilson arrived in London. Next evening, a sumptuous banquet was given for him at Buckingham Palace. Though he said nothing about Russia in answer to the King’s speech, the King afterwards asked the American Ambassador Francis, just back from Archangel, for his views. When
Francis stated firmly that the Allies must overthrow the Bolsheviks, the King replied that ‘he thought so too, but President Wilson differed from us’, recorded Francis—whom the President had adamantly refused to receive.5

On the 28th, *The Times* printed a long, mischievous report from Warsaw, dated the 24th, which did its best to counter the effect of Litvinov’s proposal. The article spoke of the ‘Lords’ Lenin and Trotsky, and compared the state of Petrograd to Pompeii; in the streets, no one was to be seen save those ‘wealthy Germanic Russians who are in collusion with Trotsky’. All the leading Bolsheviks had false passports in case they had to leave Russia, it was claimed, but Trotsky was the most powerful figure, consolidating his position through terror, and guarded by Chinese and Latvian troops in the Kremlin, where he lived in luxury, when not out in his special train, leading his ‘locust forces’. All the former Tsarist spies were now in his service, it was claimed, and while he ‘officially placards his hatred of capitalism, capital turns all the wheels in Petrograd’. *The Times* then indulged in open antisemitism. In a Bolshevik court, ‘the chief judge is an obese Jewess, with oiled locks, who lolls on the seat, while all around her press a crew of Soviet delegates’. She condemned to death 5 or 6 Russian officers every day. ‘Divorce and marriage have been made a matter of 10 minutes before some vague official’, stated *The Times* indignantly: ‘Incompatibility of temper secures a divorce’.

Lloyd George, who, with Balfour, tentatively sounded President Wilson next morning about Russian representation at the Peace Conference, and discussed the message from Litvinov, heard later in the day that the election results had given him a sweeping majority. But at a dinner that evening for the President at 10 Downing Street, at which there was ‘much talk about this amazing election, and all agreed that it was a bad business, having no opposition’, recorded Sir Henry Wilson, ‘Winston tells me that it is settled he takes over both War Office and Air Ministry.’

But Lloyd George had not settled anything. On Christmas Day, this brief exchange had taken place between Lloyd George and Lord Riddell (a press magnate):

*Riddell:* How about Winston? How about the Colonies for him?
*Lloyd George:* There will be nothing doing in that department. It would be like condemning a man to be head of a mausoleum. He would just have to see that it was kept clean.

*Riddell:* I don’t agree. The Colonies will offer many problems. The office wants bucking up and it would be a splendid thing if the Minister were to make a tour of Empire.

*Lloyd George:* Yes, I agree about that. The Colonial Office might be a good place for Winston.6

On December 30, the Prime Minister reported on his talk with President Wilson to the War Cabinet. The President first of all wanted the Peace Conference to discuss the League of Nations; and Lloyd George and Balfour had tentatively
agreed. Later, they had discussed Russia. The President was ‘very much opposed’
to intervention, and would probably withdraw from North Russia; he also
disliked the Siberian ‘expedition’, but was more concerned about the Japanese
there. But they had come to no conclusion about western Russia, as it was unclear
whether there was a Bolshevik invasion of, or a Bolshevik rising within, Estonia
and Poland. Though the President was not keen for Russia to be represented at
the Peace Conference, he had suggested that Litvinov be asked ‘formally and
definitely’ for his proposals. Lloyd George had agreed. The War Cabinet then
briefly discussed the ‘informal negotiations’ which had already taken place
between Litvinov and Consul Clive in Stockholm. Lord Robert Cecil warned
that President Wilson’s suggestion could not be adopted without informing the
Allies. It was agreed to wait until Litvinov replied.

Later in the Cabinet, Borden (the Canadian Prime Minister) stressed that the
Great War could not be regarded as over if the Peace Conference ended with
several governments still fighting in Russia. There were only two alternatives: to
intervene in Russia; or, preferably, to induce the various Russian governments
to send delegates to Paris. Cecil agreed. All the Russian groups should be told to
stand fast during the Peace Conference; meanwhile, Allied Commissions could
clear up disputed points. Milner also agreed; if this was accepted, the Bolsheviks
could be invited to Paris as well. Lloyd George agreed too; but added that they
would also have to stop General Denikin and the Siberian Government attacking
the Bolsheviks, and stop the Bolsheviks making propaganda at the Peace
Conference.7

On the 31st, Sir Henry Wilson asked the Imperial War Cabinet if he was to
demobilise British troops in Russia; if he did, he would have to order out drafts,
which would ‘not be a popular proceeding’. At Omsk, the two British battalions
were to have been reinforced by three Canadian battalions, but the Canadian
Government had refused this; and neither Japan nor America would send up
troops. Knox thought the Canadians should go back to Canada. Borden stated
that the Canadian Government had refused, pending a definite decision on Allied
policy in Russia. Cecil and Sir Henry Wilson both agreed that British troops at
Omsk were in ‘no immediate danger’. Lloyd George emphasised how ‘highly
unsatisfactory’ the present position was. ‘We were neither interfering effectively
in Russia nor evacuating it.’ As soon as the Peace Conference opened, it was
essential that the Allied statesmen at once decide on a definite Allied policy.

The War Office were thus informed that no troops could be demobilised at
Archangel and Murmansk, pending a decision on Allied policy; for which
purpose, the Foreign Office, the Admiralty and the CIGS were each to prepare a
report on the Russian situation.7

Lloyd George, aware of the hostility of Churchill and Curzon, then allowed
the whole Russian question to come to a head, to make Churchill show his hand
more openly. Barnes, who spoke first, agreed with Borden; they could not fight
Bolshevism in Russia except on a large scale, for ‘it was no use merely poking
with sticks into the kennel to infuriate the dog’. The Peace Conference should
include all the Russian Governments, including the Bolsheviks, to meet to settle their differences. If this failed, then intervention might be justified, but only by economic pressure; for Britain could not forcibly suppress Bolshevism without American help.

Churchill stated that the more the Allies tried to avoid the problem, the more it would stick to them. There should be joint Allied action; or, if America refused to act, by the rest. He was all for a peaceful settlement; but there was no chance of this, unless it were known that the Allies could and would enforce their views. The Russians should be told that if they came together, the Allies would help them; if they refused, the Allies would use force to set up a democratic government. The Bolsheviks only represented a ‘mere fraction’ of the Russian people, and would be swept away by a general election ‘held under Allied auspices’. (But this was easier said than done.) A decision was urgent. If the Allies ignored it, they would leave the Peace Conference rejoicing in a victory which was no victory, and in a peace which was no peace. (This argument, and the comparison with the emigrés and the French Revolution, was henceforth repeated by both sides on every possible occasion; and I hereafter mainly omit it.) And a few months later, went on Churchill, the Allies would have to reassemble both their Armies and the Peace Conference to deal with it.

Lloyd George agreed that a decision must have priority over everything else. ‘Even a few weeks’ delay might easily drift us into disaster.’ As yet, no satisfactory decision had ever been reached. Owing to the ‘absolute contradiction’ in reports from Russia, he himself had first favoured one side, then another; perhaps the facts simply could not be discovered. ‘Russia was a jungle in which no one could say what was within a few yards of him.’ But nothing could be worse than no policy; and perhaps it was better to proceed firmly on a wrong basis than to go on hesitating. He wished to put these views to President Wilson and Clemenceau in Paris.

‘He was definitely opposed to military intervention in any shape.’ First, it was a ‘tremendously serious undertaking’. The Germans, who had had nearly a million men in Russia, most of whom were still entangled there, had been unable, with nothing in front of them, either to take Petrograd or to save the situation in France. The Allies were on the ‘mere fringe’ of Russia with less than 100,000 troops. The Bolsheviks now had 300,000 troops, and might have a million by March. Where were the Allies to find troops to march into and occupy Russia? Britain already had to find troops for Germany, Palestine, Mesopotamia and the Caucasus. How many troops would Australia, Canada or South Africa send to conquer Russia? British troops would have to be conscripted; and even if Parliament approved, he did not think the troops would go. ‘Our citizen army were prepared to go anywhere for liberty, but they could not be convinced that the suppression of Bolshevism was a war for liberty.’

Military intervention would only strengthen what the Allies set out to destroy. In the French Revolution, horrors worse than Bolshevik horrors had been committed by a small group, who had obtained control of France. There also
Britain was invited to help. Toulon and La Vendée were now Riga and the Ukraine. But British intervention enabled Danton to rally French patriotism, and make the Terror a military instrument; and when a military dictatorship followed, all that Britain incurred was passionate hatred.

Was Britain ready for a revolutionary war against more than 100 million people, allying ourselves with the Japanese, whom the Russians passionately hated? There was no reason to believe that the Russians would regard the British as saviours. If Russia freed herself from Bolshevism, it would be a redemption. But the intervention of foreign armies would only create more Bolsheviks, and so establish Bolshevik power in Russia; and might thus prove a disaster for both Europe and Russia. The best thing was to let Bolshevism fail of itself, as it probably would if it did not represent Russia. Then it would serve as a deterrent, as the failure of the 1848 movement had done. But economic pressure was another thing; and Litvinov was no doubt in Stockholm largely because the Russians were starving. He therefore hoped that the Cabinet would reject military intervention, and support Borden’s proposal to invite all the Russian groups to send delegates to the Peace Conference.

Cecil agreed that any invasion of Russia would be ‘fantastic’, but presumed that money and supplies would still be given to the Czechs ‘and other parties, whom we had been helping and whom we could not suddenly leave in the lurch’. The Bolsheviks might be preparing to attack for economic reasons. Colonel Boyle thought that they were about to invade Roumania and Poland. The Cabinet would have to help these countries defend themselves.

Curzon also opposed military intervention, except in Georgia (the one part of the former Russian Empire which he had ever visited); for as neither America, France nor Japan would provide troops, the whole burden would fall on Britain.

The Cabinet then agreed to agree with the Prime Minister; but it was also understood that Britain would assist any existing government, if attacked by the Bolsheviks, by any means short of actual military intervention. On the whole, the Cabinet liked the descriptive phrase ‘walling off a fire in a mine’. The Foreign Office were therefore instructed to prepare a message. On January 2, Lord Robert Cecil wrote briefly to the Prime Minister: ‘I am very glad that you agree to the draft telegram to our Allies about Russian policy. I believe it is our best chance.’ On the 3rd, therefore, the Foreign Office wired the various Allied capitals, enclosing a note which they suggested should at once be sent to the Bolshevik and White Russian groups, owing to the urgent appeals for help coming from the Baltic States, ‘and the danger of their extermination within the next few weeks’. The note stated that as one of the first tasks of the ‘Great Friendly Powers’ in Paris would be to ‘bring about peace in Russia’, they called upon all the Russian groups meanwhile to cease fire during the Peace Conference; if this was done, they could then send delegates to Paris to discuss a ‘permanent settlement’ with the ‘Great Powers’.

This whole message, though, was very badly drafted. It was intended to send it to ‘General Kolchak’ at Omsk, and Denikin’s copy was to be despatched to
Ekaterinburg in Siberia, not Ekaterinodar in South Russia; while the absence of
the word ‘friendly’ at the close of the message was perhaps an indication that
these great father figures never really intended being very friendly towards Russia,
whether Red or White.8

On November 14, the War Cabinet had taken certain specific decisions in each
of the Russian theatres. This had resulted in the War Office and the Admiralty
and British officers in the field taking certain definite action, which amounted to
England fighting the Russian Bolsheviks, either directly or via the White
Russians. Now on December 31, only six weeks later, the War Cabinet was
proposing a sudden peace between the Bolsheviks and their opponents, during
which each side was to send delegates to Paris.

From early January, unrest and anxiety among the British troops about
demobilisation increased. On the 3rd, when Lloyd George told Curzon, to his
delight, that he could be Acting Foreign Secretary, and take over the Foreign
Office completely on Balfour’s return from the Peace Conference, more than
10,000 troops, who had been on leave in England, refused to embark at
Folkestone, and marched to the Town Hall in ‘one long procession [which]
followed a big drummer beating his drum with a copper stick’. Next day, there was
a ‘beautiful ceremony’ at Wellington Barracks, at which the Guards’ Colours
were handed over to be taken to Cologne. ‘Several thousands of people had
looked on, from…the railings in Birdcage Walk; and the march of the detachments
to Charing Cross Station, with the colours borne aloft, had brought many more
thousands. It was a proud procession.’ But at Charing Cross, it was discovered
‘something untoward’ had happened, i.e. that Folkestone was in the hands of
mutineers; and the colours had to be brought all the way back. The situation at
Folkestone, in fact, was worsening, and the mutineers demanded a further week’s
leave. The War Office then issued a statement that an agreement had been
reached that evening between the GOC Eastern Command and ‘representatives of
the men’, who thereupon marched them away again ‘headed by a drummer
beating a big drum’. It all looked exceedingly ominous; and Sir Henry Wilson
feared that soon the ‘whole army will be turned into a rabble’.9

There was then alarming news from Berlin. For the crucial state, both for
Allied resistance to Bolshevism, and—by Lenin’s own calculations—for the
success of world revolution, was Germany. While a German-Russian Bolshevik
link-up would make it impossible for the new small states to serve as a ‘cordon
sanitaire’, there was little hope of isolated outbreaks of Bolshevism surviving
amongst them if Germany did not go Bolshevik. But when on January 6, the
Spartakist leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg, led the Berlin workers
into revolutionary insurrection, conditions in Germany looked even more
propitious than they had in November 1917 in Russia.

On the 7th, as The Times headlined ‘More Soldiers’ Protests’, Sir Henry Wilson
went to Downing Street and ‘told Lloyd George plainly what I thought—viz, he
must come out in the open at once and back the War Office and the officers. He
must crush out the poisonous part of the Press. He must say the War is not over.
He must prepare the public mind for armies of occupation…I spoke very plainly and I frightened him. He agreed to all my proposals.’ The Prime Minister then saw Churchill, and offered him either the War Office or the Admiralty, and asked for his decision the next day. Churchill went down to Blenheim to think things over. Next morning, he wired Downing Street and accepted the Admiralty.\textsuperscript{10}

At 1 pm, when sent for by the War Cabinet, Sir Henry Wilson found a soldiers’ demonstration outside 10, Downing Street, ‘and had to work my way through the soldiers to the door’. The men were quite respectful and quiet, ‘but not much saluting’, he records. At the War Cabinet, General Robertson admitted that news of the unrest had been received the night before, and an unsuccessful attempt had been made that morning to intercept them in the Edgware Road and shepherd them onto the Horse Guards Parade; but the men had slipped through. He thought some of their grievances were genuine: ‘They complained of being called at an unreasonably early hour, and of the badness of the food.’ Milner was appalled at Lloyd George’s suggestion to go and meet them; there would be processions to London from all over the country. Sir Henry Wilson thought the soldiers’ delegation ‘bore a dangerous resemblance to a Soviet’. General Fielding (GOC, London District) then burst into the room to say that they refused to listen to him. It was agreed that the root cause of the trouble was the slow rate of demobilisation, as a balance had to be kept between those in England and those overseas; and some at home, due for release, thus had to be retained: ‘The men knew this, and feared that they were being kept back with a view to sending them to Russia.’ It was agreed that the Prime Minister should issue a statement next day. The demonstrating soldiers were finally shepherded onto Horse Guards Parade, where General Robertson spoke to them. When Churchill reached London that afternoon, Lloyd George at once asked him to take over the War Office to cope with demobilisation.\textsuperscript{11}

On the 9th, \textit{The Times} main headline emphasised: ‘Berlin Confusion’. There had now been three days of street fighting in the German capital, it reminded. It added that the Bolsheviks were now near the Baltic coast at Reval, the capital of Estonia. (There was also a small paragraph, headed: Trotsky arrests Lenin!’ sent from Copenhagen by the Exchange Telegraph Agency on the 8th.)

On the 10th, under the headline ‘The Bolshevik Menace’, \textit{The Times} pointed out that famine, among other things, was leading to a rapid growth in the Bolshevik ranks, and a regular army was being formed. A further headline stated that martial law had been proclaimed in Berlin.

That day, Litvinov wired in reply to Lord Milner’s letter in \textit{The Times} of December 19. He stated that a peaceful settlement between the Bolsheviks and the Allies should not be delayed because of fears of Bolshevik reprisals against the ‘Allies’ friends’, if the Bolsheviks were to retake those Russian areas ‘now occupied by the Allies.’ The Bolsheviks would grant them an amnesty for their ‘past offences’, and the ‘necessary guarantees’ for their safety, and a ‘fair chance’ to find work ‘within the Soviet system’. The only Bolshevik demand to the Allies was to stop all ‘direct or indirect’ military operations, and all material support for
the White Russians, and to raise the blockade. The Bolsheviks had the ‘firm conviction’ that an end to foreign intervention would mean the ‘cessation of civil war in Russia in its present form’.\textsuperscript{12}

By then, however, President Wilson had already taken action. For at 7 pm on January 8, Colonel House had telephoned from Paris that the President wished Mr William Buckler, of the American Embassy in London, to ‘proceed at the earliest possible moment to Stockholm’ to confer with Litvinov.\textsuperscript{13}

But neither the President’s action, nor Litvinov’s message, were known to the new War Cabinet when it first considered the Russian question on the evening of January 10. Sir Henry Wilson brought in two papers, one on North Russia, the other on Siberia. On December 31, he stated, the Cabinet had decided that though British troops were not to be withdrawn from North Russia, no more were to be sent out until a decision was reached in Paris. But since then, Maynard had warned that he must have 1,000 Service Corps men at once at Murmansk, or he would have to withdraw to Kandalaksha, and thus be cut off from Archangel. In Siberia, stated the CIGS, America and Japan were still refusing to send troops west of Lake Baikal. Thus, Britain must either send more troops from India to replace the departing Canadians, or withdraw the two British regiments from Siberia. But there had recently been much unrest in the British Army; and the prospect of being sent to Russia was ‘immensely unpopular’. British troops in North Russia and Siberia could not therefore be reinforced.

Lord Curzon then read out a telegram from Lord Robert Cecil, then in Paris, stating that Marshal Foch was urging the ‘enormous importance’ of helping Poland stop the Bolshevik advance before it reached Austria and Germany. As the Allies could not intervene, they ought rapidly to organise a Polish Army. An American division, with a French, a British and an Italian regiment, should thus occupy the Danzig-Thorn railway, the main supply line to Warsaw. Cecil had told Foch that as British troops were only enlisted to fight Germany, the Americans should make the proposal; but Britain would support it if the military problem could be resolved.\textsuperscript{14}

Curzon stated that Poland was in danger both to the East and the West. Returning Russian prisoners were becoming Bolshevik soldiers, whom the Germans were supplying with munitions. Unless the Allies helped Poland, she might not exist in a few weeks’ time. The Allies must at once decide on a Russian policy. Did the Cabinet agree to give military help?

As there was no reply, Curzon said that he would tell Cecil that though Britain could not give military help, she would assist in every way in agreeing on an Allied policy. But when asked for help, he reminded the Cabinet, Britain always promised money and munitions, and usually finally offered volunteers. At present, he thought it most unlikely that volunteers would come forward.

Churchill hoped that Curzon was wrong about volunteers. They could not stand aside and let Poland go to pieces. They must discuss what Allied policy should be, and how to supply the necessary forces to carry it out. There had been an unfortunate press statement that no British troops would be sent to Russia; it
should be made clear that only volunteers would be sent. The Cabinet should advise Germany that the Allies would make no objection to her organising her eastern front against Bolshevism. The Allies should now bolster up the Central Powers if necessary to stem the Bolshevik tide.

At this, Hankey reminded the War Cabinet that on New Year’s Eve, they had decided that they would support any country with whose government Britain had been cooperating if invaded by the Bolsheviks, except by military intervention; ‘walling off a fire in a mine’ had been the general agreed policy. Curzon asked whether the British delegates to the Peace Conference had any idea what Russian policy they would put forward. He urged Sir Henry Wilson to put the various War Office papers on Russia into one big paper to help the British delegates decide on Allied policy. It would be premature and useless, he warned, to send British troops to Russia. The Cabinet requested Sir Henry Wilson to prepare a comprehensive paper at once; and then left the subject, agreeing that they must decide on Russian policy as soon as they reached Paris.

Later in the meeting, the Cabinet considered whether to continue to supply the Greek troops, and whether to withdraw the two British battalions at Omsk from Siberia altogether. It was stated that General Milne, on his own authority, had promised to supply the Greek troops at Odessa with food for 10 days, and forage for 20 days. Curzon remarked that if France began operations in her area north of the Black Sea, Britain must support them. Churchill urged that Britain continue her supplies until Allied policy was agreed. This was approved. Sir Henry Wilson then stated that to withdraw British troops from Siberia would mean breaking faith with the French and Czechs. Churchill supported him; withdrawal would entail the whole ‘fabric’ falling to pieces: ‘The Czechs would go, Kolchak’s army would disappear, and the French would withdraw.’ It was agreed that the withdrawal of British—and Canadian—troops must await an Allied decision in Paris.

On January 11, as the British Delegation left for Paris, the French communist newspaper *l’Humanité* published the text of a French note rejecting the British proposal to invite all Russian groups to Paris. The proposal thus had to be abandoned. Next day, Sir Henry Wilson wrote his comprehensive paper on Russia. Owing to Allied ‘physical, moral and financial exhaustion’, the CIGS stated, there could be no ‘serious’ Allied intervention to smash the Bolsheviks; and they thus had to choose between two Russian policies. First, they could come to terms with the Bolshevik Government. But this was what the Bolsheviks themselves wanted, so that they could pursue their ‘avowed aim’ of spreading Bolshevism throughout the world. It would thus be rejected, he argued, ‘if it be accepted (and it cannot be disputed), that the Bolshevik tenets are essentially destructive of all the good that civilisation has given the world’, for it would give them greater scope for their ‘chief weapon’, which was ‘direct propaganda’. Second, they could blockade the Bolsheviks, and support the White Russian Armies. The CIGS now, in fact, supported the cordon sanitaire. Bolshevik vitality depended upon ‘constant conquests’, and the break up of the German Eastern
Front had given them access to the Baltic States; but when they reached the Baltic coast, ‘as seems inevitable’, they would relapse, provided the Allied blockade was maintained. At present, it was impossible to say whether the cordon could run from Riga to Odessa; for if Germany went Bolshevik, it would have to run much further west. They must therefore make every effort to stabilise conditions in Germany to keep the ‘infection as far from home as possible’. There had been no sign in the last two months, he warned, that the Bolshevik internal position was weakening. In fact, Allied intervention had made the Mensheviks and SRs join the Bolsheviks. This tendency would increase with Allied support for Kolchak and Denikin. There was now little danger of counter-revolution within Bolshevik Russia, ‘and their organisation for dealing with it is extremely effective’.  

Sir Henry Wilson had thus considerably advanced from his position of November 13, when he had rejected the cordon sanitaire.

**Siberia**

On January 7, the War Office informed General Knox in Siberia that the whole Russian question was to be considered by the Peace Conference. But while the White Russian capture of Perm and their loss of Ufa were unimportant, their loss of Orenburg would not only entirely sever Siberia from South Russia, but entail the withdrawal of British troops at Krasnovodsk on the Caspian, and in Transcaspia; Knox must press Kolchak to reinforce Orenburg. (In fact, the capture of Perm was of ‘great economic significance’ and ‘tremendous booty’ was taken, and the bridge across the Kama river seized intact, as the British Consul in Ekaterinburg wired on January 3, after a visit to Perm. This wire reached London on the 6th.) In reply to the War Office, Knox now protested all the more strongly at the withdrawal of both British and Canadian troops. But in spite of the evident importance of Orenburg, the War Office sharply refused to allow a British force to be sent there, in case it was cut off.  

Only the British, however, were helping Kolchak. On the 11th, Robert Lansing (the American Secretary of State), then in Paris, was candidly reminded by Frank Polk, who was deputising for him at the State Department, that there was no joint Allied policy for Siberia, ‘as the British have felt we have been playing hot and cold’. But America had an ‘absolute obligation’ to the Czechs, and ‘some obligation’ to the Russians who had sided with the Czechs. This wire only shows how out of touch the State Department was, for the Czechs had completely broken with the Russians after the Kolchak coup. But behind the lines, the American Secretary of War saw to it that American troops kept well away from the British, French or Russians. He had been incensed at the mere suggestion of Janin and Knox taking command of all Allied troops in Siberia; the President had laid down that America was engaged in a ‘joint expedition’ with Japan, and to this he would ‘adhere rigidly’.  

On the 11th, the Foreign Office heard from the British High Commissioner Eliot. Kolchak, he reported, had been told that Denikin recognised his supreme
authority; but there had been no actual contact between the two Russian leaders, as there was no wireless. On the 16th, therefore, the War Office transmitted the first cable from Lebedev, Kolchak’s Chief of Staff, to Denikin: ‘Sole power of the Supreme Ruler, Admiral Kolchak, has been established in Siberia...We have liquidated the remnants of the Constituent Assembly.’ They must know where Denikin would attack in order to coordinate operations. But the only reply via London was a brief message that Denikin had taken over supreme command in South Russia, nothing else. Bolshevik communications, in fact, were far better than those of their opponents.18

On January 21, two very overdue reports reached the War Office from Colonel John Ward, the Labour MP in command of the Middlesex Regiment in Siberia. The first, in Ward’s neat but spidery handwriting, described how, on November 11, on orders from General Knox, he had taken up a party of the Middlesex as a guard of honour for Kolchak when he had visited Ekaterinburg. Knox scribbled on the bottom: ‘The Middlesex were not sent to Ekaterinburg as “guard of honour” to Admiral Kolchak, but to represent the British Army at the presentation of colours to the Czechs.’

John Ward’s second report explained how on November 18, the day after the coup, he had told Kolchak that the ‘free peoples of the world would resist any attempt to force the Russian people back under a system of tyranny and despair’. Knox had added his postscript on this as well: ‘I’m afraid the old leaven of politics has burst through Ward’s temporary dress of khaki, but I am sure he has done no harm. I have told Neilson to warn him.’

The General Staff were surprised to read Knox’s second note. ‘We are meant to be fighting for democracy’, someone observed, pointing out that General Janin had just given Colonel Ward the Croix de Guerre. They urged that the Press be told about this meeting just after the coup d’état, in order that John Ward’s name might allay suspicions.19

The DMI was doubtful: ‘In the face of a well-known telegram from this officer I am not sure whether we ought to publish, much as I would like to’, he minuted. (This would appear to refer to a wire which Sir Henry Wilson had extracted from John Ward in Siberia, which he had then published over the Prime Minister’s head. On January 20, Sir Henry Wilson had written craftily: ‘Some fortnight ago I wired to Knox, suggesting that John Ward...should wire in clear to Barnes his views on Bolshevism. An excellent wire from Ward arrived this morning, but Lloyd George, or someone in Paris, has marked it “secret”. It must get out somehow’, he wrote. And it did.)20

Churchill now minuted under the DMI: ‘Colonel Ward is doing admirably; but I do not think the publication necessary at this moment. Our policy in Siberia is too nebulous & our prospects too gloomy for special attention to be invited.’21

For the news from the front was bad. On January 23, Knox had wired that Orenburg had fallen the day before, and the Bolsheviks were again pushing towards Kungur (south of Perm), and bringing up fresh troops to cut the Perm–Kungur railway. On the 31st, he wired again that though Siberian troops were
advancing west of Perm, Bolshevik troops were now massing near Kungur. They had also taken another town north-east of Orenburg, and hoped to have the Orenburg-Tashkent railway working within a week. Uralsk to the west was being abandoned; and though they had been sent large quantities of ammunition, the Ural Cossacks were making off south towards Guriev to join Denikin.21

But the British detachments in Siberia continued to support Kolchak, still ill with inflammation of the lungs. The Hampshire Regiment arrived in Omsk; and with the Middlesex, marched around with their bands, in the freezing cold to raise morale. At Vladivostok, HMS Suffolk mounted ship’s guns on railway trucks, and sent them up the Siberian railway to fight on the Perm front, while between Perm and Ufa there was a British flotilla on the Kama river. In Vladivostok bay, General Knox was turning Russian Island into an Asiatic Sandhurst to train the young Russian cadets, and making them box and play football, as The Times correspondent reported hopefully on February 15; but they remained apathetic, and relations between Russian officers and men were as bad as ever. Eliot, however, told Kolchak that England expressed its ‘warmest sympathy’ with his efforts to create a ‘free Russian Government’, and France sent a similar message. ‘They point out the way for the recognition of Admiral Kolchak’, warned the American Consul Harris.22

North Russia

At Murmansk, General Maynard’s shortage of Allied troops made him reluctant to advance south to raise more Russian recruits before the railway bridges south of the White Sea were repaired. But as he feared the Bolsheviks might seize Soroka, the last station on the White Sea shore, and cut his land route to Archangel, a small Allied force occupied it on January 16. As Maynard advanced, Ironside began to retire. On the 7th, the Bolsheviks had started heavy shelling on the Dvina front. On the 19th, over 1,000 Bolshevik troops attacked his forward position of Shenkursk (originally occupied to raise Russian recruits), and American troops there suffered heavily. Next day, the Bolsheviks began to outflank it.23

The British decision to retire caused an immediate row with the Americans: ‘Well, the American wounded, they [the British Command] were not going to take them with us’, recalls an American veteran*, ‘they wanted to leave them in the hospital there [at Shenkursk]. We would not go out [i.e. without their wounded] neither would the Canadians. So we sat there for two hours while they were arguing about getting them out. When we left there, we had taken our wounded with us.’

Before they left, American troops had other work to do, recalled John Boren: ‘We started burning the houses, so we would take and throw straw and feed, scattering it through the houses, set up a fire, beat the old man over the head with your musket or your rifle, chase them out, screaming and a’hollering and yelling at you. But we did it. Anyway we had to do it,’ he states. American troops then
took up positions just outside the town, and opened fire on the people in the
town—now presumed to be Bolsheviks. ‘We killed so many that day that it was
unbelievable. I sat there with a machine gun, and poured bullets into that town just
continuously. It was not over a quarter of a mile away, so with a good machine
gun you can do good work in there. They were scattered in between those houses,
you could see them, they could not get in or out of a house, there was no cover
for them.’ But on January 24, the Allied force had to retreat from Shenkursk
through the bitter Arctic night, the local Russians deserting along the way.

At Archangel, General Ironside had difficulty in explaining the loss of
Shenkursk, and in dispelling doubts about continued Allied support: ‘I sadly
missed some hopeful directive from the Allied Council’, he recorded. ‘Our
withdrawal from Shenkursk was a victory for the Bolsheviks’, he admitted; ‘Had I
but known it, the attack was an attempt to shut us in from any connection
with Gajda’s force at Perm.’ The War Office reacted with alarm. On the 26th,
General Maynard was urgently instructed to send an infantry battalion and a
machine-gun company to Archangel; half were to go in on ice-breakers, the
remainder were to march overland along the White Sea shore. Maynard, who
desperately needed more troops even to keep the Murmansk railway open down
to the White Sea shore, was told that these men would not be replaced. Bolshevik
forces in North Russia, admitted The Times gloomily on the 28th, ‘must be
stronger than we were led to suppose’.

On February 3, The Times printed a War Office statement admitting a further
Allied withdrawal on the Vologda railway front. ‘It is reported that the Bolsheviks
have commenced to use gas shells against the Allied troops’, it stated; but the
Allied soldiers were ‘completely equipped’ with anti-gas apparatus. The War
Office then wired both Ironside and Maynard (and Milne in South Russia) that
‘fullest use’ was now to be made of gas. (I have been unable to find any evidence
of the Bolsheviks using poison gas against Allied troops in North Russia, or
anywhere else. As will be seen, the War Office, and Churchill himself, later went
to great trouble to have poison gas sent out to Archangel. Ironside however
seems to have been wise enough to have used it very sparingly; and on return
from Archangel, it was carefully dumped somewhere in the North Sea.)

There was then a complete failure by Russian troops on the Dvina front, which
led to a violent row between British and French officers. ‘Tempers everywhere
were getting very frayed by this time’, admitted Ironside. Fortunately, the Russian
General Miller then arrived from Murmansk to take command of the Russian
troops; and he was followed by the Yorkshire regiment. But the War Office
feared that the Bolsheviks were determined to cut off the Dvina force, and drive
all Allied troops back to Archangel, and force them to capitulate. Maynard was

* Testimony of Mr John Boren (US veteran of the American 339th Infantry Regiment)
given in the BBC documentary, ‘The Forgotten War’, shown on BBC2 on 4 September
1971.
thus ordered to send a further battalion and the rest of his machine-gunner post-haste to Archangel. A small party again went in on an ice-breaker, while the remainder had to make the long march overland. But the Murmansk force, and the Murmansk railway, were now almost stripped bare.  

South Russia

Bolshevik troops now invaded the Ukraine. On January 12, Picton Bagge (the British Consul in Odessa) passed on to London an intercepted message from German troops in Nicolaiev to Berlin stating that the Ukrainian Directorate had given the Bolsheviks 48 hours to withdraw from the Ukraine: if they did so, they were for peace; if not, for war. The Bolsheviks made no reply, and Ukrainian delegates rushed in alarm to Moscow. On the 13th, General d’Anselme finally landed at Odessa with more French infantry to occupy Nicolaiev. He was pessimistic about the fighting that had taken place on the French landing. The French had not come to fight, he stated, nor to take over. They needed a Russian civil power; but Denikin was preventing the various Russian forces uniting. But though d’Anselme tried to reach agreement with the Ukrainian War Minister, then at Odessa, Denikin refused to allow any dealings with the Ukrainians. General d’Anselme therefore recognised Grishin-Almazov as Russian Commander of the Odessa region; and he relied on the—equally reactionary—Shulgin, who thus ruled Odessa.

But as the local French Command received contradictory orders from Paris, Bucharest and Constantinople, the situation remained chaotic, the factories stayed closed, and the workers idle. As goods became ever scarcer, the whole of Odessa was soon caught up in the fever of speculation. All the local merchants wanted French visas to go and buy goods—especially cloth, wines, perfume, lemons—at Constantinople, and then resell them at enormous profit at Odessa, where the French presence assured them of reasonable security. Everyone also speculated in foreign exchange as the rouble steadily fell, and the cost of living rose; soon the exchange rate at Constantinople was twice what it was in Odessa. On the boats plying between the two ports, everyone had something to sell or resell. The Municipal Council of Odessa could not cope with the supply problem. Though Grishin-Almazov took up the ‘struggle against speculation’, and issued a daily deluge of contradictory orders, he only made matters worse; for his military agents were extremely dishonest, and openly extorted money from the local merchants, who simply raised the price of their goods by that amount.

Picton Bagge, in a long wire of January 17, warned that the economic question underlay the whole Russian problem. If the Russian economy could be put right, Bolshevism would die of itself. But Allied military action without economic help would only lead to disaster. As no supplies were coming in, and the peasants refused to sell their food for paper money, Russian troops either had to seize the food, or else starve. As the Russians could not reorganise the economy themselves, Bagge urged that an Economic Committee, under the Allied C-in-C,
made up of Allied delegates and Russian economists, should handle all the grain, oil and coal in South Russia—from where a general advance on Moscow must start—through the Cooperative Societies. Bagge also urged the grant of a substantial British credit, and the issue of British rouble notes, to weaken the profusion of rouble notes churned out by the Bolsheviks.

General d’Anselme, meanwhile, had made no move on Nicolaiev. This was allegedly due to ‘transport difficulties’; but the French Admiral Amet was more explicit. As German troops were holding Nicolaiev and the local railway, and supporting Petlura’s troops there, he warned that ‘incidents may occur between German and French troops, if the latter are landed at Nicolaiev before the former leave’. Though Petlura’s troops were anti-Bolshevik, they were very hostile to the Volunteer Army. French support for the Russians, in fact, made people think France simply wished to restore the ‘old order of things’.

On the 20th, however, Franchet d’Esperey informed Foch that Berthelot’s immediate plans were to secure the railway between Odessa and Bessarabia, to occupy Nicolaiev and then Kherson, and in the Crimea, to move on Theodosia from Sebastopol. ‘No plan for the occupation of the Donetz can at present be established’, he wired, ‘as nothing is known…of the disposition of the Ukrainian Directorate towards the Allies.’ It seemed that Trotsky would beat the French to the Dnieper river line.

In the British zone in South Russia, Reilly, after inspecting the Volunteer Army, then went up to visit Ataman Krasnov on the Don, who, he remarked, seemed to think he was Louis XIV, and ‘L’état, c’est moi’; and ‘now institutes a form of government for which the old regime in some of its worst forms supplied the inspiration and the methods’. Reilly found bribery, and gross abuse of power, particularly in the law courts. ‘Ils n’ont rien appris, ni rien oublié’, he noted. In the towns, the Donetz miners and workers were thus in constant ferment, and, with all Labour associations suppressed, were being driven into the arms of the Bolsheviks, who were carrying on a strong propaganda campaign. Among the Cossacks, though, agitation had only affected the younger ones, who were tired of fighting and wanted some loot.

When Reilly saw Krasnov, his first impression was that Krasnov would not keep his agreement with Denikin. For when Reilly tried to draw him, speaking of his ‘wise and unselfish attitude’, Krasnov, instead of giving a banal reply, flared up: The institution of a Supreme Command over all the forces in South Russia at the present moment was premature; one should have waited until the military and political situation was much clearer. Everybody out there is thinking only of grasping the maximum amount of power.’ (‘I could not help interposing at this’, reported Reilly, ‘that I have observed it “elsewhere” also.’) ‘Look at the tremendous staff they all have’, Krasnov went on, ‘whilst I can carry on all my work with a staff of practically 2 men’.

Reilly came away feeling that Krasnov should be chastened but kept; if he would not respond, there was always Bogaievsky, who was very popular both with the Don Cossacks and the Volunteer Army. But the Cossacks had become used to
German speed, and could understand neither the apparent British slowness, nor the British failure to go into the Ukraine and stop Petlura. And a strong Bolshevik blow might still make the Don Cossack army disintegrate. ‘The unfortunate fact that at every visit of Allied officers the old national hymn “God Protect the Czar” has been repeatedly and insistently played at the slightest pretext, has produced a deplorable impression, and is being interpreted as a proof that the Allies have come to restore the monarchy…Things have gone so far that a legend has found credence that the Allied officers who came to the Don, were Russian monarchists dressed up in British and French uniforms.’

The Volunteer Army, in the Kuban, were now sweeping the Bolsheviks before them; and on January 21, the Bolshevik line was broken, and they were in Mineralaya Vodi. Ordzhonikidze, the Bolshevik Commissar in the Caucasus, wired in despair to Lenin that the ‘Eleventh Army has ceased to exist. It has finally gone to pieces. The enemy occupies cities and stanitsas almost without resistance…there are no shells or bullets…we all perish in the unequal struggle.’

On return to Ekaterinodar, all Reilly now discussed was finance and the restoration of trade. Denikin’s advisers stated that they must have Allied help; but Allied credits, which could be partly guaranteed by Russian gold in Allied banks, should be made to one central bank, which would call in the profusion of local currency, and issue new currency notes. All this Reilly approved in a detailed report.28

Reflecting on his visit to the Kuban and the Don, Reilly considered that the Volunteer Army ‘represents the only concrete dependable force and living symbol of Russian unity. It is now past its heroic period and [has] reached [the] critical point where it must either become [the] determined factor for rallying all constructive elements, or slowly but surely disintegrate. This will entirely depend upon promptitude and extent of Allied support. Although total strength estimated at 150,000, field force only 60,000.’ Denikin, though, had to make a political declaration, delay in which was due to Generals Lukomsky and Dragomirov, both convinced monarchists, who thought that acceptance of the ‘National Centre’ programme would antagonise their best regiments, which were mainly composed of monarchist officers. Reilly also urged that a British High Commissioner be sent out to Denikin. This was a marvellously accurate assessment, but it is unfortunately impossible to reproduce more than a fraction of this series of brilliant reports sent by this outstanding man.

Not until January 29 did the Admiralty send Commander Bond’s report on the Don Cossacks to the War Office. On February 4, a top secret memo reached the War Office from Denikin, which gave exactly the same number of Russian troops as shown in Colonel Blackwood’s initial report. The General Staff, however, were by now a little suspicious; the Ukrainian Army, for instance, was ‘always a shadowy affair and is more so now’, they minuted.

Churchill also was dubious; he had come to no decision about South Russia. ‘What basis of fact is there behind this?’ he asked on February 6. ‘It is highly important to know what the Russians can & will do for themselves. If they can
put up a real fight, we ought in my view to back them in every possible way. But without them, it is no good our trying. Be vy careful not to let our wishes colour our statements.’

But the General Staff replied that this secret memo was ‘practically confirmed by Blackwood and Bond…the first 100,000 [sets of equipment] are now well forward in preparation, most of the guns and ammunition…being sent from the Near East…It is, however, essential to lay down our policy.’

The French, in the face of this British indecision, then took action in both the British and the French zones in South Russia. On January 16, as the Ukrainian Directorate declared war on the Bolsheviks, General Berthelot demanded that Petlura allow all German troops to leave, and all Russian officers in Kiev to come to Odessa; and that Petlura himself cooperate with the French against the Bolsheviks. If Petlura complied, Berthelot would recommend French recognition of the Ukraine. Franchet d’Esperey also took action. After warning Foch that Denikin’s proclamation that Krasnov had agreed to serve under him had only been made to coincide with Sazonov’s departure from South Russia for France, he agreed to the despatch of Berthelot’s nephew, a Captain Fouquet, to offer Krasnov a military treaty, provided he acknowledged Franchet d’Esperey as C-in-C in South Russia, and assumed responsibility for French property and investments on the Don and in the Ukraine. When Denikin heard of this, he forbade Krasnov to sign any agreement, and strongly protested to Franchet d’Esperey. Captain Fouquet then published a statement in a local Don newspaper that Allied troops were coming to the Don and the Donetz, but had been delayed by lack of shipping.

Trotsky, who was also preparing for a big offensive on the Don, had meanwhile been ‘rubbing into’ his local Cossack and peasant soldiers that Bolshevism had broken out all over Europe, that the Germans no longer had any control over the Ukraine, and that the ‘workmen soldiers’ of the Allied countries would soon be fighting on their side against the ‘imperialists of Krasnov’. And on January 23, the Bolsheviks began their offensive on the Don, and took Lugansk the next day, thus cutting the Kharkov-Tsaritsin railway, and preventing Denikin from reinforcing the Donetz.

At this, Don Cossack and Volunteer Army morale wavered dangerously, the Donetz mines were threatened, and the miners streamed into the Kuban Cossack capital of Ekaterinodar. Franchet d’Esperey wired to Paris that Russian morale must be raised by Allied occupation of Mariopol (on the Sea of Azov), and by the despatch of ammunition. At the Don Cossack capital of Novocherkask, where the situation was desperate, Ataman Krasnov, with General Poole’s encouragement, wired urgently to Denikin: ‘I guarantee the situation would be saved if even 3 Allied battalions were given to me.’ But unless there was some immediate ‘tangible proof’ of Allied support, there would be a disaster, and they would lose all their guns and supplies to the Bolsheviks, who would thus reconquer the Don like the Ukraine. Denikin wired back to Poole urging the immediate landing of British troops ‘to prove to Cossacks and peasants that the Allies were for them and
not the Bolsheviks’. Their presence, with tanks and aircraft, would turn the scale,
but Allied aid ‘must be immediate to be effective’. Poole therefore at once asked
General Milne at Constantinople for two British battalions, with two artillery
batteries, to be sent to the Don; and for an infantry and an artillery brigade to be
sent to the Kuban to link up with British forces at the Caspian port of Petrovsk.
Though Milne at once refused this request, which was in flagrant breach of
Poole’s instructions, Poole did not inform Krasnov, who announced to his
wavering troops that British infantry would arrive to support them in late
January. ‘Four French divisions have arrived at Odessa, Sebastopol, Kherson and
Nicolaiev’, he stated. ‘Other divisions will be sent towards Kharkov, Kursk and
Moscow.’ But no troops, of course, came.  

But as the Bolsheviks advanced on the Don, they finally collapsed in
the Kuban. On the 26th, Trotsky wired in surprise to Astrakhan.
‘Ordzhonikidze telegraphs about the disintegration of the Eleventh Army. Why
did you give no warning of this? How could the catastrophe occur all of a
sudden? Why were measures not taken to ensure the Army’s steadiness? Report
immediately…’

Thus, on the eve of the Peace Conference, when the Allies were to meet to
decide on their joint Russian policy, the British, though pretending to await an
Allied decision, and tentatively proposing a ceasefire between all Russian groups,
who could then send delegates to Paris, were in fact busily arming and supplying
White Russian forces in South Russia, and at Omsk in Siberia, where they had
just set up a Russian Dictator, who had liquidated the Constituent Assembly. The
British had now been advised by the CIGS to continue this policy, together with
a cordon sanitaire around Bolshevik Russia. The French, meanwhile, who had
rejected the British proposal for a ceasefire, and the summoning of all Russian
delegates to Paris, were descending into the Ukraine, mainly to protect their pre-
war investments; while the American President, without informing his Allies, had
already sent an envoy to Stockholm to open peace talks with the Bolsheviks.

All this, of course, had already led the Bolsheviks into the fervent belief that the
Allies were jointly decided on the worst they could imagine, i.e. the despatch of
large Allied forces into South Russia (all else, the Bolsheviks were sure, was mere
deception and window-dressing), and Trotsky was proceeding on that assumption;
and before attacking on the Don, as Lenin wished, Trotsky had decided to seize
Kiev and the Dnieper river line first. Thus, even before the Peace Conference
opened, the three main Allied Powers were all pursuing entirely different Russian
policies.

Paris

On January 12th, when the Peace Conference assembled, Marshal Foch urged a
quick peace with Germany, which would free Allied troops to crush Bolshevism
in Russia by force; and he wanted American troops, with Polish troops and
Russian prisoners, sent out via Danzig and the Danzig-Thorn railway to protect
Poland from Bolshevik attack. Foch handed over a memo stating that there were some 1,200,000 Russian prisoners in Germany, who, on crossing the frontier, were given the choice of joining the Red Army, or starving. It was urged that they be sent to join Kolchak or Denikin, or to North Russia. President Wilson and Lloyd George completely disagreed. Russian prisoners were part of the Russian problem; and if it was decided to fight Bolshevism, this would be one of the methods available. But whatever the Allies did, stated Lloyd George, we must ‘concert our policy and act together, and act efficiently, which we had not done up to the present’. It was however agreed that Russian prisoners should not be sent back to Bolshevik Russia. But when Sir Henry Wilson later tackled the Prime Minister privately on Russia, he had no success. ‘Lloyd George is opposed to knocking out Bolshevism’, he wrote that night. ‘This tacit agreement to Bolshevism is a most dangerous thing.’

The Peace Conference then considered whether Russia should be represented. The Omsk Government had urged that discussion of the Russian question be delayed until their delegates reached Paris, by when the Peace Conference would have decided both on Russian policy and on recognition of the Omsk Government, whose delegates could thus attend. Pichon (the French Foreign Minister) did not think the Omsk delegates could attend, as the Omsk Government could not yet be recognised as the Russian Government; but their views could be heard. (The reference is to the recently formed Russian Political Conference in Paris, which consisted of Prince Lvov (first Prime Minister in the Russian Provisional Government in 1917), S.D.Sazonov (a former Tsarist Foreign Minister), V.A.Maklakov (Russian Ambassador in Paris), N.V.Chaikovsky (Prime Minister of the Archangel Government) and Boris Savinkov (leading SR and Deputy War Minister of the Russian Provisional Government under Kerensky in 1917.)

Lloyd George emphasised that the Allies were ‘in a fix’ as they had no Russian policy. They must either withdraw Allied troops, or reinforce them; unless reinforced, they were no use whatever. The Omsk delegates did not represent Russian opinion. The Russian peasants accepted Bolshevism as the French peasants had in the French Revolution, because it gave them land. ‘The Bolsheviks were the *de facto* Government’, stated Lloyd George. The Allies had formerly recognised the ‘absolutely rotten’ Tsarist Government, and now the Don, Archangel and Omsk Governments, but not the Bolsheviks. They could not select Russian delegates. Possibly the Bolsheviks did not represent Russia; but Prince Lvov certainly did not, nor did Savinkov, ‘although he was a good man’. The British had made exactly the same mistake with the French émigrés, which had led them into a war lasting some twenty-five years. The question must now be settled. When Pichon protested that he only wished to hear what they had to say, Lloyd George retorted that their attendance would give the impression that they represented Russia; their views could be obtained on paper, or privately. It was thus decided that Russia should not attend the Peace Conference—which then got under way, and the myriad territorial commissions were appointed; but
President Wilson insisted that the League of Nations must be drawn up before anything else.

In Berlin, the Spartakist revolt went on. On the 13th, President Wilson urgently appealed for the despatch of food to Germany, which the French adamantly opposed; and later that day, when news came through that the Spartakist revolt had been put down (and Liebknecht shot and Rosa Luxemburg clubbed to death), the French considered their harsh attitude on Bolshevism justified. In London, next day, the Foreign Office informed the Allied capitals that France had rejected the British proposal on Russian policy, as it would mean recognition of the Bolsheviks; the Allies, stated the French, should continue to supply the White Russian Armies, for the Bolshevik Government would ‘ultimately collapse’ if the Allies refused to treat with them.  

On January 16 (as the State Department in Washington received an offer of separate peace talks with the Bolsheviks—no reply was made), the Peace Conference had its first full discussion on the Russian question. Lloyd George stated firmly that the British were not intending to invite the Bolsheviks to the Peace Conference, but were merely proposing a truce in Russia, during which all the various Russian delegates could confer with the Allies in Paris. He had made this proposal for three reasons:

a) The Allies did not know the facts about Russia; and until they did, could not form a correct judgment.
b) But Russia was clearly in an ‘extremely bad’ condition; and though the military position was obscure, Allied hopes of a Bolshevik collapse had ‘certainly been disappointed’. British officers in Russia reported that it was stronger than ever.
c) As an ‘adventurer [i.e. Petlura] with a few thousand men’ had easily overthrown an allegedly firm Government, the Ukraine was not the anti-Bolshevik stronghold imagined. In fact, the process that had run its course in Russia was now starting in the Ukraine. Were the Allies to back a landlord minority against an immense peasant majority?

There were three policies from which to choose:

1 The Allies could say that Bolshevism was as dangerous as German militarism, and must be destroyed. No one seriously proposed this policy, or would carry it out. England certainly would not.
2 There was the cordon sanitaire, which meant the Allied blockade of Bolshevik Russia, which would not kill the Bolshevik ‘Chinese ruffians’, but the ordinary Russian people, already dying of famine, and with whom the Allies wished to be friends. It might be said that this inhuman policy would lead to the Bolshevik overthrow. But who in Russia could overthrow them? General Knox reported that the Czech troops were ‘tainted with Bolshevism’, and hence lukewarm to Kolchak, who was trying to revive the
ancien regime with untrustworthy Russian troops; while an ‘immense’ Bolshevik area separated them from Denikin, who had recognised, but could not contact Kolchak, and who only had some 40,000 troops in a ‘little backyard’ by the Black Sea.

3 The only other policy was what he proposed—to ask the various Russian groups to send delegates to Paris after a truce. Sazonov, who had long been out of Russia, did not even represent the Omsk Government. They could send the Bolshevik delegates back to Russia if they made propaganda here.

Pichon urged that Ambassador Noulens, just back from Archangel, could give them ‘very interesting information’ about Bolshevism. But President Wilson stated that there was ‘no possible answer’ to Lloyd George. If the Bolsheviks did not invade the Baltic States and Poland, the Allies should allow all the Russian groups to send delegates to Paris. (In the course of a further long statement about the struggle between capital and labour in America, the President observed that many people there sympathised with Bolshevism, because it offered ‘opportunity to the individual’.) Pichon again interrupted that they should first hear Noulens, ‘whose news from Russia was fresh’. Sonnino [the Italian Foreign Minister] urged that Scavenius (the former Danish Ambassador in Petrograd) should also be heard. It was agreed that both should attend the next meeting on Monday, January 20.35

During the intervening weekend, Lloyd George and Clemenceau fell out over the British proposals. Clemenceau stated that if pressed to allow Bolshevik delegates to come to Paris, he would have to resign; and turned for support to Lord Derby (the British Ambassador), who was influential in the Conservative Party, but who rapidly diverted him to Balfour. The Foreign Secretary, after seeing Clemenceau, thus wrote to Lloyd George, urging that no Bolshevik delegates should come to Paris, but that an Economic Mission should be sent to Moscow, nominally to discuss food and relief, but in fact to confer with the Bolshevik leaders. Lloyd George was furious with Clemenceau for trying to split up the British Delegation, and threatened to return to London. But Bonar Law warned him that the Conservative Party felt very strongly on Bolshevism; if Lloyd George broke with Clemenceau on the matter, the Coalition Government would break also.36

On January 20 the Peace Conference met to reach a decision on Russian policy. After the French Ambassador Noulens had disappointed even the French with his atrocity stories, Scavenius urged immediate Allied intervention, and a converging attack on Moscow by Denikin, assisted by Allied, Polish and Finnish troops; as Krasnov’s and Denikin’s troops would not advance beyond their present areas, 100,000 to 150,000 Allied volunteers could thus ‘ensure success’ for the White Russian cause. The sole Allied object should be to allow the Constituent Assembly to meet. Clemenceau asked if Scavenius meant that Denikin’s troops were ‘unwilling to go to Moscow’. He said this would be so if ‘they had to do all the fighting’. Lloyd George asked what would result from the capture of Moscow. Scavenius said that Bolshevism would cease to exist. Though
the Constituent Assembly could not meet at once, those Russian elements ‘at present helpless’ would gather round the Allies, ‘and in time would call forth the Constituent Assembly’. Lloyd George said this meant the Allied formation of a Russian Provisional Government. Scavenius agreed, ‘but it need not be apparent’. The Russian parties could set up a proper government a little later. Lloyd George asked what would happen if the Bolsheviks obtained a majority in the elections? Scavenius said glumly that it ‘must of course be accepted’. Balfour asked if the Allies really could gather together an effective Russian force on arrival in Moscow. In North Russia and Siberia, they had dissolved when the Allies withdrew; they could only lean on foreign troops. Scavenius retorted that up to now the Allies had used ‘too small forces’. Great attention was paid to what Scavenius said.37

President Wilson then read out a wire from his envoy Buckler in Stockholm. Litvinov said the Bolsheviks wanted no more ‘costly campaigns’; and if the Allies wanted peace also, they would compromise on the Russian foreign debt, protect foreign business, and grant new concessions. They would also stop Bolshevik propaganda in Europe, since conditions there were not suitable for a revolution ‘of the Russian type’. Once there was peace, they would grant an amnesty to their opponents, who could leave Russia. They had no designs on Finland, Poland or the Ukraine; but while foreign powers supported the capitalists there, they would support the workers.

Buckler had also seen Arthur Ransome, the Daily News correspondent, formerly in Moscow, and now in Stockholm, who was in close and intimate contact with the Bolsheviks. Ransome thought Allied intervention could eventually smash Bolshevik power; but only indefinite Allied occupation could cure the ensuing anarchy. No Russian party but the Bolsheviks could hold the Russian people together without Allied military support. Many Bolsheviks wished to provoke more active Allied intervention to stir up discontent in Europe as well. ‘If you care to bring Ransome to Paris, he could inform you almost as well as Litvinov’, remarked Buckler. Military intervention, he concluded, could only succeed in the distant future, while they could reach an agreement immediately, which would restore better conditions to act as a ‘disinfectant’ against Bolshevism. Despite Litvinov’s guarded language, Buckler felt they could make a fair bargain on the Russian debt and concessions, provided Russia kept her coal and oil fields, and Siberia.37

Lloyd George and Balfour then lunched with Franchet d’Esperey, who strongly urged a ‘cordon sanitaire’ round Russia, and the destruction of Bolshevism by starvation. He was going to occupy Sebastopol, Odessa and Nicolaiev, and raise and equip Russian Armies under Allied Command. The Allies would have to pay, and guarantee the rouble; but they would have all Russia’s assets as security. At present, however, he much feared a Bolshevik attack in the Ukraine.38

That afternoon, Lloyd George faced the British Empire Delegation. Though President Wilson supported the British proposal, the French wanted the Allies to crush Bolshevism, he said. But America would not send an army to Russia. Would Canada? Borden declined. Intervention, he said, was impossible, and they
must contact the Bolsheviks; if they refused to stop fighting, then we could apply economic pressure. Hughes opposed the reception of any Russian delegates. Economic pressure would keep Bolshevism within Russia, where it would inevitably die. The British Empire should only fight it if it came out. Lloyd George asked what would happen if the Bolsheviks entered the Ukraine. Hughes urged support for the de facto government there. Lloyd George said there were at least two and asked if he would send Australian troops. When Hughes declined, he stressed that they were ‘not meeting the difficulty’. The War Cabinet had decided not to intervene, and to summon Bolshevik delegates to Paris. This did not mean keeping 20,000 Allied troops in Russia, and supplying the White Russians. The question was whether to withdraw. Balfour tried to interrupt, but Lloyd George insisted on a decision: were the Allies to keep troops in Russia, or to support the White Russians; and would the British Empire help? When Borden refused to retain Canadian troops, Lloyd George suggested supplying the White Russians.38 This, said the DMO, would amount to ‘enormous sums’; Kolchak had already been promised 200,000 sets of equipment, and Denikin was asking for 250,000. Lloyd George added that they also wanted us to guarantee the rouble. Borden again urged negotiation; but finally agreed to retain Canadian troops until June. Montagu interrupted that Britain should withdraw now; she would be drawn into further intervention if it was left until later. But Lloyd George had gained his point. Unless the Russian groups were brought together, he concluded, Britain would at once stop both intervention and support of the White Russians; though she would protect any state which ‘ought to be independent’. When Hughes protested that it had been decided not to intervene ‘in any event’, Lloyd George agreed; but if the Peace Conference brought the Russian groups together, the withdrawal would not be immediate, ‘pending the result’.38

When the Peace Conference reconvened, and President Wilson suggested that the Russian delegates meet the Allies at Salonika, there were strong protests from the Italian Prime Minister Sonnino: they had heard Litvinov’s views that morning, and were anyhow fighting the Bolsheviks. President Wilson stressed that intervention was really helping the Bolshevik cause. Clemenceau did not favour talks, but Bolshevism had invaded the Baltic and Poland, and was spreading to Budapest and Vienna; and if, after Germany, it spread to Italy, all Europe would be in great danger. Thus something must be done. But the Bolsheviks were laying a clever trap. They had originally made a breach on principle, and now offered a deal based on money and concessions. The Allies should be wary. The necessary Russian evolution would take time; but the Allies, like Russia, needed a speedy peace. He urged President Wilson to draft an appeal.38

But when Balfour remarked that the Bolsheviks would anyhow refuse, Sonnino retorted that they would be the first to accept. They had made many promises at Brest-Litovsk, and broken them all. The Allies should support the White Russians, provided they adopted a moderate policy, and did not revoke land reform. For France and Italy it was simply self-defence. Lloyd George remarked
that Scavenius had said 150,000 Allied troops would be needed. There were at present 20,000 British troops in Russia; and if more were sent, ‘there would be a mutiny’. Sonnino urged calling for volunteers Lloyd George retorted that this would be impossible. As the Allies could not even supply enough White Russian troops to beat the Bolsheviks, why try and crush Bolshevism by speeches? Sonnino finally gave in. Clemenceau stressed that this appeal was being made for ‘purely humane reasons’. It was agreed that President Wilson should prepare a draft.

That evening, Balfour wired the Foreign Office that the Peace Conference had decided to propose a meeting between the Allies and all the Russian groups at ‘Lemnos or some other convenient place’.

‘I must say, with all respect’, minuted Sir Ronald Graham (an Assistant Under-Secretary of State), ‘that this seems a remarkable proposal.’

Lord Curzon would not be drawn, but merely clarified the location of the meeting. ‘It is Prinkipo’, he wrote.

On the 22nd, as the League of Nations Commission was formally set up under President Wilson, the Peace Conference duly approved a thoroughly unfortunate message to all Russian groups, inviting them to confer with the Allies on Prinkipo island (near Constantinople), provided there was first a truce. They would be expected at Prinkipo by February 15; and the Allies asked for a prompt reply.

How even Lloyd George had the face to sign this message is past belief. British arms and equipment for 200,000 men were on their way to Kolchak, and vast quantities were already being prepared for Denikin; and Lloyd George knew this. But part of the message stated that the Allies ‘recognise the absolute right of the Russian people to direct their own affairs without dictation or direction of any kind from outside. They do not wish to exploit or make use of Russia in any way. They recognise the revolution without reservation, and will in no way, and in no circumstances, aid or give countenance to any attempt at a counter-revolution. It is not their wish or purpose to favour or assist any one of those organised groups now contending for the leadership and guidance of Russia as against the others.’

(At least King George V was consistent and impartial at this time, and would not even accord sanctuary to members of the Romanov family or the Russian nobility. Lord Stamfordham (the King’s secretary) wrote to Sir Ronald Graham on January 20 that ‘as Lord Curzon is probably aware, the King is strongly averse to any Russian Grand Dukes coming to England under present circumstances’.)

But The Times approved the Prinkipo proposal. On the 23rd, the main leader stated that the Peace Conference had shown ‘courage’ over the proposal, which demonstrated a ‘clear, consistent, and humane principle’. The real purpose was to set up a ‘committee of inquiry into the facts’. (But some idea of the quality of the journalism in The Times at this period is well reflected in a story printed on the 25th, under the headline: ‘Lenin–Trotsky Quarrel—Compromise, or War to the End?’, in which a wire sent from Stockholm on the 23rd was printed stating that the ‘persistent report’ that Lenin had recently been arrested by his Bolshevik opponents,
and released after a few hours’ detention, appeared now not to be true. ‘At any rate’, The Times commented, ‘if it did not happen, it might easily have done so.’

The French, however, deliberately wrecked the Prinkipo proposal from the start. While refusing even to transmit it to the Bolsheviks, Philippe Berthelot (the Secretary General at the Quai d’Orsay) promised continued French support if Sazonov (the White Russian Foreign Minister, acting for both Kolchak and Denikin) declined the proposal; and his brother, General Berthelot, made a similar offer to the Ukrainian Directorate. The various Russian groups readily obliged. On the 24th, it was announced that the Omsk, Ekaterinodar and Archangel Governments ‘refuse to associate with Bolshevism.’ They would not send delegates to Prinkipo.

In Moscow, Chicherin was highly suspicious of the Prinkipo proposal (which was, in fact, picked up by Moscow Wireless as soon as it was announced). When Litvinov in Stockholm had read in l’Humanité of the angry French reaction to the initial British proposal, he informed Chicherin, who thought it very suspect; there had been a British Economic Mission in Moscow, he recalled, just before the Allied intervention at Archangel. He now wired to Stockholm to discover what this new ‘strange and improbable’ proposal meant; for if the Allies really wanted peace in Russia, they should stop intervening. There were signs that the ‘forces of reaction’ were growing weaker, but discussions could not be held in secret; there must be full publicity for the Bolshevik cause.42

President Wilson, the supposed author of the Prinkipo proposal, would have been astonished at the exchanges that now took place between Lenin and Trotsky on the subject. ‘Wilson proposes a truce and is summoning all Governments of Russia to a conference’, Lenin wired to Trotsky at Kozlov on the 24th; ‘I am afraid that he wants to establish his claim to Siberia and part of the South, having otherwise scarcely a hope of retaining anything.’ Now that they had taken Orenburg, Lugansk and Chertkovo (and thus cut the main South Russian railways), they must thus make every effort to take Rostov, Chelyabinsk and Omsk within a month. ‘The person to visit Wilson will, to all appearances, have to be you’, stated Lenin. Trotsky replied next day that they would do their best; but Reval, Archangel and Murmansk were just as important. There was no need to hurry over the Prinkipo proposal. It would be better to send Chicherin; there would be no need for polemics, ‘since everything has been made clear already’.42

While the Peace Conference was deliberating in Paris, there were more and more serious outbreaks of disaffection and mutiny in the British Army both in England and France. In London, while Churchill was considering his priorities before taking over as Secretary of State for War, there was a further mutiny. The approaches to the War Office were blocked one morning by lorries which had been seized and driven up to London by mutineers from the Service Corps. When the new Minister strode into the War Office on January 15, he had decided that his first task was demobilisation, and then the reformation of the new British Army. Since the Armistice, he found, more than 750,000 ‘key men’ had been demobilised out of the 3,500,000 officers and men in the British Army. It
was soon agreed in the War Office that 1,150,000 men would be needed on a compulsory basis for the Armies of Occupation; their pay would be doubled, and a bonus paid. But while the remainder waited to return home, they had to behave themselves; any trouble-makers would be ‘put back to the bottom of the list’. During 1919, they would also have to reform the old British volunteer army; but recruitment would doubtless be good, Churchill commented, as soon as those demobilised had come back to the ‘freedom of civil life, and have had a chance to look around’.

Meanwhile, unrest and disorder among the British troops about demobilisation grew and grew. Soldiers’ Councils were formed, the Service Corps was quite out of control for several days, and at Luton the mob burnt down the Town Hall. In London, Sir Henry Wilson was so alarmed that he urged Churchill that, as soon as their scheme was through the Cabinet, ‘both he and I ought at once to go over to Paris and get Lloyd George to agree to it, and then get it out without a moment’s delay’. He went on, ‘We are sitting on the top of a mine which may go up at any moment.’ Churchill agreed to bring it before the War Cabinet on the 21st.

Thomas Jones (the Cabinet Assistant Secretary), however, wrote a quick note to Hankey in Paris, warning him what was in the wind. ‘This is of course a matter of first class importance and I am letting you know of it at the first opportunity’, wrote Tom Jones on the 17th. ‘You are simply splendid.’, replied Hankey the next day. ‘The P.M. was much annoyed about Churchill’s proposal and has written to him to stop it. He has promised not to mix your name up in it, as we don’t want to make trouble between you and anyone else. You were absolutely right to let me know and the P.M. is very pleased.’ This gratuitous piece of informing by a Cabinet secretary does indeed seem odd; but Churchill was not popular at this time. On January 11, the main *Times* leader had undoubtedly reflected the views of many people when it remarked that ‘Mr Churchill seems to have been selected (or to have selected himself) for the one post where he is calculated to inspire the greatest distrust’.

Lloyd George, in fact, wrote a very sharp letter to Churchill on the 18th about his scheme for ‘continuing military service’ to keep up a British Army of 1,700,000 men. ‘I am surprised that you should think it right to submit such a scheme to my colleagues before talking it over or at least before submitting it—in the first instance to me’, he wrote. ‘It is hardly treating the head of the Government fairly…Please let me know something of your plan at once.’

Before he received this, Churchill had sent the Prime Minister a rough outline of his plan on the 19th ‘I do not think you will get the military authorities to function properly until they are re-assured that they are not going to be left without an Army’, he warned. At present, discipline in the Army was being ‘rotted—every platoon simultaneously—by the pulling out of people in ones and twos without any relation to what the ordinary man regards as fair play’. The feeling indeed was so bad that they could not even release the enormous numbers of men in England ‘whom we do not want and who want to go’. But once his
scheme was approved, the War Office could ‘push the others out of doors as fast as they want to go, or even faster’. But though the press had now ‘seen the red light’ and were trying to help ‘instead of exciting discontent’, he remained ‘very anxious’ about the British Army, and wished to publish his scheme in next Sunday’s papers; Sir Henry Wilson would bring it to Paris on Tuesday for the Prime Minister’s assent; if necessary, Churchill would also come.

Next afternoon, Churchill wired in answer to Lloyd George’s letter of January 18, ‘which I am very sorry to receive’. He had thought it better to thrash out the details first before consulting the Prime Minister, but was sending the plan in an incomplete state that evening. Later, he wired again that as there was no airplane or boat that night, someone would bring it over on the 21st. ‘Situation in Army causes great anxiety to all my advisers’, he added. ‘A few more weeks on present lines and there will be nothing left but demoralised and angry mob.’ Only ‘powerful and bold action’ could retrieve the situation. The figure anyhow was not 1,700,000, but 1,150,000. ‘I do hope you will help me in these difficulties, for, without your approval, all action is paralysed.’

Lloyd George was quite unmoved. On the 21st, Bonar Law returned to London to say that the Prime Minister was ‘angry with Winston’. Haig was then summoned to support Churchill and the CIGS. But that evening, Lloyd George sent a further message that he ‘won’t let Winston place our scheme before the Cabinet tomorrow, but has no objection to all the members meeting in ‘conversations’. This, Sir Henry Wilson knew, would give him the chance of denying later on that the scheme had been put before the Cabinet. Sir Henry Wilson therefore sent a message of ‘grave concern’ to the Prime Minister.

While the Prime Minister in Paris kept up steady pressure by letter, telegram and telephone, the War Cabinet in London had their ‘conversations’ on the 22nd about Churchill’s scheme for the new British Army. Bonar Law said that no decision was to be taken; but Haig and Sir Henry Wilson, somewhat exaggerating, said that if the scheme was not put through, they would lose their armies not only in Germany, but in India, and all over the world. ‘Even now we dare not give an unpopular order to the troops, and discipline was a thing of the past. Douglas Haig said that by February 15 he would have no army in France. Much talk round the plate. But Winston and I stuck to it, and in the end we got an unwilling assent to our proposals. Austen [Chamberlain] very frightened of the expense. Bonar Law very determined not to give an opinion…No secretary, so no record of the proceedings.’

On the 23rd, Churchill, supported by Haig and Sir Henry Wilson, crossed over to Paris to obtain the Prime Minister’s approval for their scheme for the new British Army. Lloyd George now agreed to the proposals—which Churchill personally rushed round with early next morning, while the Prime Minister was still shaving. (They then had a brief talk about Russia, which ended in a row, when Churchill, to his dismay, discovered that it was really Lloyd George, and not President Wilson, as he had imagined, who had initiated the invitation to the Bolsheviks to come to Prinkipo. This meant recognition of the Bolsheviks, and
‘one might as well legalise sodomy as recognise the Bolsheviks’, Churchill told the Prime Minister angrily.)

But their main dispute was not yet over. On the 27th, the Prime Minister sent Churchill a further letter from Bonar Law, with a short covering note, stating that his scheme for the retention of compulsory military service was quite contrary to recent election pledges.

Churchill replied at once. ‘I hope you will not allow the vague fears expressed in the note you have just sent me to paralyse necessary action’, he wrote. It was impossible to raise the necessary troops this year by voluntary means. The House of Commons should be informed, and their support obtained for retaining men by compulsion. But the Prime Minister’s work in Paris would be gravely impeded by making the duration of compulsory service dependent upon the signature of the Peace Treaty. At present, the conscripts were serving either until then, or for 6 months after the Armistice. Thus, the British Army would break up if peace was not signed by May 11th. Good discipline depended upon the troops knowing that some of them had to stay in the Army possibly for a year: ‘They then make up their minds to go through with it; the sooner they jump this fence, the better; the sooner they put out of their heads the idea that they are going to get home by pushing and shoving, the better.’

That evening (the 27th), as it became apparent that the Prinkipo proposal had failed, Churchill wrote his first tentative paper on the Russian problem for the Prime Minister. ‘I am distressed by the military telegrams from Russia’, he wrote. Though Britain only had some 14,000 British troops there, they were ‘exerting a great influence, particularly in Siberia, because they are thought to be the vanguard of Britain. They are nothing of the sort. Individual officers and soldiers are keeping large towns and districts up to their duty against the Bolsheviks by giving the impression that “Britain is behind them”; whereas long ago Britain has quit the field.

‘We are at the present moment [“wilfully” crossed out] heavily and indefinitely committed in all sorts of directions, and we have, as far as I can see, not the least intention of making good in any of them.’ As War Minister, he strongly objected to retaining troops in the field who were denied the necessary transport, technical services, doctors, and even mules. ‘But that is what we are doing. These poor men are writing cheques on our account and in our name which we have neither the intention nor the means to honour. They have written a good many already’, he remarked. ‘It seems to me most urgent for us to frame and declare our policy. “Evacuate at once at all costs” 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.’ Britain must thus confine herself to ‘modest limits’.

* There is a long gap here in the text.
In North Russia, Britain should withdraw as soon as the ice allowed, and remove all those compromised with her; meanwhile, British troops should be properly sustained. But South Russia, Transcaspia and Siberia were ‘enormous regions into which it will be disastrous for us for Bolshevism to penetrate’. During the war, Britain had here called into being Russian Armies which were fighting ‘in an indifferent manner with varying fortune’ [‘—but still fighting’ inserted]. We are very heavily compromised with [‘Denikin’ added in ink]* and the [‘Omsk’ added in ink] Government. We have only got two battalions in Siberia, and they are everywhere being [‘exploited’ crossed out] paraded as symbols of the British power. I consider, in view of what you have told me, that the anti-Bolshevik Russians should be told that they have got to shift for themselves, that we wish them well, but that all we can do is to give them moral support by the presence of such volunteers…and material aid in money, arms and supplies.’

But, he went on, ‘I hold most strongly that, after all that has happened, we cannot cut these anti-Bolshevik Russian armies suddenly off the tap of our supplies. As long as they are able to go on fighting effectively, we [‘will’ crossed out] shd continue to aid them with arms, supplies and volunteers. We should fix now the quota of arms and supplies but should give no guarantee as to the number of volunteers.

‘If they are suppressed or throw up the sponge, we should, of course, withdraw and disinterest ourselves in all that may follow. All the telegrams show that this matter requires your personal attention.’ He ended thus: ‘As you know, I should much have preferred going to the Admiralty, where there would have been none of these difficulties for me to try to solve and where I could have lived in comfort for a year or two.’ He would return to Paris on Saturday, February 1.

Churchill sent this paper (which well demonstrates his unfamiliarity with the Russian scene) straight over to Sir Henry Wilson, who replied at once.

‘With all you say I entirely agree’, he wrote. ‘For months I have been writing papers about Russia with no result. I know it is very difficult to come to a decision because the question is difficult & is enormously complicated by our Allies, and now I don’t believe we can decide anything until the Prinkipo affair is exploded.

‘I am in favour of being ready to i. quit Murmansk & Archangel next summer; ii. of quitting Omsk now if the French agree; iii. but of strengthening our hold on Batoum-Baku-Krasnovodsk-Merv line. I will show you the papers we have written.’

At dinner that night in Paris, as a full-scale British mutiny at Calais entered its fourth day, and serious rioting broke out in Glasgow and Belfast, Churchill finally induced the Prime Minister (now also seriously alarmed at the mutinies) to approve his scheme. He and Sir Henry Wilson then caught the night train back to London, saw the Press, who ‘took it all like lambs’, obtained Cabinet approval, and the new Army Order was issued. It was just in time: ‘The railwaymen and base details in Calais practically came out on strike yesterday’, wrote Churchill to
Lloyd George on the 29th, ‘but all my information goes to show that the fighting troops are quite sound.’

These events, however, prevented Churchill from returning to Paris, as promised, on February 1, when he ended a short letter to Lloyd George thus: ‘I wish I cd have got over; but I did not like to leave. The Calais mutiny has had some serious consequences: & 8,000 troops have been sent into Glasgow. Everything is however going vy well here & I do not see any reason for yr changing yr plans.

More angry rumbles of dissatisfaction at the Prinkipo proposal then came in from Siberia. On January 30, the American Consul Harris wired from Omsk that it had caused ‘considerable disaffection’ in the Siberian Army: ‘Press here growing unfriendly to Allies…’ On February 4, he wired that it had aroused great hostility at Omsk, Ekaterinburg, Novonikolaevsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk—all down the Siberian railway.

In North Russia, the Prinkipo proposal was received with consternation. Both the Archangel Government, and their Premier Chaikovsky, angrily rejected this ‘offensive’ invitation. The British envoy Lindley wired scathingly and at great length on February 1 that it had coincided with the Bolshevik massacre of the people of Shenkursk. ‘Not a word of condemnation for the Bolsheviks’, he declared angrily. ‘None hide their opinion that the object of the invitation was to enable the Allies to wash their hands of Russia.’ He showed at length how it ran completely contrary to British policy ever since the intervention, and now gave an ‘immense accession of strength’ to the Bolsheviks. ‘Never was the truth of the old Chinese adage, that in war the moral is to the material as five to one, more demonstrably true than at this moment; and yet this is the moment chosen by the most influential gathering that has ever met [i.e. the Peace Conference] deliberately to ignore the moral issues involved in the Russian problem.’

Lord Curzon was much impressed: ‘It is a very sensible, manly and courageous despatch and should be printed and circulated at once to the Cabinet’, he minuted.

The American Consul Poole simply announced that he was resigning.

President Wilson was constantly affirming that foreign policy must be based on moral principles, he wired, and not expediency, and that evil must never be condoned; and yet it was the President who had made the Prinkipo proposal, which denounced reaction, but not the ‘other enemy of the revolution—the Bolshevik Government’, whose ‘utter wickedness’ he had constantly stressed. The Archangel Government favoured intervention, he underlined, and would prefer American and not British control; the British were tactless, interfering and selfish, the Russians thought.

The American Delegation in Paris had never been hopeful about the Prinkipo proposal. On January 27, Lansing had explained candidly to the State Department that as military intervention was impossible, and there was no real hope of building up a Russian Army, and Russian troops could not be relied on ‘even as auxiliaries’, the ‘humane thing’ was simply to appeal to the Russian groups to stop fighting. ‘It very probably will not accomplish anything’, he admitted.
Frank Polk, his deputy, replied from the State Department on February 1, warning Lansing that the Prinkipo proposal would probably destroy anti-Bolshevik morale entirely. ‘Have you considered recognition of the Omsk Government’, he asked. Though Kolchak was ‘probably a reactionary’, he and Denikin should be sent some friendly word; for a ‘suggestion of recognition’ might tempt them to attend Prinkipo.\footnote{55}

This was exactly why Chicherin had wired to President Wilson for an official invitation on January 28. The President urged the Peace Conference on February 1 to send one, even though it would be ‘tantamount to recognition’. But this was rejected.\footnote{55}

By now, however, there was a new American proposal in the wind. On January 31, William Buckler, just back from Stockholm, went with William Bullitt (a junior American delegate in Paris) to the British Delegation. After Buckler had given Philip Kerr (Lloyd George’s private secretary) an outline of what Litvinov had said to him, Bullitt told Kerr that he and Lincoln Steffens, an American journalist, were going to Russia with President Wilson’s approval to see if the Russian civil war could somehow be ended, and Russia brought into contact with the Peace Conference. Bullitt asked if the Prime Minister would approve. Kerr replied that he would ask Lloyd George at once. The British, he said, were ‘extremely anxious’ to evacuate Archangel as soon as possible, anyhow by May 1. But in view of Ransome’s ‘well-known’ Bolshevik sympathies, they could not bring him to Paris, as Buckler had suggested, but would meet Bolshevik delegates alone at Prinkipo, ‘or anywhere else’, since the main object of the Prinkipo proposal was to stop the Russian civil war, and induce the various Russian groups to attend an ‘All-Russia convention’. Buckler believed the Bolsheviks might agree, provided the Bolshevik regime remained intact.\footnote{55} (This is Buckler’s account of the interview mainly; but it is difficult to believe that Kerr really said that the British would evacuate Archangel by May 1, since it would still be ice-bound. By ‘All-Russia convention’ Kerr presumably meant Constituent Assembly.)

Philip Kerr then hurriedly talked the matter over with Lloyd George, who was fully in favour of such an exploratory mission being undertaken ‘informally’ by the American Delegation; and Philip Kerr so informed Bullitt (who was anxious to take Lincoln Steffens, a well-known ‘muckraking’ journalist of the old school, since he had not only been to Russia in 1917 during the Provisional Government’s term of office, but in 1918 had written a foreword to a pamphlet by Trotsky, published in New York. This sufficiently associated him with Bolshevism, so Bullitt thought, for the Bolshevik leaders to take the Bullitt mission seriously).\footnote{56}

**North Russia**

By now, there were urgent demands for reinforcements for North Russia. On January 31, the DMO minuted that he had asked a month ago for the despatch of
more troops to keep open the Murmansk railway. Now the Allies had had to withdraw from Shenkursk, and Maynard had had to reinforce Archangel by land. It was thus ‘urgently necessary’ to send Maynard the troops he needed. It was presumed that a recent Army Order superseded the War Cabinet decision, and would allow conscripts to be sent out. This was at once passed to the Prime Minister; but nothing was done.\textsuperscript{57}

Under pressure from the War Office, Churchill on the 3rd sent the Prime Minister another copy of the DMO’s note asking for more troops for North Russia. ‘Do you realise’, Churchill warned the Prime Minister, ‘that a disaster might easily occur on this front…?’ They could not even be withdrawn for four months, during which time British troops there would be exposed to needless suffering without reinforcements. He thus asked for the War Cabinet decision to be reversed, so that he could take such steps as the present state of discipline allowed. The ‘alarming rumours’ in London about their safety were not justified, ‘but the situation may rapidly deteriorate and people will not tolerate their belongings [? beloved ones] being left to their fate on this desolate coast’. These measures were necessary whether or not it was decided to withdraw.\textsuperscript{57}

On the 4th, the General Staff warned that while the Allies had 18,000 troops on the Archangel front, of whom 11,000 were combatant, the Bolsheviks now had some 22,700 of whom 18,300 were in the line—an 80 per cent increase in two months.\textsuperscript{57}

\textbf{Moscow and Paris}

On the 4th, the Bolshevik Government finally decided that the moment had come to reply to the invitation to Prinkipo, which they had never received, as the French had adamantly refused to send it from Paris. Chicherin wired the Peace Conference in harsh terms that they would ‘purchase’ an agreement from the Allies, their ‘only real adversaries’, to bring the Russian civil war to an end. They would settle the Russian foreign debt, might settle with Allied subjects, and would guarantee interest by granting concessions, and might cede territory to the Allies or to the White Russian troops whom they supported. But the extent of these concessions would depend on their ‘increasingly favourable’ military position. In North Russia, they had retaken Shenkursk (and thus stopped Gajda linking up with Ironside). In Siberia, though they had lost Perm, they had retaken Ufa, Orenburg and Uralsk. In South Russia, they held the railway junctions on the lower Don (which prevented Denikin and Kolchak linking up), and were threatening Krasnov’s rear. In the Ukraine, they had taken Kharkov and the Dnieper river line from Chernigov down to Ekaterinoslav (which prevented the French from invading the Ukraine or the Donetz). In the Baltic, they had taken Riga, and Dvinsk, Vilna and Minsk (the main Latvian and Lithuanian towns). Within Bolshevik Russia, the Mensheviks and the SRs, who had reached Moscow the day before, now declared ‘most strongly’ against Allied intervention. ‘Finally, the lies in the foreign press concerning alleged disturbances in Petrograd
and elsewhere are pure inventions’, stated Chicherin. They would however stop Bolshevik propaganda, and come to Prinkipo to meet the Allies, jointly or separately, or the other Russian groups.\textsuperscript{58}

The Bolshevik reply was published the same day in Moscow, and rapidly became the ‘main subject of conversation’, wrote Arthur Ransome, the \textit{Daily News} correspondent, then back in Moscow. The Mensheviks openly approved it, the Bolsheviks thought it conceded too much; but even its critics were ‘desperately anxious that it should meet with a reply’. Ransome, however, told Chicherin that day that he doubted whether the Allies ‘would at present come to any agreement with the Soviet Government’. But it was clear that the ‘overwhelming mass’ of the Russian people wanted peace. Ransome heard on all sides that ‘we cannot get things straight while we have to fight all the time’.\textsuperscript{59}

The Bolshevik reply reached Paris on the 5th. While President Wilson found it ‘studiously insulting’, the Prime Minister was perfectly furious—the real fury of the outraged liberal, whose quasi-magnanimous, though basically dishonest concession has been flung back in his face. ‘I never saw a man more angered than Mr Lloyd George’, the President told his secretary. ‘We cannot let that insult go by’, said Lloyd George. ‘We are not after their money or their concessions or their territory’. He at once telephoned to Churchill in London that ‘any details necessary’ should be sent to North Russia ‘without delay’. But he should not send out ‘drafts to enable demobilisation to commence there without feeling assured of what effect on the troops would be’. (Lloyd George had first written: ‘without definite Cabinet decision on the point’. But he crossed this out, and added: ‘without feeling assured of what effect on the troops would be’ in pencil.)\textsuperscript{60} Sir Henry Wilson went straight off to ask the American General Bliss to send out some 720 more American troops as well.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{London}

In London, there was further mutiny. At 8.30 am on February 8, Churchill was summoned urgently to the War Office: 3,000 troops, kept without food at Victoria station all night, had refused to return to France, and had marched in an armed body to Horse Guards’ Parade, where their leader was demanding conditions. General Robertson (C-in-C, Home Forces) had some Grenadiers and Household Cavalry available. What should they do? Churchill asked if they would obey orders. ‘The officers believe so’, was the reply. Churchill ordered the men to be surrounded and made prisoner, and stayed anxiously in his room, watching the reactions of observers on the roof of the Horse Guards.\textsuperscript{62}

But after the whole lot were finally shepherded away, given breakfast, and despatched back to France, the General Staff thought even more carefully about sending more troops to North Russia. They asked General Robertson; service there, he agreed, was ‘most unpopular and…the men are, rightly or wrongly, under the impression that it has been authoritatively stated that no more troops would be sent to Russia, which they interpret as no more drafts’. For General
Robertson had just received answers to a War Office secret circular sent, without Churchill’s knowledge, to all Commanding Officers, which asked if troops would help the Police keep order; assist in strike-breaking; go overseas, ‘especially to Russia’; and if they were satisfied with Churchill’s demobilisation scheme. This information was required, it was stated, to set up an ‘efficient intelligence service’ to enable the War Office to ‘keep its finger on the pulse of the troops’. The answers stated that the troops would assist the civil power; were satisfied with Churchill’s scheme; but would not break strikes. They would go overseas, but not to Russia, ‘about which doubt exists’. They feared it would delay their demobilisation, did not know what the Russian campaign was about, who their enemy was, or what British policy was, and disliked what they heard of the climate. (There were also further questions about the influence of Trade Unions on the troops, the formation of Soldiers’ Councils, and the source of agitation; but it is not clear what answers these further questions received.)

The General Staff finally decided later on the 8th that in the ‘present temper’ of the troops and country, it would be ‘very risky’ to send more troops to North Russia. ‘Our policy has been gravely attacked…before any troops are sent out, it seems necessary that an atmosphere should be created.’

Thus, when the Prime Minister returned to London that evening from Paris, the Russian problem, which all had agreed had to be resolved as soon as the Peace Conference opened, was in an even worse state than before. The failure of the Prinkipo proposal was now leading not only to political but also to military drift. For as the munitions and supplies and equipment began to stream out to South Russia and Siberia, the troops themselves, it seemed, would not budge. To prevent the War Office being drawn even further into the Russian quicksands, the War Cabinet now simply had to lay down a firm military policy—much more concise than Lord Milner’s principle of November 14 last.
War or Peace: Churchill’s proposal

South Russia

In early February, while Allied policy drifted in both London and Paris, events in South Russia continued to develop unrestrained, and a struggle now ensued between the British and the French for control of the White Russian forces.

On the Don, the situation was lamentable. By February 4, General Poole had reported a general retreat by the Don Cossacks from Lugansk and Kachalinskaya (just south of the middle Don) back to the line of the lower Don; some regiments had arrested their officers, others had returned to their villages. Unless they received some Allied support to restore morale, they might not even hold this line, Poole warned. Denikin then wired to Milne to ask point-blank why the Allies had occupied Russian territory, where their presence was ‘either not called for at all, or where these forces might be considerably smaller’ (i.e. in the French zone) and yet had repeatedly refused for some three months to send Allied troops to the Don, which had caused the collapse of the Don Cossacks, and a ‘revulsion of public opinion’ against the Allies, as Denikin put it, turning Poole’s pet phrase against him. But by now, it had been decided to recall General Poole, who had categorically disobeyed his orders by promising Allied troops to Denikin.¹

Denikin also sent Milne a message for Kolchak. His immediate objectives, he stated, were to reconstruct an united Russia, to destroy the Bolsheviks, and to establish a Russian Government by the will of the Russian people. ‘Allied troops [have] landed at Sebastopol, Batoum and Odessa’, he added. But he gave little indication of his plan of attack, and merely defined their respective spheres of operation. ‘As it is base of Red Army, it is necessary that Astrakhan be in my sphere’, he informed Kolchak, which should extend to the Caucasus, where British troops were now cooperating with the Volunteer Army.¹

This, unfortunately, was hardly true. On February 1, Sir Henry Wilson had informed Milne that in the Caucasus he was to enforce the Armistice terms, to secure the Batoum-Baku line, and help the British flotilla control the Caspian. Milne was not to concern himself with military operations in the Caucasus, Sir Henry Wilson made clear; and it was up to Denikin, if he so wished, to arrange for a link with Petrovsk, which Britain had only occupied to assist the British
flotilla. But on the 8th, there came news of serious trouble in the Caucasus. The Volunteer Army had just landed south of Sochi on the Black Sea coast, which the Georgians were instructed to evacuate in 24 hours. Milne asked for immediate permission to make it clear to Denikin that Britain would only supply him if he followed British policy. Two days later, Milne wired again that Denikin claimed that Sochi had never belonged to Georgia, and that he was perfectly entitled to seize it; the Georgian Government, Milne now added, was Menshevik. But on February 11, Balfour confirmed to the Foreign Office that if Denikin tried to force Georgia back into the Russian Empire, British support would at once be withdrawn.

But in the Kuban, the situation was improving rapidly. The Bolsheviks, harried by the Volunteer Army, fled to Vladikavkaz, where typhus was raging. On January 31, as General Wrangel approached, the Bolsheviks panicked, and streamed out along the road to the Caspian. On February 4, Vladikavkaz finally surrendered after bitter fighting, and only a few stragglers escaped to Grozni, where they were bombed and machine-gunned by the RAF from Petrovsk. When the Kuban campaign was over, Wrangel went to congratulate his troops, passing ‘convoys of prisoners, marching by one after the other in an uninterrupted stream. Ragged, starving, with bare, bleeding feet, thousands of these poor creatures dragged themselves along with an escort of only a few Cossacks…There were many stragglers. They marched along, stumbling and falling, getting on to their feet again with the greatest difficulty and attempting to go on, then sinking down, never to get up again. I went into a signalman’s hut at an abandoned railway station. Eight men were lying there, pressed close against one another. I asked one of them where the station-master was. He did not answer. I questioned one of the others—no reply. I stooped down to them. They were all dead except one who was in the last throes; he was clasping a dying dog to his chest, trying to get some warmth from it…In one station I was shown an ambulance train; there were forty-four carriages full of dead bodies, and not one live man amongst them. One carriage was devoted to Sisters of Charity and doctors—dead, too, of course.’

As soon as Wrangel returned, he too went down with typhus. Poole was replaced by General Sir Charles Briggs, whom Churchill charitably describes as a ‘competent cavalry officer’, but who knew nothing of Russia. ‘Not being a politician and being one of those soldiers who have never recorded a vote and never will do so whilst on full pay, and not having any leanings towards diplomacy, this order came to me somewhat as a shock’, Briggs candidly admitted; and the French officers, whom he met at Salonika, said they were sorry for him going to join Denikin, because England was ‘backing the wrong horse, and that he was a reactionary’.

When General Briggs arrived at Ekaterinodar to replace General Poole, he was horrified to find the local inhabitants dying at ‘appalling rates’ from typhus. (His first surprise, however, had come on arrival at Novorossisk, accompanied by eleven British transports, when he met the British Consul, a Norwegian Jew called Guilmayden, who told him that the Bolsheviks were ‘quite good and
sound’, and that any goods sent to Denikin should be sent via him, as he could pay for the labour, while Denikin could not. Briggs, somewhat startled, found that even the Bolsheviks were mystified by this man and his wife, who owned a number of ships herself, and was ‘greatly addicted to philanthropy’; as a result of her ‘remarkable talents’, and frequent visits to all the Commissariats, she had managed to have them exempted from seizure, and to obtain oil for them at fixed prices, some of which the British Consul had then been sending to the Crimea for the use of German submarines. Briggs got rid of this man and his wife very quickly.)

The make-shift hospitals at Ekaterinodar, Briggs found, had no drugs, no linen, no medical supplies, and the verminous patients both from the front and from the town were all huddled together, so that the wounded rapidly went down with typhus. There were no disinfectants to disinfect clothes, railway carriages or even the hospital trains. Typhus was rampant. Briggs on arrival was thus besieged by hundreds every day, demanding repatriation to their various homes; all asked him if he knew what Bolshevism really was, ‘and if the hearts of the Allies were absolutely dead towards poor Russia’.

On February 15, Briggs was received by Denikin, and told him, in the name of the British Government, to stop fighting the Georgians, and to turn his attention to the Bolsheviks; for which purpose, he said, England was sending him arms and equipment for 250,000 men. He then read out to Denikin a personal wire from Sir Henry Wilson, saying that he had followed with ‘greatest interest the early anti-Bolshevik campaigns of the Volunteer Army against stupendous odds and the prodigious feats of arms performed by your valiant troops’. He urged all Russians to sink their political differences and unite until a proper Russian Government could be formed; which unity, he hoped, would soon produce a force strong enough to ‘isolate and finally strangle the scourge of civilisation in the shape of Bolshevism’.

There was a slight pause. Then Denikin asked him if he had finished what he had to say. Briggs said he had. Denikin stated angrily that he was a Russian, and would not take orders from an alien government when the Georgians invaded the Black Sea province, which was Russian territory. He had given orders that they were to be thrown back over the frontier. If the British Government wished to withdraw their support because he did not obey their orders, they could; he would simply fight on, as before, on his own resources. ‘He asked me whether England and the Allies knew what Bolshevism was, and I said I believed they did, I had not been to England for a long time’ stated Briggs, ‘but I had read a good deal about it in the papers; to which he replied: “If they do not want Bolshevism at their own doors, they will find it cheaper to fight it in Russia. If they do not, some day they will live to regret it”’. Denikin had by no means finished. What were meant by British and French zones of influence? What were the British doing in the Caucasus, and who invited them to go there? Were they, like the Germans, after the oil? Did the British understand that the German system was to create small states in Russia, so that they might the more easily devour them? If
the Allies were friends of Russia, he did not see how they could adopt German
tactics. ‘He felt it very hard that aliens should enter his country without his
permission and give him orders.’ At Tiflis, he went on, Russia had war material
for a whole army, which the British had handed over to the Georgian
Government. At Odessa, there were arms and equipment for another army,
which the French had seized. In Roumania, there was enough for three armies,
which the Roumanians had seized, ‘whilst he had to act as a beggar and implore
England to send these needful necessities. He asked me many further searching
questions, and I felt more like a prisoner at the bar than head of a Mission’, Briggs
admitted. ‘At this interview I came to the conclusion that Denikin was a strong,
clear-headed and determined man who would stand no nonsense from anybody’, he added.4

In the Ukraine, Petlura’s bands were now attacking the German troop trains
leaving Russia; and the Germans, on being disarmed, either had to join Petlura or
be massacred. But the French troops, who were to replace the Germans, were in
poor shape. On January 28, on his way back to Odessa, Reilly passed through
Sebastopol, where he found the Bolsheviks making great efforts to subvert the
French troops; ‘money, women and all forms of entertainment are the principal
means of propaganda…to create a feeling of home sickness’, he reported, and
these efforts were having some effect; but the Bolshevik agitators could make ‘no
headway at all with the British sailors’. In his final report, Reilly pressed for the
return of the Black Sea Fleet to the Russians. Just before the Armistice, the
Germans had handed over most of the ships to the Ukrainians; and just before
the Allies entered the Black Sea, the Russians were given the remainder, which
the Allies at once seized, and sent to Constantinople. The Russians, stated Reilly,
now wanted them back.5

On January 29, as 3,000 more Greek troops arrived at Odessa, General
d’Anselme (the local French Commander) landed with a French force at
Kherson; but, as Franchet d’Esperey wired apprehensively to Paris, there were
some 3,500 well-armed troops and a squadron of cavalry under a General
Gregoriev, one of Petlura’s commanders, near Nicolaiev; and while a violent anti-
French campaign was being ‘almost entirely carried on by Jews’ at Odessa, the
French were being reproached throughout the Ukraine for their assistance to the
Volunteer Army, ‘who are “the representatives of Tsarist reaction”’.6

For the French Command ran into trouble as soon as they induced the
Ukrainian Directorate to raise the blockade of Odessa to allow French troops to
occupy the main Russian towns nearby. When French Chasseurs went to guard
the local waterworks, which brought the Odessa water supply from the Dniester,
the local people accepted them. But when some Volunteers came to requisition
straw, there was a revolt, 4 were killed, and French cavalry which came to their
aid lost 6 men in the general mêlée; and 2 French regiments had to come and
restore order. This trouble was repeated in various other towns nearby. At
Tiraspol, the local people entirely refused to recognise the authority of the
Volunteers, and the French had to organise a special militia, and hand the town
over to the Municipal Council. At Kherson, the Petlurist garrison was besieged by a Volunteer detachment from the Crimea. To avoid a conflict, the Captain of a British cruiser in the harbour urged the Volunteer Commander not to enter the town, and the Municipal Council had this appeal placarded up at every street corner. But the Volunteer Army press, for anti-French propaganda purposes, then reproduced this poster, with the British Captain’s signature altered to that of a French officer. Except at Odessa, in fact, where the French warships imposed French authority on the Volunteers, nowhere was it possible in the Ukraine for the French to protect Denikin’s authority, without running the risk of a revolt. The French thus refused to allow the Volunteers to organise any mobilisation.\(^5\)

By late January, the French Command had decided to come to terms with the Ukrainian Directorate, if only to save Kiev from the Bolsheviks; and the CNUR (the centre party), which now felt ‘cool towards Denikin and the Volunteers’, proposed the formation of a local Russian Government at Odessa, to include all the four Odessa parties, and some Ukrainians, which would control the Ukraine—Denikin should only nominate the War Minister and Foreign Minister. Colonel Freidenburg (the French Chief of Staff) put the French case to Margulies thus: ‘We must save Kiev from the Bolsheviks. If Petlura’s troops can do this, I will help him. If I had two divisions, I would have managed without Petlura’s troops, but I haven’t; and I wonder if I ever shall. I’m not afraid of Petlura’s claims. I’ll give him this ultimatum: I will help the Ukrainians, in return for which they must agree to subordinate themselves to me unconditionally.’

On February 4, as Freidenburg went to see the Ukrainian Directorate, which was now at Vinnitsa, the CNUR was informed of French plans in more detail by a Russian officer called Andro, who was in close contact with General Berthelot (the French Commander in Roumania). Andro, a somewhat mysterious character, who came to play a large part during the brief French occupation of South Russia, had been a deputy in the first Duma, and had held a government post in the province of Volhynia (just west of Kiev), where he had been a grain contractor. During the war, he had served as a Cossack officer in the Imperial Guards. After Brest-Litovsk, he had served under the pro-German General Skoropadsky in the Ukraine. At the end of the First World War, he had fetched up in Bucharest, where he had been in contact with Berthelot and Freidenburg; and raised a band of peasant irregulars, and fought his way back almost to Kiev. Then he changed his name, perhaps to shake off the stigma of his German connection, and called himself ‘Andro de Langeron’, claiming some connection with the old French family of Langeron, who were long resident in Odessa. (There seems, however, to have been another French officer called Langeron as well.) But the importance of Andro lies in the fact that he seems to have controlled the local grain trade around Odessa.

Andro now told the CNUR that the French wanted to create French volunteer brigades. For if there were any French losses in South Russia, there would be a storm of protest in Paris, and French troops would have to be withdrawn. But though French officers had volunteered, there had been no
response from the Russian troops. Berthelot thus wanted to use Petlura’s troops, but would prefer ‘not to get this project mixed up in general politics’. Berthelot, in fact, was carrying on his own policy in South Russia.6

But on February 4, Petlura pulled out of Kiev, and an ‘unhealthy and impudent-looking’ Bolshevik rabble streamed in, together with some wild-looking cavalry, with ‘cigarettes in their mouths’, noted a surprised Volunteer Army agent, left behind to report to Shulgin in Odessa. Even more surprising was the Bolshevik transport—peasant sledges loaded with sides of bacon, machine guns, trunks, gun wheels, cartridges, bicycles, hides, gramophones, more cartridges. ‘The soldiers smoked during the roll-call’, the agent reported in disgust. ‘For days long they wander about in groups with their guns on their shoulder, playing on a harmonium…often get drunk, bring women home, dance and…and heaven knows where they get time for service.’

Petlura’s abandonment of Kiev caused general alarm. Scores of people rushed down to the Crimea, and there were many demands for passages to France. In Odessa, as the plan for a local Russian Government had been turned down by the Volunteer Army and by Denikin himself, the CNUR now suggested a Civil Council to advise the Russian Governor, whose authority could be extended as Denikin approved. But Denikin, fearing French dominance, turned this down as well.7

Reilly and Hill had by now returned to Odessa, where Reilly found the Polish banker Jaroszynski (through whom the British Government had bought control of the major Russian banks in early 1918). Reilly at once introduced him to Picton Bagge (the British Consul), who wired to London on February 4 asking for permission for him to come to England. But the Foreign Office (who had temporarily forgotten about the Bank schemes) replied that they had ‘no reason for wishing Yaroshinski [sic] in this country’. Bagge thereupon wrote a private letter to Sir George Clerk (a senior official at the Foreign Office), in which he highly commended Reilly’s reports on the various anti-Bolshevik forces in South Russia. Colonel Keyes, however, had a’great aversion’ to Reilly, probably like other British officers, because of his great ability (and no doubt because he was Jewish); but ‘with all the high Russian Generals at Ekaterinodar, Reilly is persona gratissima’, Bagge wrote. Both he himself and Reilly were very surprised at the wildly optimistic report on General Krasnov and the Don Cossacks by General Poole. ‘I gather that the latter’s well-known weakness for female society has much to do with his point of view’, he wrote.8

Bagge went on to describe the very bad conditions at Odessa, where the French had managed to alienate the sympathy of all parties and classes. People in the bazaars were muttering that the ‘Germans beat us, but there was food and order. Our so-called saviours have come, and we are starving’. There was no authority whatsoever, as the French Command received their instructions from Bucharest, but had not yet even got a direct telegraph line; while the siege which they had permitted at Odessa ‘by a few hundred bandits, called Petlura’s republican army’, had led to a lack of everything. French officers were continually
in the society of rich Jews and Jewesses, and ‘close relations between French and Jews is infuriating the Russians because most of the Jews are germanophile’, but ‘d’Anselme is to be seen at the theatre arm in arm with a Jew lawyer, who has been expelled from the society of lawyers’, while ‘the so-called Consul, Henno, is the “comble”, he has a mistress called Mme. Bernstein, whom her husband will not divorce. He introduces her as his wife, and, as such, had the effrontery to bring her to a public dinner at which she was in the place of honour, and I next to her’, wrote Bagge angrily. ‘She is with him at all interviews he gives’, he added. (There is reason to believe that this lady was not unconnected with General Berthelot, to whom she reported on Henno’s interviews, and on his messages to the Quai d’Orsay.) ‘The French’, Bagge complained, ‘seem to have no idea of how to handle the Russians. They are too uncertain and easily get angry. They either ask too politely or demand too roughly.’

He went on, ‘I consider it of the greatest importance that Carl Yaroshinski should be given a visa for England, and every facility extended him. His influence is enormous both in Russia and Poland, and his interests almost fabulous. He wants to have England behind him, and British interests demand that we should have him with us’, he wrote. But as he was a ‘great talker and at least 2 hours are required for the overture, lunch is better than office hours, and dinner than lunch’, he added.

On February 6, Bagge wired that he had sent Hill, to whom he had entrusted his letter, to London the day before with all Reilly’s reports, and he should arrive about the 16th. Having seen the reports, Bagge strongly urged that any decisions, especially about the Don, be suspended until Hill reached London. Reilly, he wired, was now studying the situation in Odessa, where all the necessary information about the Ukraine could be obtained. When Reilly’s work was completed in South Rusia, Bagge suggested that he return to London, unless the Prinkipo Conference actually took place, which Reilly should attend, as his relations with all Russians were so good.

R.A. Leeper, of the Political Intelligence Department at the Foreign Office, minutcd as follows on Bagge’s wire: ‘As Mr Reilly was a Secret Service agent in Russia & is well-known to the Bolsheviks as such, I think his presence at Prinkipo would only cause trouble. The Bolsheviks could easily use his name in connection with the Lettish conspiracy in Moscow last summer so as to discredit our delegation in the eyes of Labour here. Otherwise as a political agent I think he has done extremely good work.’

Bagge thereupon wired again: ‘Mr Reilly has finished his work here and is awaiting instructions. In my opinion it is advisable that he should return home to discuss matters verbally.’

On this, the Russia Department minuted: ‘I have discussed the question as to whether Mr Reilly should return to this country with Mr Leeper, [who] says that Reilly told him when he left, that if possible he would try to work from Odessa up to Kiev, and then either round via Kharkov to Ekaterinodar, or else right through Central Russia up to the Archangel coast. I understand that Mr Reilly is
prepared to risk his life in this venture, but that he would like some form of recognition for the risk taken.

‘I submit that we should reply to Mr Bagge inquiring whether Mr Reilly considers that he can do any more useful work in Russia, and whether in his opinion he thinks it would be practicable for him to work his way into Central Russia and come out via Finland or Archangel.’

Gregory, head of the Russia Department, added: ‘I understand that Mr Reilly is one of the most useful agents we could have in Russia, and it seems a great pity he should return.’ Gregory suggested consulting Bagge about this. Sir Ronald Graham initialled this.

But the British Delegation at the Peace Conference wired to the Foreign Office: ‘Mr Reilly’s attendance at a Prinkipo Conference would be useful. He should return to Odessa for the present.’ The Foreign Office, therefore, had no option but to repeat this wire to Bagge. ‘Do you think he [Reilly] could do any useful work in Central Russia?’ they added. Bagge’s reply is not recorded.

French troops had by now finally reached Nicolaiev to find 12,000 German troops still there taking orders from HMS Sentinel in the harbor, and Bolshevik workmen with nothing to do. To lessen Bolshevik influence, the French Command tried to restart the factories and reopen the shipyards. But both the Municipal Council and the German Command told the French that they would not be responsible for order if the Volunteers appeared in the streets; while if they made any requisitions, there would certainly be a revolt. The French thus had to stop the Volunteers entering Nicolaiev at all.

But though the French now controlled the main Russian towns around Odessa, and the railways in between, there was total chaos in the Ukraine. On February 8, Franchet d’Esperey wired to Paris that at least 30,000 of Petlura’s alleged 40,000 troops were quite undisciplined and semi-Bolshevik; he only had some 8,000 reliable Galician troops near Kiev, and another 4 good regiments near Kharkov. Gregoriev (who was highly independent) had some 3,000 men near Nicolaiev, while a young anarchist leader called Nestor Makhno had a further 4,000 near Ekaterinoslav. French morale was worsening, and French troops were very unpopular with the German colonists around Odessa, and with the Odessa population itself. Bolshevik propaganda, in fact, was having a considerable effect. Bolshevik agents got at French troops in cafés and cabarets and worked them up against the ‘Russian Tsarists’, whom they were supporting. They also brought out a daily news sheet in French, which was found every day in the barracks. Bolshevik propaganda also played on the local popular desire for vengeance aroused by German support of the wealthy against the poor. There was no proper information service at Odessa, and no powerful radio station to relay news, and French ships only received very irregular messages from Paris; but German and Bolshevik wireless messages were received all the time, and spread false news. As Odessa was quite out of touch with Ekaterinodar, all this created a feverish atmosphere.
Denikin’s ramshackle administration (‘son entourage, lamentable ramassis de côteries et de chapelles’, as Jean Xydias calls it) did nothing to improve matters. For as the Volunteer Army counter-espionage simply employed professional blackmailers to uncover Bolshevik agents, every official request had to be accompanied by a gift, and any illegal favour could be purchased. When a Bolshevik agent was arrested, the clandestine Bolshevik Committee offered a sum of money, whose value depended on the importance of the prisoner, who was often released in a few hours. All this, coupled by police terror, soon induced the Odessa population to ask the French Command for protection from the Volunteer Army. The whole situation, in fact, was chaotic. Though Denikin turned down all French proposals for any sort of Russian Government, the French declined for some time to intervene. But when Gregoriev suddenly went over to the Bolsheviks, and advanced with an armoured train on Kherson, the French again turned to the Ukrainian Directorate; and requests for cooperation soon became sharp demands.

In Odessa, the clash now came between the French Command and the Volunteer Army. All the Russian parties and newspapers had strongly criticised the Prinkipo proposal; but on February 14, when Shulgin’s paper had added a violent attack on the French Command as well, General d’Anselme (the French Commander) suspended the paper for several days. Thus the first French intervention in Russian internal affairs was an attack on the liberty of the Russian press, and on a matter which had aroused strong patriotic feelings. Grishin-Almazov (the Russian Military Governor) wrote d’Anselme a strong letter of protest, which was also published in the Russian press, and d’Anselme at once withdrew the suspension. But General Berthelot then informed General Sannikov (whom Denikin had just appointed as Russian Commander in South West Russia) that he was to obey d’Anselme’s orders, and that all Russian ships in particular were to remain under French control. Denikin rejected this angrily.

Picton Bagge strongly urged an agreement with Denikin for economic reasons. For owing to the murder of the landowners and the widespread ravages of Petlura, there would probably be no harvest in the Ukraine this year, unless seed could be obtained from the Kuban; but the seed could not be sown unless the French and the Volunteer Army cooperated in restoring order in the areas they had freed.

But by the 15th, the French had switched horses. ‘The French have made a deal with Petlura’, recorded Margulies. As Colonel Freidenburg (the French Chief of Staff) had returned to Odessa convinced that the Ukrainians would shortly retake Kiev, it was agreed that if Petlura replaced his colleagues in the Ukrainian Directorate with Russians, let the French control the entire Ukrainian economy, especially the railways and finance, and handed over his better Galician troops to the French Command, the French would support the Ukrainian delegates at the Peace Conference. This at once led to wild speculation in francs, and ‘everything points to a well known Odessa trio—two Odessan bankers and a businessman from Kiev’, noted Margulies. Denikin had not been consulted.
But Franchet d’Esperey was concerned about his right flank, and in his reports to the French War Office underlined the deteriorating situation of the Volunteer Army. Since November, he pointed out, they had received neither munitions nor supplies, and Denikin’s troops in the Donetz were not strong enough to guard both the Donetz frontier and the Mariopol-Nikopol line; and since the Don Cossacks to their right were not holding either, the position in the Donetz basin was hopeless.  

Denikin tried to settle his difficulties with the French at Odessa by taking personal command of the situation there. On February 10, Clemenceau wired the War Office in London that Denikin (who did not recognise the British and French zones) had told Franchet d’Esperey that he was going to transfer his headquarters, for political and strategic reasons, to Sebastopol, from where he could command all Russian forces in South Russia. Since Denikin was now in the British zone, Clemenceau asked the War Office for their view on this move, which he thought open to objection.  

The War Office replied to Clemenceau on the 13th that they approved Denikin’s move to Sebastopol, and thought that he should then command all Russian and Allied forces in South Russia, including French troops at Odessa, and that the British Mission should continue to assist him; but the War Office could not approve the Ukraine or any other border state being forced back under Russian rule. Clemenceau replied the same day that he now reserved judgment on Denikin’s move to Sebastopol. French troops in the Ukraine were not to intervene, and must thus remain under General Berthelot; for they would become involved in military operations if they came under Denikin’s command. But if Allied troops did engage in joint operations with Russian troops, he added, the C-in-C would have to be an Allied General, since the Allies were supplying and financing the Russian forces. Denikin thus remained firmly where he was—in the British zone.  

**Paris**

In Paris, the Peace Conference was now reaching a minor climax. President Wilson was soon to leave for a brief visit to America; and the Armistice terms had to be renewed before February 12. Was the Allied blockade of Germany to continue? The Council of Ten resolved to draft a preliminary treaty at once containing military, naval and air terms only; the military terms were to be ready within 48 hours.  

On February 11, two Englishmen in Paris were wondering what to do about the Prinkipo proposal. Philip Kerr (the Prime Minister’s private secretary), who had remained in Paris, wrote to Lloyd George that day to warn him that since he had left Paris, the Peace Conference had begun to drag owing to the ‘deliberate obstruction’ of the French. The day before, Balfour had asked Clemenceau what he was going to do about the Bolshevik reply to the Prinkipo proposal. ‘Clemenceau said to him: “Do you love me, and if so will you do something for
me?” Balfour replied that he loved him to distraction, and would do anything in reason to please him, upon which the old man said: “Will you postpone the Prinkipo question until after the President leaves?”

Kerr warned that this would kill the Prinkipo Conference, which would now need ‘some drive’ to carry through, which Kerr urged. For it was ‘pretty certain’ that peace could be arranged on the Russian frontiers, which would be a ‘tremendous gain,’ while the Allies also had a ‘fairly strong hand’ in stopping fighting within Russia. They could simply tell Kolchak that Allied troops would be withdrawn in the spring, which would mean that Kolchak ‘will collapse and the Bolsheviks will overrun Siberia’; while the Allies could tell the Bolsheviks that they would not send them any supplies, nor allow them to trade. But if the Prinkipo proposal lapsed, the Allies would have to withdraw in four to six weeks’ time from Siberia anyhow, and later from North Russia, and abandon the White Russians to ‘annihilation if not massacre’. Kerr also warned Lloyd George that the French were concocting a scheme with Savinkov and Benes (the Czech Foreign Minister) for a Czech Army, supported by Russian prisoners from Germany, to march on Moscow from Poland, ‘if they succeed in knocking the Prinkipo proposal on the head’. The Allies must therefore decide which alternative to adopt, or whether they were ‘simply going to drift’.

Meanwhile Brigadier-General Spears (head of the British Military Mission in Paris) was thinking about an alternative policy to Prinkipo. It was increasingly clear, he wrote that day to the CIGS, that the Allies must take a ‘very strong’ political line on Russia. It was sheer folly to pour ‘immense quantities’ of valuable supplies into Siberia and South Russia, while undermining Russian morale by inviting them to a discussion with their opponents. The Allies must have no relations with the Bolsheviks, must continue to support and recognise the White Russians, help restore trade; and set up an Allied Council for Russian Affairs with executive power. The First World War had taught that success meant unity of effort, which meant unity of control. It was disunity which had caused the failure of Allied intervention in Russia.

London

Lloyd George was more concerned about the Bolsheviks in England. ‘Winston said he had had a long talk with L.G. last night’, recorded Sir Henry Wilson on February 9, ‘& there was no doubt that L.G. thought both railways & miners were coming out on great strikes, & that there was going to be a trial of strength between the Govt & the Bolsheviks.’

The Prime Minister and the War Cabinet, when dealing with the Russian problem, now had to cope with Parliament as well. For on February 11, the new House of Commons assembled to hear the Loyal Address. Of the 707 seats, the Coalition had 478 (made up of 334 Unionists, 133 Liberals, 10 National Democrats, 1 Independent); and the non-Coalition had 229 seats (made up of 63 Labour men, 48 Unionists, 28 (‘Wee Free’) Liberals, 73 Sinn Feiners,
7 Nationalists, 4 Independents and 6 others). The Coalition thus had a majority of 249. But Lloyd George’s reliance on the Conservative vote was thus total. (The programme of the new National Democratic Party—which had recently been founded to unite Labour support behind the Coalition, and was backed by anti–Socialist Trade Unions—was somewhat vague: ‘We detest the idea of a class war, and maintain that Merrie England can be created by other and better means,’ they stated publicly. ‘We will cooperate with any party in the state in the passing of legislation for the uplifting of the people.’ On Russia, they followed the Tories.)\(^{13}\)

During the debate following the Loyal Address, the National Democrats voiced disquiet about Prinkipo. But Colonel Josiah Wedgwood (an opposition Liberal) praised the Prime Minister for trying to negotiate with the ‘hot broth of Russia’. The British people were completely opposed to further intervention, he said, and Britain already had too many ‘little packets’ which were ‘careering about’ in Russia. Clemenceau’s speeches were translated word for word from Edmund Burke, who had dragged Britain into war against the French Revolution. This ‘perpetual warfare’ in East Europe was simply creating Bolshevism.\(^{14}\)

(Colonel ‘Josh’ Wedgwood DSO, aged 47, had been the liberal member for Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1906, and had served on the Mesopotamia Commission in July 1916. Though he had gone in early 1918 on an abortive mission to Siberia, he in fact knew little about Russia; but he was to emerge as the leading opposition spokesman on intervention in the House of Commons. Having previously served both at Antwerp and at the Dardanelles (where he was seriously wounded), he did have some real experience of Churchillian military blunders, and soon thought he saw another looming up in Russia. Privately, the two were good friends; and in Their Finest Hour (London, 1949, pp.306 and 509) Churchill refers to him not only as an old friend, but a ‘grand-hearted man’.)\(^{15}\)

On the 12th, after the War Cabinet had discussed food distribution in the event of a railway and transport strike, the First Sea Lord spoke about the Baltic. In Finland, they were ‘actually contemplating a raid on Petrograd’, and the Latvians were also mobilising. He was asked to submit a paper on the Baltic.

Churchill had by now made up his mind on Russia. Britain was committed all over Russia, he said, and British troops were entitled to know what they were fighting for, and to proper support. But everything was crumbling. In North Russia, the Bolsheviks were stronger every day, and the situation might soon be serious. In South Russia, Denikin’s troops had deteriorated, and Krasnov’s Don Cossacks were discouraged, due to lack of Allied support. Things were the same in Siberia. Allied delay had disheartened everyone. If Britain was to withdraw, she should do so at once. If she was to intervene, larger forces should be sent; and he believed Britain ‘ought to intervene’.\(^{15}\)

Lloyd George remarked that it was the military view that this entailed the despatch of a million men in the spring. Churchill deprecated intervention on that scale, but felt that Britain must keep the White Russian forces alive. Lloyd George repeated that successful intervention entailed the despatch of a million men from Odessa or through Poland. The other policy was just to send supplies;
but he was told that they would be no use on their own, and 150,000 Allied troops would have to be sent as well. Churchill repeated that large-scale intervention was impossible, but Britain ought to support the White Russians as best she could.

‘The alternative was to withdraw at once.’ Chamberlain (Chancellor of the Exchequer) thought their chances had greatly diminished in the last few weeks. They had expected far more Allied support than had been sent. In South Russia, their troops were untrustworthy. In North Russia, they were useless without Allied troops, and the position there was serious. In Siberia, British troops were very tired, and the Czechs unwilling to fight. Greek troops were only being sent to Odessa as Venizelos (the Greek Prime Minister) wished to retain Allied goodwill. Could Britain let them remain there, unsupported, if they could not hold Odessa?

(There had, in fact, been a lengthy discussion on the Greek Army just prior to this discussion on Russia. ‘We were not concerned in the employment of Greek troops at Odessa’, stated Chamberlain, ‘and, in his opinion, ought not to take any responsibility for financing them.’ Sir Henry Wilson said it was a matter of ‘high policy’, and would depend on a decision on Allied intervention in Russia. The Prime Minister retorted angrily that the Allies were ‘determined not to intervene in Russia. There was not a single advocate of intervention amongst the Allies’. After further discussion, Sir Henry Wilson remarked that as he understood it, the Allies were not to go to Odessa; but as the Greeks were there, the matter should be settled in Paris. There it was left.)

Lloyd George now hedged, and asked for the military view on all these various policies, especially on the despatch of supplies, and the defence of the border states—which did not now include Siberia, he added. If Britain sent supplies, what would it cost, and would more troops have to be sent? Churchill said the War Office would prepare the necessary paper; but if Britain could not help the White Russians, the sooner they were told the better. But if the Allies would not, Japan and Germany certainly would; and in a few years, Germany, Bolshevik Russia and Japan would form the most powerful combination the world had ever known. Lloyd George refused to be drawn. The White Russians had just as many troops and guns as the Bolsheviks, and would certainly have made headway if the Russian people had been behind them, he stated. But though the Bolsheviks did not have a proper army, the White Russians had done nothing.15

Curzon emphasised that the Bolsheviks were winning largely because the Allies had no Russian policy. The Czechs complained of Allied indecision, while the White Russians thought the Prinkipo proposal raised the Bolshevik Government to their level. The Prime Minister had suggested three policies. Though large-scale intervention was impossible, the War Cabinet should seriously consider a ‘bolstering policy’, before deciding on complete withdrawal. Though only volunteers could be sent to Russia, they were not only British; Scavenius had spoken of Swedish volunteers. Chamberlain warned that as President Wilson was clearly opposed to any intervention, France and England would have to bear the
whole cost. The First Lord interrupted that John Ward’s recent letter had caused a great stir, and made people think that British troops in Siberia had been forgotten.

Churchill insisted that the War Office be ‘definitely instructed’ on Russian policy. They should be told either to intervene, or to supply the White Russians, or to withdraw. Lloyd George refused to be pinned down. The War Cabinet, he stated, had received no alternative plans. America was also obliged to defend the border states, he added. Chamberlain stated firmly that no one believed that the White Russians could possibly stand on their own. The Prime Minister concluded by asking that the War Office paper should be ready for discussion in London next day, and in Paris on Friday (the 14th), as the matter must be decided before President Wilson left for America on Saturday. They could not reach a decision in London, but could make the Cabinet’s view known in Paris. Sir Henry Wilson was thereupon instructed to give a military view on intervention; evacuation; a ‘middle policy’ of supporting the White Russians; and the defence of the border states.\textsuperscript{15}

The Prime Minister then replied to Philip Kerr that a decision on Russian policy must be taken before President Wilson left Paris, ‘and I don’t want a decision arrived at in Wilson’s absence. He ought to share the responsibility whatever it is. If there is a fair chance of securing the attendance of the parties at the Conference I would [‘will’ crossed out] proceed with Prinkipo, but I would [‘will’ crossed out] not go there to meet Bolsheviks alone.’ He added in pencil: ‘That would answer no useful purposes. But the refusal of the others must be taken into a/c. They won’t confer & cannot fight’ The Cabinet had just asked the War Office to advise on three different policies, and he would telephone the Cabinet decision to Kerr the next day.\textsuperscript{16}

He added, ‘Bolshevism cannot help winning with such poor material as that which is opposed to it. Now you can exact some terms which would guarantee better government in Russia; a few months hence Bolsheviks may [‘would’ crossed out] be triumphant and absent’

Sir Henry Wilson that day took up the matter of reinforcements for North Russia (whose despatch the Prime Minister had approved on February 5, as soon as he had heard of the Bolshevik reply to the Prinkipo proposal). ‘I quite realise the risk of sending reinforcements to Russia’, he minuted to Churchill, ‘but I also realise the serious risk of disaster to our forces if they are not sent…Nothing will excuse us for not doing our utmost to help our soldiers in North Russia or anywhere else…We think that if an atmosphere of help to our comrades was created, coupled with the knowledge of officers volunteering in great numbers, much of the difficulty would be overcome’, he wrote. ‘The matter is very urgent’ But Churchill did not see this file for some days.

That afternoon in Paris, however, President Wilson agreed to send more American troops to North Russia. As he did not have time to discuss it with the Prime Minister, he put his name to a memo for the War Cabinet, which was forwarded to the War Office in London next day.\textsuperscript{17}
In the House of Commons that afternoon (February 12), when the debate on the Loyal Address was resumed, the Tory right wing (upon whose support Lloyd George had to rely) attacked him. (They were led by Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. Walter E. Guinness, DSO and bar, aged 39, the Unionist member for Bury St Edmunds since 1907; and Sir Samuel Hoare, the Conservative member for Chelsea since 1910, also aged 39, who had been head of the British secret service in Russia during the war. Hoare was to become Air Minister after Lloyd George’s fall in 1922, and then Foreign Secretary in the 1930s. During World War II, he was British Ambassador in Madrid; and then entered the upper House as Lord Templewood. As Lord Moyne, Guinness was later leader of the House of Lords; and then Minister of State in Cairo, where he was assassinated by Jewish extremists in 1944.)

Lieut.-Col. Guinness stated that Bolshevism was a ‘purely German enterprise’, and Britain should remain at war with the Bolsheviks until she could dictate terms both to them and to the Germans. He denounced both the Prime Minister’s first proposal and the Prinkipo proposal. The ‘loyal people in Russia’ did not ask for British troops, only British supplies, with which the Bolsheviks were well provided ‘owing to German help’.

Sir Samuel Hoare complained that Britain had been ‘backing one horse one day and another horse another day’. Britain needed a consistent Russian policy. The Prinkipo proposal was just another sign of ‘uncertainty and hesitation’. He urged the Prime Minister ‘boldly to take sides’. Though British troops could not be sent, Britain could give the White Russians great support by providing both munitions and food. If Britain promised to send food to Petrograd provided a democratic government was set up, ‘the Bolshevik power would fall there tomorrow’.

The Prime Minister denied that there had been any proposal to recognise the Bolsheviks. Hoare urged the British Government to make up its mind. ‘Have we ever backed the Bolshevik?’ On the contrary, Britain had given the White Russians ‘far more than moral support’. She had given them guns, supplies and finance. ‘So that what he asks we should do we have done, and more.’ He did not wish to take the matter further, since it would shortly be discussed in Paris; but he asked, ‘Does it mean men?’

An Hon. Member: ‘Yes.’

The Prime Minister: ‘I like my hon. Friend for his courage, because…it is no use giving them support unless you give them real support. What does that mean? Are you to confine it to money? Are you to confine it to munitions? Or are you to send men?’ America would send nothing, ‘and therefore it practically falls upon France and ourselves. Has anyone calculated the cost?’ The third policy was the brutal one of ‘letting the fire burn itself out’. Hoare thought Britain could send food to Petrograd.
Who would distribute it? ‘My hon Friend says he knows Russia. When did he leave Russia?’

Sir S.Hoare: ‘More than a year ago.’

The Prime Minister: ‘Anyone who follows events knows there has been a vast difference in Russia since then…’ If Britain sent food to Russia, ‘there is no one to distribute it except a Bolshevik Government’. There were two real difficulties. First, ‘everybody who has ever interfered with Russia has come to grief, whether the Swedish Monarch or the French Emperor’. Second, the Allies had to reach agreement, which ‘takes a good bit of doing’. The Prinkipo proposal was ‘something short of…allowing the fire to burn itself out’. This was the practice on the north-west frontier of India, when there were ‘brigands and assassins to deal with, and when there is turbulence among tribes there, they are summoned very often by our Commissioners to see whether some sort of order can be restored when you want to avoid an expensive expedition’.¹⁸

Lt.-Col. Guinness: ‘What about munitions?’

The Prime Minister: ‘I do not want to say too much about that if I can possibly avoid it. We have not denied anything in that respect, but I do not wish to give away military information to the Bolsheviks. I would rather not be pressed’. He asked the House to turn occasionally from the newspapers to read about the French Revolution. ‘Is experience to teach individuals, and never to teach nations?’¹⁸

At noon on the 13th, the Prime Minister read out to the War Cabinet Sir Henry Wilson’s paper on the four different Russian policies, as requested the day before, which had not been ready in time for circulation before the meeting. Lloyd George complained strongly that it did not tell the War Cabinet what they wanted to know, as it said nothing of the cost; the War Office should have some idea whether £20,000 or £20 million were involved, he added sarcastically. The day before, Curzon had admirably summarised three ‘simple propositions’, while he himself had stated clearly that all the Allies agreed to defend the border states against the Bolsheviks, or anyone else who attacked them. (Lloyd George usually made remarks of this sort to mollify Curzon over something; but the reference here is unclear—perhaps he was merely ensuring that he did not side with the War Office.) Curzon, thus encouraged, joined in the attack. There was a military and a political programme, he said. The political one was recognition. But Britain had already recognised Esthonia, Poland and Denikin, and all the other border states as far as it could; and though Kolchak had not been recognised, Britain had sent ‘very friendly messages’ to him. What therefore did Sir Henry Wilson mean by ‘recognition’? (There is evidently an error here in the Cabinet minutes, as the
third alternative that Sir Henry Wilson was asked to consider is listed as ‘Recognition of Bolsheviks and material support’. This, one imagines, should be ‘Recognition of anti-Bolsheviks…’)\(^1\)

Sir Henry Wilson made no reply. Churchill stated that as it was out of the question to use large British and French armies, the only chance of making headway against the Bolsheviks was with Russian armies. They now numbered some 455,000 men (but this figure included Finnish, Estonian, Polish, and even some British troops!), and there were plans to raise this figure to one million: but unless they could be made into an effective force, there was no use going on. He would put this question to the General Staff: was it possible to get the Russian armies into a ‘fighting condition’ if a large British army could not be sent? He was not prepared to guarantee results, ‘because we had to deal with Russians,’ whose morale was poor; but if Britain did not reach a decision, there would be a succession of disasters, followed by wholesale massacres and the extermination of all Britain’s Russian supporters. If Britain could not give them effective support, it would thus be far better to decide now to quit, and tell them to make the best terms they could with the Bolsheviks, rather than leave British troops there, and go on with no policy. He did not agree with Prinkipo, but it was a plan; and if successful, would have led to something. If it was at an end, something else must take its place. He hoped it would be possible to reach a decision before President Wilson left for America.\(^1\)

At this, the Prime Minister read out his letter to Philip Kerr, in which he insisted that this be done. He then launched a further attack on the General Staff paper, which dealt with political and not military matters, when the War Cabinet particularly required a military opinion on a military question. Kolchak, for instance, had been defeated and lost Ufa and Samara before the Prinkipo proposal, while Scavenius felt that Denikin’s 10,000 troops were no use, and that the Cossacks would never leave their own lands. These should be treated by the CIGS as military facts. (They were not military facts, simply conjectures by Scavenius.) Lloyd George agreed that Britain could not send large British armies. Kolchak, he added, had made a great mistake with his *coup d’etat* and thus lost all moderate support. All this was omitted from the General Staff paper. And if political matters were brought in, they must be complete. Denikin, for instance, was adamant that the Ukraine could not be split off from Russia, while the only real force in the Ukraine was a national separatist movement. But he had a ‘perfectly open mind’ about supplying arms and equipment, ‘provided he could be assured it would be of the slightest use’.

Churchill insisted that the paper must be political, as the General Staff were not simply listing forces at Britain’s disposal. Britain was not dealing with certain facts, but trying to encourage the ‘wavering’ Russian forces, which were Britain’s only hope, and whose morale depended upon a decided and energetic Allied policy. Curzon retorted that the War Cabinet had expected the General Staff to propose a definite military programme for each Russian theatre, and he asked for detailed estimates of British material and financial support that could be given to Denikin.
and others. A wire had arrived that morning stating that Krasnov had been defeated, and had decided to evacuate the whole Don. At Omsk, British troops were in a precarious position, and he would like to know if the War Office* intended leaving them there. But if Britain left, Japan would take her place in western Siberia. Japan had offered to send 20,000 troops and so crush the Bolsheviks in two months, if Kolchak would hand over north Sakhalin, part of Kamchatka, and control of the Manchurian railway.19

Churchill stated that a paper would be prepared as required by the War Cabinet. He would ask the General Staff to state what were the best results they could hope for, if no Allied armies could be sent, but if an united declaration of war on the Bolsheviks was made in Paris. Unless the Allies made a whole-hearted effort within these limits, the Russian troops could not be made into an effective force. The paper would consider the prospects in the various Russian theatres. The Prime Minster trusted that the General Staff would note that Scavenius considered that the Ukrainian Army had never existed save on paper. The Bolsheviks, he added, were advancing on Novocherkask, and it was quite possible that Denikin’s troops were in too bad a state for any British supplies to arrive in time to save them. He trusted that the General Staff would also consider ‘without bias’ an Italian occupation of the Caucasus. The paper must be worked out in detail, and must show the cost.

Montagu asked if Britain could help the Russians both whole-heartedly and within limits: ‘The whole scheme was based on the admission that we should declare war on the Bolsheviks.’ If the few British volunteers got into difficulties, would Britain not have to send conscripts to extricate them? Churchill brushed this aside. He would tell the Russians plainly of the limits within which Britain would help them, ‘and if they did not like our terms they could reject them’. Britain must have a Russian policy to offer the country, and we must state that no conscript would be sent to Russia. The First Lord supported him. Britain was already committed to support the Russians, in fact in a bad position from which she could not escape. Evacuation was impossible in view of the Prime Minister’s statement in Parliament the day before. There would be no world peace until the Allies had combined to establish proper government in Russia.

Chamberlain, however, thought it possible to tell Kolchak that though Britain could not send British armies, she could provide material and financial support and British volunteers, provided the War Office thought there was a reasonable chance of success.19

(But the War Office had reported that day that British guns, tanks and 100 aircraft, together with arms and equipment for 100,000 troops, were either awaiting ships or already en route for South Russia; while a further 150,000 sets of

* There are some faint dots under the words ‘War Office’, and either an exclamation or a question mark in the margin. The reference on this copy of the cabinet minutes, which are marked ‘CIGS’, is perhaps to Neilson’s activities at Omsk in November.
equipment should be on the front in May. In Siberia, British arms and equipment for 100,000 troops had now been delivered, and a further 100,000 sets were being prepared; all of which should be on the front by early summer. It was added that the War Office were trying to send arms and supplies from Baku to the Uralsk Cossacks, who were coming down—to join Denikin—to Guriev on the Caspian, which was frozen until late March.)

Churchill added hastily that there would be no difficulty in finding the necessary volunteers. The Second Sea Lord said that Chamberlain’s policy had been tried out in the Baltic, where the British Admiral had been told to restrict his support to the supply of arms and naval support. This had worked in Esthonia. Little, however, had been achieved at first in Latvia, and arms had only been handed out quite recently. But the ‘limits of our policy had been very definitely laid down’. The Prime Minister said there would be complete Allied agreement on Esthonia, as the League of Nations would have to defend the small states. But he was ‘not in the least clear that the Russian people did not want something in the nature of Bolshevism’. They were tired of it in Petrograd, it was true, but not in other districts.19

At this, Sir Henry Wilson finally lost his temper. He could not submit a paper based on ‘such nebulous material’, he stated angrily. ‘He could not say what Poland would do; nobody could.’ Scavenius might say that Denikin and Krasnov were of no use, but General Poole (who was sitting beside the CIGS) held an entirely different view. It was, though, impossible to say what the effect would be on these Russian forces if an announcement were made tomorrow that Prinkipo had been abandoned, and that the Allies would let them exterminate the Bolsheviks. The Prime Minister had quoted Scavenius as saying that it would have no effect unless supported by Allied troops. Poole took the opposite view. The Prime Minister beat a hasty retreat. It was indeed a serious matter if the CIGS really felt that the whole thing was so uncertain that no one knew what might happen. It was Mr Keeling, who was just back from Russia, and whom he had seen the day before, who had told him that the workmen in Petrograd were sick of Bolshevism, though the peasants outside still feared that when the present regime fell, the land which they had got would be taken away from them. (Keeling was nominally a trade unionist, but in fact had been acting as a spy. Someone from the Foreign Office, however, described him as a photographer and mechanic, who had spent five years in Petrograd, and had finally escaped by walking the sixty miles to the Finnish border, and bamboozling the frontier guards.) Churchill said he thought the General Staff could advise what the chances of success would be if the Allies sent a ‘message of defiance’ to the Bolsheviks, and clearly stated what support they would give to their opponents. It was, he admitted, a forlorn hope; but if nothing were done, there would be certain disaster.

It was at this critical moment that General Poole was asked for his views. Denikin, he stated, was ‘not a great soldier’, nor even a good administrator, but he was thoroughly patriotic and enjoyed general respect; his subordinate
Dragomirov, however, was a ‘first-class soldier’. Both the Kuban and the Don Cossacks were already fighting well outside their own territories, though Krasnov was holding back his young troops to train them ‘for a campaign on Moscow.’ At present, he was retiring, due to a ‘slight reverse’. Curzon interjected sharply that a wire had arrived stating that Krasnov had ‘completely collapsed’, and that he had decided to evacuate the Don. Poole went on that he agreed with what Scavenius and General Franchet d’Esperey had told the Prime Minister about the need for Allied troops to support the Russian troops to make them really fight; but if Britain sent 150,000 Allied troops, the only result would be that 150,000 Russian troops would withdraw from the line. There was nothing the Russians would like better than to sit down and watch the British fight for them. It would be quite enough if we sent tanks and aeroplanes, and British personnel to man them; there was not the ‘slightest fear’ of their capture by the Bolsheviks. ‘At times the Russians fight extraordinarily well’, Poole went on. Some of the Volunteer Army’s exploits under Alexeiev were some of the ‘best efforts’ of the late war: ‘The Cossacks were well disciplined, well trained and well led.’

It is clear that the War Cabinet did not know what to make of Poole’s contradictory remarks. Curzon asked him what the Cossacks were going to do, and what was the most that Denikin could be expected to do, if provided with arms and equipment as proposed. To date, he had done nothing. Was he going to expand his operations? Poole said that up to now Denikin had been hard pressed by the Bolsheviks, but he would certainly launch a big offensive. He had been fighting successfully until he had to support Krasnov, whose ‘debacle was merely a question of nerves.’ But Kolchak must cooperate, there must be complete coordination. It would be quite enough if Britain supplied guns, as the Bolsheviks had never been ‘very serious fighters’. Surprise was everything with them. ‘The impression the Bolshevik gave him was that he was a man who wanted to live a long time.’ But they had some good Tsarist officers, who had been forced into service, as their families had either been captured, or were faced with starvation. Wrangel had spoken of great deterioration in the Bolshevik ranks, but this was true of both sides, as the whole of Russia was tired. The situation that led to Kolchak’s coup d’état was the same all over Russia. An SR Government was set up, which basically relied on extreme socialist support, and any moderate attempt to restore discipline at once aroused cries of reaction; it was thus impossible to form an army. From that point of view, Kolchak’s coup d’état was justified. He had always urged the Omsk Government to proclaim a programme. There would be no peace in Russia, stated Poole, until the land question was settled.

Chamberlain suggested that political conditions, such as a definite statement on the land question, might be attached to any Allied offer of military help. The Prime Minister agreed; it must be brought home to the peasants, who were largely illiterate, but who formed 86 per cent of the Russian people, as the Russian Generals, on whom Britain was relying, had no really popular movement behind them. Poole said this was not so in their own districts, for the Cossacks, who
were peasant proprietors, strongly supported their Russian Generals. This might be true, said Lloyd George, but it did not apply to the rest of Russia.  

Chamberlain then called attention to a wire from Picton Bagge in Odessa, outlining a plan of Allied economic support in South Russia. The Prime Minister retorted that it would be necessary to know the cost of these proposals, which involved guaranteeing the rouble, and thus a vast sum of money. ‘What he really wanted to know was whether, after fighting a whole year, it would be possible for the Allies to make any impression against the solid power of the Bolsheviks.’ Churchill reminded the Cabinet that in future Russia could no longer counter-balance German military power. If there was no proper Government in Russia, she would be claimed by Germany as a war prize. ‘Germany had only to sit tight’, he warned. ‘The Russian situation must be judged as a part of the great quarrel with Germany.’ Unless Britain helped the Russians, there would be a vast anti-Allied combination from Yokohama to Cologne. The War Cabinet thereupon requested the CIGS to prepare a paper ‘on the lines laid down by the Prime Minister’.  

After giving the War Cabinet the benefit of his rather muddled advice, Poole went on long leave, and retired to his house at Fowey in Cornwall, where he received a good many letters from J.D.Gregory at the Foreign Office, which usually began, ‘My dear General, I wonder if you could tell us what happened when…’ For Poole had left a quite unnecessary amount of confusion in his wake, and there were now many accounts coming back to the Foreign Office for settlement out of the dust and turmoil of the Russian Revolution. The big Bank Scheme was only one of many, and Poole had had his finger in all the various pies. Large sums remained to be accounted for, and the Foreign Office was anxious to pursue all the various people, British Red Cross officials amongst them, who had undoubtedly made off with official funds. If Poole can be exonerated for his part in the Bank Schemes of early 1918 in Petrograd, he cannot be excused for his part in the attempted coup at Archangel in September, nor for promising British troops to Krasnov. To each of Gregory’s letters, a reply eventually came back from Fowey in Poole’s crabby handwriting, but only with vague, rambling explanations; most of the people involved thus escaped.  

On the afternoon of February 13, Churchill asked Sir Henry Wilson to answer certain very detailed questions for the Cabinet on every aspect of the Russian situation, assuming: that the Prinkipo Conference would not take place, and that the Allies would ‘instead make a united appeal to all loyal Russians to exert themselves to the utmost against the Bolsheviks’; that no British conscripts could be sent to Russia; and ‘as a variant’, that all the Allies, except the United States, agreed to this.  

These were the questions:  

1) Within the limits aforesaid, what means are there of aiding the Russian Armies to wage war upon the Bolsheviks?
2) What are the actual measures which the General Staff would propose, generally and in each of the theatres?
3) What numbers of non-Russian soldiers, and particularly of British soldiers, would be required?
4) At what do you estimate the cost
   (a) of obtaining and maintaining the British personnel;
   (b) of maintaining the Russian Armies that are in the field or are required to be raised?

Finally, after raising every possible variant in regard to question two, Churchill asked whether, if the General Staff’s needs were met, ‘there is a reasonable prospect of animating the Russian Armies so as to secure success in the Summer and Autumn of 1919?’

He then sent this questionnaire straight to Lloyd George, with this note: ‘Do you wish for a Cabinet. Are we to go to Paris. The answers cannot be given for 48 hours, tho many are available.’ Lloyd George looked it through, adding in pencil after Churchill’s concluding question: ‘If so what kind of success do you contemplate as possible.’

But the matter was considered so urgent that Lloyd George, Churchill and Sir Henry Wilson had a further very private discussion at 6.30 pm that evening in the Prime Minister’s room at the House of Commons. Churchill admitted that he was ‘baffled by the Russian situation’. Lloyd George said he was too, ‘and did not see what could be done’. He rejected Hoare’s suggestion to send food to Russia; it would simply fall into Bolshevik hands. When Churchill urged that President Wilson be made to face the situation before he left France, Lloyd George suggested that Churchill ‘go to Paris immediately and try and obtain a decision’. Churchill said that he would put some ‘direct and searching questions’ rather than make proposals. ‘There must be some intelligible policy which could be explained and defended in the House of Commons’, he said.

Lloyd George said he was in favour of going on with the Prinkipo Conference, ‘but not if only Bolsheviks were to be present. The idea of Prinkipo had been to call brigands and their victims together’. Sir Henry Wilson asked if the Polish troops in France could be sent back to Poland. Lloyd George replied that the Poles were fighting the Germans. ‘The moment that quarrel was arranged, then General Haller and his troops would be sent to defend Poland against the Bolsheviks.’ But Sir Henry Wilson persisted; if Britain wished to beat the Bolsheviks, she must use ‘every weapon on every possible front’. Lloyd George said there was a ‘fundamental distinction’ between supporting the border states, and interfering in a civil war. At this, Churchill asked if Lloyd George meant that Britain should withdraw her support from Kolchak and Denikin, and concentrate on Esthonia and Poland? Lloyd George agreed, if they were attacked, ‘but only on that condition’. He did not believe the Bolsheviks wanted Poland; the difficulty was that the Polish and Esthonian frontiers had not been defined. Churchill pointed out that Britain was now fighting for Denikin and Kolchak.
The reason for the original British support had been absolutely sound. The question now was, ‘having been co-adventurers, could we throw them over?’ Lloyd George asked whether, ‘short of throwing them over’, Britain was bound to send or keep her troops there, save for volunteers? Churchill agreed that conscripts could not be sent, but felt that the troops already there must remain as long as required. But when Lloyd George suggested asking Colonel John Ward’s troops to volunteer, Sir Henry Wilson feared that few of them would be left by the spring, as typhus was rampant in Omsk.

Lloyd George then stated that he had ‘no objection to supplying the [White] Russians with ammunition and equipment’. Sir Henry Wilson asked if he meant that British troops ‘ought to be cleared out?’ Lloyd George said he did. Sir Henry Wilson said there were 525,000 White Russian and Allied troops at present in Russia; and there should be some 1,100,000 by May 15, ‘but he did not for a moment believe that the promises would be kept’. Lloyd George retorted that by then the Bolsheviks might have a million men instead of 300,000. Sir Henry Wilson warned that there was ‘no chance of seriously damaging the Bolsheviks unless we put our backs into the effort. We had ample quantities of war material which could be sent to Russia, much of which would probably be lost’. But Lloyd George thought ‘we might run the risk of the loss. The [White] Russians had a certain moral claim upon us, and we might see that they did not fail for lack of material. If the country did not want to be saved, we could not save it’, he stressed. Churchill agreed that ‘Russia must be conquered by Russians’.  

(Unfortunately, the end of this document is missing; but the request for Churchill to go to Paris is clear enough, and the limits of his mission are fairly clear.)

Paris

Next morning, Churchill circulated his long questionnaire to the War Cabinet, omitting Lloyd George’s pencil notes, and warning that it could not be answered for some days. He and Sir Henry Wilson then left for Paris, where he was shown both General Spears’ note urging the setting up of a Russian Council to coordinate Allied policy, and the War Office file strongly urging the despatch of more reinforcements to North Russia. ‘Policy first. Atmosphere second. Then and not till then Action. There is no Policy at present’, he scrawled across the file in red chalk; and then, accompanied by Sir Henry Wilson, marched into the Council Chamber at the Quai d’Orsay to find President Wilson laying the League of Nations’ Covenant before the Peace Conference. ‘Mrs Wilson was present!’ noted Sir Henry Wilson in disgust, and ‘one delegate after another talked nauseating nonsense about peace’.  

After some two hours, President Wilson (in a hurry to catch his train to Cherbourg) rose from the table, and the meeting was breaking up, when Balfour introduced Churchill, who explained that he had been sent to Paris to ‘obtain some decision’ on Russian policy. The Prime Minister wished to know if the
The Prinkipo proposal was to be followed up; or if not, what policy was to take its place. He felt there would be no point in going to Prinkipo if only the Bolsheviks came. But if the Prinkipo proposal did not lead to a cease-fire, the present situation might last indefinitely.23

Clemenceau retorted sharply that such an important matter could not be settled at a short and ‘unexpected’ meeting. But President Wilson turned back, and leaning on Clemenceau’s chair, replied that Allied troops were doing ‘no sort of good’ in Russia. They were simply helping local Cossack movements, and ought to be withdrawn. But as the Prinkipo proposal was simply meant to restore peace in Russia, he was quite willing to allow ‘informal’ American envoys to meet Bolshevik delegates, in spite of their insulting reply. If the other Russian Governments would not come to Prinkipo, ‘why should not the Allies imitate Mahomet, and go to them?’

Churchill admitted that complete Allied withdrawal was a logical and clear policy, but it would pull out the linchpin and completely destroy the White Russian Armies. There was then some desultory discussion about sending supplies and volunteers. But President Wilson retorted that they would ‘certainly be assisting reactionaries’ in some areas. At present, there were too few American troops in Russia, who could not be reinforced; but if they were removed, many Russians might be killed: ‘It was certainly a cruel dilemma.’ But Allied troops would have to be withdrawn some day. After some discussion about Bolshevik forces on the Siberian and Archangel fronts, Churchill asked if the Peace Conference would agree to arm the White Russian forces, if the Prinkipo proposal failed. President Wilson hesitated to express any definite opinion. He had explained how he would act if alone, but would ‘cast in his lot with the rest’. He then hurried off to his train.23

Churchill considered this a ‘very satisfactory note’ for the President to end on, and that they were ‘entitled to count on American participation in any joint measures which we may have to take’. (But Philip Kerr informed Lloyd George that the minutes were ‘not so definite’.)

Kerr then joined Churchill and Sir Henry Wilson for dinner; and after some discussion, Churchill decided to ask Balfour to make two proposals: first, that an Allied Commission should go to Prinkipo if there was a ceasefire within ten days; second, that a Russian Council should at once be set up to advise in ten days’ time on military action ‘to bring the Bolshevik regime to an end’. While Sir Henry Wilson drafted the proposal for the Russian Council, Churchill himself drafted a wire to the Bolsheviks, and asked Philip Kerr to draft one also.

Churchill and Sir Henry Wilson then wired General Milne (the British Commander at Constantinople) to confirm Balfour’s advice that British support to Denikin would at once be withdrawn if he continued to attack Georgia and force her back into the Russian Empire. Such aggression would prejudice the Peace Conference against all Russian claims to disputed territory. Milne was simply to protect the Batoum-Baku railway when the Turks left, and prevent any Bolshevik
attack from the north. He was not to interfere politically, but to advise what British policy in the Caucasus should be.24

On the morning of the 15th, with President Wilson safely on the high seas, General Albi, Foch’s Chief of Staff, informed the Peace Conference of the French military plan for the defeat of Bolshevism. At present, the Bolsheviks were advancing on all Russian fronts, save in Esthonia; only the Volunteer Army was holding fast in good order. This Bolshevik success was due to more men and material, improved organisation and intensive Bolshevik propaganda; and to White Russian disunity, poor equipment and low morale. But as the Red Army showed ‘des causes irrémédiables de faiblesse’ (no proper spirit, poor command, no supply services, bad communications, little technical equipment), a few Allied troops under good command could easily overcome it at small cost, if equipped with tanks and aircraft, which the Bolshevik troops would be unable to resist.

To enable Russia to ‘regenerate herself’, Bolshevism must first be encircled on all fronts. On the Archangel, Siberian and Don fronts, White Russian troops merely needed supplies. But from the Baltic to the Donetz, the Allies must take action. On the northern sector, German troops could be used ‘temporarily’ in East Prussia; and the new Polish Army must be reinforced by the Polish divisions in France. But in the Ukraine, as the 3 French and 3 Greek divisions now there could only hold the coastal ports between the Dniester and Don rivers, 10 divisions of l’Armée de l’Orient (3 French, 3 Greek, 1 British, 1 Italian, 2 Roumanian) should ‘reoccupy the valley of the Donetz, and protect the Ukraine from the north’.25

The various White Russian Armies could then be reinforced. Allied arms and supplies (especially tanks, aircraft, armoured trains) should be sent out, via an united Russian High Command, to obtain a ‘crushing superiority’ over the Bolsheviks. Second, Russian prisoners in Germany and Russian troops in France should reinforce both General Denikin in South Russia, and General Yudenitch in the Baltic, and form new Russian Armies near Prague and in the Ukraine, when the Allies had occupied the Donetz. There should then be a general attack to break Bolshevik morale. The ‘decisive effort’ should be an advance on Moscow by Denikin’s troops (the ‘least unsatisfactory anti-Bolshevik elements’) via the Ukraine and the Donetz, where the Allied Army could supply and support them; this would be coordinated by an attack by the Russian Army from Prague, supported on the left flank by the Polish Army, and by the Siberian Army, who would link up, on the River Volga line, with Denikin, whose rear was supported by British troops in the Caucasus. General Yudenitch could attack Petrograd later, when the thaw came, and if food could be provided for its people. But the whole operation must be conducted with the ‘utmost energy, and as speedily as possible, so that results may be attained before the end of 1919’, warned General Albi; “The unstable morale of the Russian Armies does not, in fact, permit us to anticipate prolonged effort on their part”25

At this point, Clemenceau prevented General Albi from going any further. Such, anyhow, was Foch’s Napoleonic design, in which the star role was reserved
for the French, who were to ‘collar’ Denikin, while the British remained quietly in the background.

The same day, the Quai d’Orsay sent a copy to the British Military Mission in Paris, on which Colonel Kisch pencilled, ‘This is a good appreciation’, and sent it to London on the 17th. Pinned to it in the War Office file is this note by the General Staff, dated February 24, for Sir Henry Wilson: ‘When you were away, S of S directed to circulate General Albi’s paper to the War Cabinet. I have made out a covering note for your signature, if approved.’ This, dated the 20th, stated that it would be ‘very dangerous’ to use German troops, but it was ‘reasonable’ to supply the White Russians with German war material; though Britain should continue the despatch of supplies both for military reasons, ‘and with an eye to future trade relations’. Second, occupation of the Ukraine and the Donetz was obviously a sound measure, provided there was also economic relief, and it could be carried out with less than ten divisions. But it was very doubtful if Russian prisoners could be organised in Prague and Poland.

On the bottom of this slip, in another hand: ‘M.O.5. Keep till called for.’ But it never was. In Sir Henry Wilson’s own hand, there are also the first few words of an undated memo on Versailles paper:

Note for Cabinet.

Pending a decision on the larger policy to be pursued in Russia I ask for… Then in another hand underneath: ‘M.O.5. I think this is dead.’ And it was.

Foch’s plan certainly intrigued Churchill. That morning, when the draft notes to the Bolsheviks by Churchill and Philip Kerr were compared, it was found that Churchill’s draft was addressed solely to the Bolsheviks, who would first have to assure the Peace Conference that they had ceased fire, before the White Russians were ‘invited’ to do so; while Kerr’s draft followed the Prinkipo proposal, and was addressed to both sides, and stated that a refusal to cease fire would cause a rupture in Allied relations. Both were then shown to Balfour, who preferred Churchill’s draft.26

About mid-day, Philip Kerr wrote to Lloyd George that Churchill’s proposal would come before the Peace Conference that afternoon. He thought Churchill’s approach the right one, provided it gave ‘every inducement’ to the Bolsheviks to accept an armistice. The defect of the Prinkipo proposal was that the Allies, ‘while actually fighting side by side with Kolchak & Co’, suddenly professed ‘complete neutrality’ at the Peace Conference. Kerr thought the new proposal would bring the Prinkipo issue to a head, and he approved setting up a Russian Council, as Churchill wished. ‘But I cannot conceal from you’, he wrote, ‘that in my opinion Mr Churchill is bent on forcing a campaign against Bolshevik Russia by using Allied volunteers, Polish and Finnish and any other conscripts that can be got hold of, financed and equipped by the Allies. He is perfectly logical in his policy, because he declares that the Bolsheviks are the enemies of the human race and must be put down at any cost. Personally as I think you know, I am against
such a policy because, to my mind, it must lead to the Peace Conference taking charge of Russian affairs, and if they do that it will end in revolution in the West.’ Lloyd George should thus watch the situation ‘very carefully’, warned Kerr, ‘if you do not wish to be rushed into the policy of a volunteer war against the Bolsheviks in the near future.’ Kerr drew a thick pencil line down the margin.\(^{26}\)

That afternoon, with Balfour’s approval, Churchill made his ‘two-pronged proposal’ for a wire to be sent to the Bolsheviks to cease fire within 10 days from February 15, whereupon the White Russians would be asked to do likewise; and for an Allied Council for Russian Affairs to be set up at once, and report when the time limit was up. Lansing and House (the American delegates) both agreed to the despatch of the wire, but urged that the formation of the Russian Council be deferred until Monday, the 17th.

But Sonnino (the Italian Foreign Minister) thought the military question ‘most urgent’. So did Clemenceau, who argued strongly that Lloyd George’s proposal had definitely broken down. The Peace Conference should extract itself as simply as possible. He would say nothing, but Churchill’s draft would do if shortened. He favoured setting up the Russian Council. If Russia were left to her own devices, she would rapidly fall to Germany. But a cordon sanitaire would eventually make the Russians ask the Allies to intervene. They must decide at once on military policy in Russia. Balfour urged that the Bolsheviks be compelled either to cease fire, or to refuse to negotiate. When House supported this, Clemenceau simply asked them both to get the Allies out of ‘this Prinkipo business’ as simply as possible.

Sonnino stated that he had been right all along. As the Bolsheviks had not ceased fire, and the White Russians had not accepted, the matter was at an end. A further message, with a time limit of 10 to 15 days, would only do more harm; by then, the situation would only be worse. The Russian Council should be set up. But when Clemenceau supported him, Churchill said that the Prinkipo proposal should not be abandoned until the military experts had reported, and other plans were ready. Lansing and House agreed. (In *Russia 1919*, Churchill is made to state: ‘The British Government wished it to appear that they had acted fairly by the Bolsheviks.’ But in his wire to Lloyd George, Churchill states that he urged that, having made it clear that the Allies were trying to end the bloodshed, ‘we should not make a sharp turn which would appear to be breaking off negotiations abruptly’.)\(^{27}\)

Sonnino argued that even if the Bolsheviks agreed to a ceasefire and came to Prinkipo, it would be impossible to discover in 10 days whether the fighting had actually stopped; while it would have still further disorganised the White Russians. The Bolsheviks had been given up to February 15, and had not ceased fire. ‘The prestige given to Bolshevism was a real disaster’, he said, and they should be given no more. Everyone, in fact, save Sonnino, had forgotten the date. (‘I was not aware of this’, Churchill informed Lloyd George ‘having come so newly into the business.’) As all now felt very strongly that a ‘perfectly fair’
breaking-off point had been reached, Balfour proposed that both matters be deferred until Monday, the 17th. This was agreed.\textsuperscript{27}

Churchill then put the gist of all this in a long telegram to Lloyd George, and enclosed the draft wire to Moscow, and the proposal for the Russian Council, whereby a ‘continuous and concentrated study of the Russian problem will be secured and that unity of command and control which you introduced into the Western theatre’. The Russian Council should at once consider the ‘kind of composite question’ which he had put to the General Staff, and report at once. If Prinkipo fell through, the Peace Conference could then ‘take a definite decision whether to clear out altogether or to adopt the plan’. He added, ‘Note please that I have made it perfectly clear throughout that we can in no circumstances send men by compulsion to Russia.’ The War Cabinet should see the paper by General Spears, which was available in the War Office. Churchill would have a further talk with Balfour next day.\textsuperscript{28}

Owing to cypher difficulties, the wire could not be sent that evening; and on Sunday, he wired to Lloyd George again that he would send the text by King’s Messenger so as to reach him by 7 pm that night, and if possible by aeroplane as well, in which case it should arrive about noon.

On the 16th, Philip Kerr (mindful of Bullitt’s Mission to Moscow) wrote a short note to Balfour: ‘Won’t it be a great mistake to break off relations with the Bolsheviks altogether? Once we have done that we have only three alternatives: war on Soviet Russia; evacuation—both equally bad—or to go on…backing our friends just enough to keep them alive and no more.’ The defect of the Prinkipo proposal was that while fighting ‘with Kolchak’, the Allies pretended to be neutral; ‘Let us now abandon the pose of neutrality and deal with the Bolsheviks as one belligerent to another.’ The Allies should tell them that they had no wish to attack Bolshevik Russia, but would ‘stand by our friends’, and not let the Bolsheviks ‘eat them up’. They should answer Litvinov’s proposals, and give the Bolsheviks their terms if they sent delegates to Helsinki or Sweden. ‘This seems to me an honourable and clear-cut proposal’, wrote Philip Kerr. ‘We are bound to defend Kolchak & Co’, he added; ‘We are surely not bound to conquer Soviet Russia for them.’ Once there was peace, Bolshevism would probably rapidly decline, for they could dictate terms for the despatch of supplies, which would ‘spread the light of day’ throughout Russia. ‘I don’t believe the Bolshevik regime can long stand up against these’, he wrote.\textsuperscript{29}

But Balfour proceeded cautiously. Though apparently convinced that the Red Army would win that summer unless there was an internal Bolshevik collapse, he merely asked Churchill to take the lead in the discussions next day, as he had been present at the recent lengthy Cabinet meetings, and had definite instructions. ‘I will, of course, give you all the assistance in my power’, he added.

That afternoon, Churchill wired Lloyd George\textsuperscript{*} again that after ‘further careful consideration’, he had decided not to wire to Moscow at present; as the time limit had already expired, Britain need not ‘show our hand immediately’. It would be better for it to be sent after the Russian Council’s report, which might
of course be negative: ‘In that case we shall have to quit’. Balfour had told him to handle the matter, and would help; and unless Churchill heard from Lloyd George, he would act ‘in the sense here indicated’. But until the Russian Council reported, ‘we really do not know where we are’.29

Philip Kerr then warned the Prime Minister that as the Peace Conference would certainly next day decide that the Prinkipo proposal had lapsed, Lloyd George was now ‘bang up against’ Churchill’s plan for an anti-Bolshevik war with ‘allied volunteers, tanks, gas, Czech, Polish and Finnish conscripts and the pro-Ally Russian Armies’. (Philip Kerr has again drawn a thick pencil line in the margin against this paragraph.) Kerr’s own view was that it would be a ‘fundamental and colossal mistake’ to be drawn into war with Bolshevik Russia. They would become responsible for a Russian Government for a ‘considerable number of years’, because ‘Kolchak, Sazonov & Co will certainly never be able to stand alone’. But they had some obligation to Kolchak and Denikin, ‘and I don’t think we can honestly clear out and leave them in the lurch’. They must therefore either make terms for them, or give them enough support not to be overrun. The Prinkipo proposal was ‘fundamentally right’, but the method of contacting the Bolsheviks was ‘not perhaps very wise’. But he still thought the right course was to ‘get into relations with the Bolsheviks now’. And he developed the point which he had made to Balfour, and enclosed the note.29

Lloyd George, who was down at Walton for the weekend, received Churchill’s wire, together with the draft wire to Moscow, on Sun afternoon; and he at once replied to Philip Kerr: ‘See Churchill and tell him I like the cable which it is proposed to send [to the] Bolsheviks.’ But he hoped the alternative programme would not commit them to any ‘costly operations’, since he had understood that Churchill only intended to send out volunteers and surplus supplies. This had to be made clear. ‘There is only one justification for interfering in Russia—that Russia wants it.’

Later in the evening, Churchill’s proposal for the Russian Council arrived. Lloyd George (who had by then presumably received Philip Kerr’s letter) was quite horrified. ‘Am very alarmed at your second telegram’, he wired straight back* to Churchill, ‘about planning war against the Bolsheviks. The Cabinet have never authorised such a proposal’. They had only contemplated supplying the White Russians, ‘and that only in the event of every effort at peaceable solution failing’. A military inquiry was all right, but they must remember the cost. He begged Churchill not to commit England to a ‘purely mad enterprise out of hatred of Bolshevik principles’. It would simply strengthen Bolshevism in Russia, ‘and create it at home’. The French were not safe guides, owing to their many small

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* Sent at 2.18 pm, and received at the War Office at 4.10 pm, for transmission to the Prime Minister. Churchill had seen Balfour by then.

* Both these wires were despatched at 10.40 pm on Sunday night, the 16th.
investors who had put money into Russian loans, and would dearly like the British to ‘pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them’. Churchill must also remember the ‘very grave’ labour position in England. ‘Were it known that you had gone over to Paris to prepare a plan of war against the Bolsheviks, it would do more to incense organised labour than anything I can think of? Churchill should stand by his ‘first proposals’, subject to Lloyd George’s comments on them. ‘Please show these telegrams to the Foreign Secretary’, he added. That night, Lord Riddell came to dinner. ‘Winston is in Paris’, chuckled the Prime Minister; ‘He wants to conduct a war against the Bolsheviks. That would cause a revolution!’

All this irritated Sir Henry Wilson in Paris. ‘Peevish wire in early from Lloyd George’, he noted on Monday morning; ‘Winston quite calm. I fancy L.G. is getting jumpy about the strikes.’ At noon, when the British Empire Delegation considered Churchill’s proposal for the Russian Council, Balfour admitted that the Allied position was ‘illogical, confused and embarrassing’, but warned that White Russian morale would be shattered if it was announced that the Allies were to withdraw. Churchill argued that if they rejected the ‘bolstering’ policy and withdrew, Japan would support Kolchak, whereupon America and England would oppose Japan; and Germany would step in and seize the prize. (He argued that there was thus ‘no distinction morally between the case of the border states and Russia itself. Nor was it possible as a practical military problem to make such a distinction; the two hung together’. This was, of course, quite incorrect; and had been, and was to be, the subject of close discussion in London.) Churchill drew his usual alarming picture of a ‘predatory confederation’ from the Rhine to Yokohama, menacing India. He had ‘never in any period of the war felt so anxious as he felt now’.

Borden (the Canadian Prime Minister) stated flatly that the ‘Russian pot would simply have to boil’. Canadian troops should leave Siberia and Archangel. In fact, all Allied troops should leave Russia at once. Churchill replied that the Murmansk and Archangel forces were bound together, and could not withdraw until June. In Siberia, Canadian troops had already been withdrawn to Vladivostok. He pointed out on a map the ‘vast areas of Russia from Perm to the Pacific that had been dammed off from the Bolsheviks by a very small number of troops’. (This was sheer fantasy; neither British nor Canadian troops were involved in the fighting in any way at all.) Complete Canadian withdrawal would entail a British withdrawal as well, and a Bolshevik advance of some 5,000 miles across Siberia up to the Japanese area in the Far East. Balfour urged them to come to a decision. Hughes (the Australian Prime Minister) stated firmly that Russian policy was already settled both in London and Paris. The Prime Minister had stated that it was impossible to intervene: ‘No one would dispute this conclusion.’ But it was finally agreed to support Churchill’s proposal for the Russian Council that afternoon.

Churchill then wired Lloyd George* that as far as the military inquiry was concerned, there was no difference between ‘my second telegram and my first’. In
accordance with Lloyd George’s views, ‘which I perfectly understand’, the ‘limited character’ of British support would be made clear. It seemed better not to send the wire to Moscow until the Russian Council reported. ‘We might otherwise be in the position of being unable either to fight or parley’, he explained. ‘My second telegram is really more tender towards Prinkipo than the first because I am afraid to close that door without first making sure that there is another one open. You need not be alarmed about the phrase “planning war against the Bolsheviks”. We are, as you pointed out at the Cabinet, actually making war on them at the present moment.’ The intention was simply to assess the available resources. ‘Believe me I understand all your difficulties. I only wish I could see a means of solving them.’

On Lloyd George’s instructions, Philip Kerr then showed both the Prime Minister’s wires to Colonel House, who entirely agreed with them; he was even opposed to the formation of the Russian Council, as it would certainly be ‘boomed by the French’ as the start of an anti-Bolshevik war, and so force both England and America ‘immediately to declare their Russian policy’. French policy would drive the Germans and the Russians together, and so cause a ‘great aggressive combination’ from Yokohama to the Rhine, and he ‘could not imagine what possessed them in advocating it’. (This was the currently fashionable phrase, as the arguments about the French emigrés, and signing a peace that was no peace, had in their turn been. Philip Kerr had presumably told House in some detail of what had passed at the British Empire Delegation meeting.) House favoured keeping in touch with the Bolsheviks, and thus ‘gradually bringing them to terms’.

When Philip Kerr told both Balfour and Churchill what he had done, Churchill was ‘very indignant’, Kerr reported, since it both revealed the War Cabinet’s ‘internal disagreement’ to the Americans, and ‘made it seem as if you had no confidence that he would represent your views’, Kerr informed Lloyd George. Sir Henry Wilson and Churchill, in fact, took a harsher view of Lloyd George’s conduct. ‘This was a low down trick, as this showed that L.G. did not trust Winston’, noted Sir Henry Wilson; ‘Winston was very angry.’

Finally, at 3 pm, Churchill made the formal request to the Peace Conference that the matter be considered by the Allied military advisers. ‘House objected to this’, records Sir Henry Wilson, ‘and A.J.B. backed House. Clemenceau exploded. House said neither Americans nor material would be allowed to go to Russia. Tiger said, that being so, the others would discuss Russia without America… Winston and I and Sonnino were entirely in sympathy with Clemenceau. I said nothing, but Winston spoke a little, and well.’ Balfour, who had ratted, then tried to resolve the matter by suggesting that the military advisers should report separately, instead of jointly. And after Clemenceau had commented on the

* Sent at 1.10 pm, and received at the War Office at 2.45 pm, for transmission to the Prime Minister.
‘strange spectacle’ of the victorious nations being afraid even to remit to their military advisers a matter of ‘vital importance to Europe’, Churchill reported to Lloyd George, this was agreed. (The minutes of this meeting are pointedly omitted from ‘Russia 1919’.) Sir Henry Wilson was furious, and ‘advised Winston to go home as he was doing no good here and would get tarred, so he went tonight’. Philip Kerr reported back to Lloyd George: ‘Your various telegrams and messages…have, I think, had their effect.’

Next afternoon, House asked Philip Kerr if the Prime Minister was satisfied with the previous day’s results. Kerr said he was sure Lloyd George was ‘entirely satisfied’ that an anti-Bolshevik campaign had been ‘definitely abandoned’, but was anxious that some other policy should take its place. House asked what Lloyd George’s policy was. ‘I said that I did not know further than that you were against an attack on Soviet Russia’, reported Kerr (which was indeed a terrible indictment of Lloyd George). House then asked Kerr if he had any suggestions. Kerr said he ‘personally’ would negotiate with the Bolsheviks, if they ceased fire. If the Allies could settle for Kolchak and Denikin and the border states to have ‘free control’ of their own affairs, and for ‘Allied agents’ (presumably concession-hunters) to enter Bolshevik Russia, they would have amply fulfilled their obligations, and struck a ‘deadly blow’ at Bolshevism. If the Bolsheviks refused, they would then have a ‘clear case’ to ask for volunteers to help save anti-Bolshevik Russia ‘from Bolshevik aggression’. House agreed; and at once drafted instructions for William Bullitt (the young American delegate who was to go to Moscow), which Lansing (the American Secretary of State) signed the same day.

Philip Kerr asked the Prime Minister whether what he had told House ‘meets with your view or not’. Thus, the ‘liberals’, or rather the liberal Philip Kerr (who had no understanding of Bolshevik endurance), and Lloyd George, wearing his ‘liberal’ coat, had won the day. But what a hollow victory! They were simply one step behind Churchill. If the Bolsheviks again refused, the Allies would again be back where they were before, and with a considerable drop in prestige, and would then have to quit the field—without expert military advice. This would be ‘utterly indefensible’, Churchill wrote to Lloyd George in his last letter from Paris. ‘You must forgive me putting these cruel facts before you when you have so many anxieties and burdens to bear. I am sure your courage will not shrink from facing them in their ugliest aspect.’

But this letter was never sent.

**Moscow**

Did the Bolsheviks want peace in any sense at all? Lenin at this moment was drafting a military paper for presentation at the Eighth Party Congress in March. The imperialist war, he wrote, as the Bolshevik party had long foreseen, could not have ended in any peace at all, but merely led to ‘international combinations, under the guise of the League of Nations and so forth’, which concealed the germs of new imperialist wars leading to a ‘grandiose war of the exploited labouring
masses, headed by the proletariat, against the exploiters and against the bourgeoisie', both within certain countries, and by revolutionary countries against bourgeois countries. This was the natural end-product of the class struggle. Thus, he wrote, the Bolshevik party ‘decisively rejects as reactionary the philistine illusions of the petty-bourgeois democrats...and the hopes for disarmament under capitalism and opposes to all such slogans and their like, which in practice merely play into the hands of the bourgeoisie, the slogan of the arming of the proletariat and of the disarming of the bourgeoisie, the slogan of the total (and pitiless) suppression of the resistance of the exploiters’.

36
On February 19, President Wilson wired from aboard the George Washington that he was ‘greatly surprised’ at Churchill’s recent proposal on Russian policy. At the last hurried meeting in Paris, he had only meant that he would not take any ‘hasty separate action’, he stated. ‘It would be fatal to be led further into the Russian chaos.’

With this Presidential disavowal, the way was now clear for the two Americans, William Bullitt and Lincoln Steffens, to leave for Moscow, with the tacit approval of Lloyd George, for discussions with the Bolshevik Government. In Paris, Colonel House mentioned to Steffens some questions that he would like answered, ‘especially by Lenin’, explaining that Bullitt would concentrate on political questions, ‘which Lloyd George would give him’. Steffens interpreted this as a ‘subterfuge’ to give Colonel House the chance of repudiating him later, if necessary. Steffens was probably quite right. Unfortunately, no prior arrangements seem to have been made to repudiate Bullitt.

On the 21st, Philip Kerr (without reference to Lloyd George) handed to Bullitt, ‘as personal suggestions of his own’, a statement—in his own hand—containing eight conditions (including a general ceasefire, an amnesty for the White Russians, and the withdrawal of Allied troops), upon which the Allies might ‘resume normal relations with Soviet Russia’. Bullitt and Steffens left Paris for Moscow via London on February 22; and on the train to London, Bullitt showed Steffens the British conditions ‘pencilled on a sheet of paper’. He was, he told Steffens, to negotiate a ‘preliminary agreement’ with the Bolsheviks, so that America and England could then persuade France to issue a joint invitation to peace talks, ‘reasonably sure of some results’. Their journey went smoothly. The British, indeed, had ‘paved our way’, writes Steffens. ‘They had reserved our places on trains and boats and at the London hotel. When we called for our tickets on the boat to Norway, they were delivered to us “all paid”. British consuls met and speeded us through Norway, Sweden, Finland…’

Bonar Law carefully deceived the House of Commons over this mission. On the 20th, Colonel C. Malone asked the Prime Minister ‘whether he will consider
the formation of a small Commission representative of all parties to visit Russia and render a Report on the political and economic situation, to be laid before the House within, say, two months’ time?"

Mr Bonar Law: ‘The Government do not think that the suggestion of my hon. Friend could be adopted with advantage.’

Col. Ashley: ‘Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is a widespread desire for more information than is given to the House at the present time?’

Mr Bonar Law: ‘I am sure there is, but as the Prime Minister pointed out, I do not think more information could possibly be given with advantage at the present time.’

Mr Devlin: ‘Will the right hon. Gentleman consider the desirability of giving less attention to Russia and more to Ireland?’

Mr Bonar Law: ‘Both countries, unfortunately, demand attention.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘Is it not a fact that at the present time all the information we get from Russia is one-sided?’

Col. Lowther: ‘Would it not be of some advantage that hon. Members with Bolshevist leanings and inclinations should be given free tickets to Russia?’

Washington

But Lansing and Colonel House nevertheless had to proceed with caution over Bullitt’s mission. In fact, during the whole period from February 11 until March 8, the American Delegation in Paris had to keep glancing over their shoulders at the daily stream of testimony being given before an American Senate Committee on ‘Bolshevik Propaganda’, which was much influencing American opinion. The investigating Senators had got it firmly implanted in their minds from the start that the Bolshevik revolution had been entirely caused by Russian Jews, long resident in America, who had returned for a moment to ‘reorganise’ Russia, whereupon they would then come back to America, and ‘reorganise’ that in the same way. There now follow some extracts from this vast quantity of testimony.

Mr R.B.Dennis, an American who had been in Russia for the YMCA and then been appointed an American Consul, was one of the first to be interviewed.

Senator Overman: ‘You say that three-fourths are against the Bolsheviks. Why do they not rise up and overthrow the Bolshevik Government?’

Mr Dennis: ‘One answer is to shrug your shoulders and say “That is Russia; that is the Russian character.” The Russians...when it comes to politics are absolutely hopeless. They do not know the meaning of the word “compromise”. If you were to gather around this table representatives of the Methodist Episcopal Church, of the Presbyterian Church, of the Catholic Church,
and of the Jewish Church, and of all the other sects that we have in this country, and ask them to form one church, you would have the same situation in Russia if you were to ask these political parties to get together...There is a saying in Russia which very plainly describes the Russian characteristics, and which is true, that any time you get three Russians together you have five opinions…’

Sen. Overman: ‘You did not know Lenin and Trotsky?’
Mr Dennis: ‘Personally, no, sir.’
Sen. Overman: ‘Were they men of ability, brains, and education, by reputation?’
Mr Dennis: ‘Yes, sir; I should say they were very able men and thoroughly believed that this was the way to bring about heaven on earth, and to end the ills of society.

Sen. Wolcott: ‘Their route to heaven, though, seems to have been first through hell?’
Mr Dennis: ‘The route was circuitous.’

Mr R.F. Leonard, an American Vice-Consul in Russia, described the general scene: ‘I got acquainted with a Jew who had been in New York who was a Commissar…His first act on taking office was to distribute all the silk stockings they found there to all the peasant women and working women—to all those who belonged to labour unions or whose husbands did. The Jew was very scared at this time because the Cossacks were coming, and he was going to use his American library card as an American passport to get out.’

Sen. Nelson: ‘What was his name?’
Mr Leonard: ‘I cannot remember.’
Sen. Overman: ‘Did you see many of these New York and Chicago Bolshevik sympathisers?’
Mr Leonard: ‘I was in the provinces all the time. People who came over had an opportunity to get the good jobs, and they were in the Centre.’

Sen. Overman: ‘They were in with the Bolsheviks?’
Mr Leonard: ‘Yes.’
Sen. Overman: ‘Did you talk to any of them?’
Mr Leonard: ‘I talked with just this man. That is the only case I knew.’
Sen. Nelson: ‘Where had he lived in this country?’
Mr Leonard: ‘In New York.’
Mr Leonard: ‘Yes, Sir.’
Sen. Overman: ‘His idea in going over there, Mr Leonard, was that he thought it was going to be a good time, I guess.’
Mr Leonard: ‘Thought it was going to be a good time. He boasted that he had never done a day’s work in his life.’

Mr Leonard: ‘Yes.’
Sen. Nelson: ‘And had never done a day’s work in his life?’
Mr Leonard: ‘And did not intend to.’
Sen. Overman: ‘And he wanted to come over to this country and do the same thing.’
Sen. Overman: ‘How did you find their morals there, among the men and women?’
Mr Leonard: ‘They have a different moral standard from what we have in America.’
Sen. Overman: ‘Are they bad?’
Mr Leonard: ‘They have more of the Oriental attitude.’
Sen. Wolcott: ‘What is their argument for declaiming against the home?’
Mr Leonard: They say the home does not give the children a fair chance…that everybody ought to start equal, and the children ought to be taken and put in Government institutions and given the same education…’
Sen. Wolcott: ‘That is to say, the children will not grow up in home surroundings?’
Mr Leonard: ‘No.’
Sen. Wolcott: ‘If they carry out their programme, then, the future men and women will have no recollection of home life or of the home fireside, with their parents there.’
Mr Leonard: ‘No; they are opposed to that.’
Major Humes: ‘The theory is that the children are to be taken care of by the State.’
Mr Leonard: ‘Yes, Sir.’
Sen. Nelson: ‘They are to be nationalised.’
Mr Leonard: ‘Yes, Sir.’
Major Humes: ‘Yes; nationalised in that way.’
Mr Leonard: ‘Yes, Sir.’
Sen. Nelson: ‘And they do not believe in marriage, because it is a part of the creed of the capitalist class, is not that it?’
Mr Leonard: ‘Yes, Sir.’
Sen. Overman: ‘Are they in favour of divorce?’
Mr Leonard: ‘It is very easy to divorce.’
Sen. Overman: ‘They do not have to go to Reno? They have no Reno?’
Mr Leonard: ‘No.’

Mr W.W.Welsh, of the National City Bank, emphasised that a ‘labouring man in this country would be a bourgeois in Russia…To the average hooligan, as they call the Bolshevik supporters, who are the rough necks there, every man that wears a white collar, or a woman that wears a hat, is a bourgeois.’
Sen. Nelson: ‘The Russian workman wears a blouse, does he not?’
Mr Welsh: ‘Yes, Sir.’
Sen. Nelson: ‘With a kind of belt around it?’
Sen. Overman: ‘A woman who wears a hat is in the bourgeois class?’

Mr Welsh: ‘Yes. It was not uncommon at all to hear conversations in the street cars of the peasant women, or working women, addressing women who had on hats, saying, “You people who wear hats, you think so-and-so,” and then going on in a tirade against them; but the distinction was, “You women who wear hats”...But what surprises me is this. There are a great many supposed Bolsheviks in this country, who, if they were to step on Russian soil, would be immediately taken as bourgeoisie, and before they had been there very long would be considered counter-revolutionists.’

Mr R.E. Simmons, an American Trade Commissioner, who had been inspecting Russian timber forests, proceeded to read out the Bolshevik and Anarchist decrees on the nationalisation of women, as issued in the towns of Luga, Kolpin, Vladimir and Saratov, some of which, he claimed, had been published in *Izvestia*. The most detailed was that published on 15 March 1918 in Saratov, which stated: ‘Social inequalities and legitimate marriages, having been a condition in the past which served as an instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie, thanks to which all the best species of all the beautiful have been the property of the bourgeois, have prevented the proper continuation of the human race.’ Thus, the right to possess women between the ages of 17 to 32, save for those having had 5 children, was abolished. The age of the women was to be determined by birth certificates or passports, or else by the Black (ie. Anarchist) Committee, ‘who shall judge them according to appearance’. All members of the working class had the right to a woman (‘a piece of public property’) not more than three times a week for three hours at a time. Other classes had to pay 100 roubles a month into public funds. All such women would receive 238 roubles a month (‘That is $23.80, in other words, now’, remarked Mr Simmons); but they would be released from their ‘direct State duties’ for three months before and one month after childbirth. All children thus born would be brought up by the State, until they were 17. ‘In case of a birth of twins, the mother is to receive a prize of 200 roubles.’ All citizens were enjoined to have their urine and blood checked once a week, and those spreading venereal disease were to be ‘severely punished’, though ‘women having lost their health may apply to the Soviet for a pension’. Anyone refusing to support this decree was automatically branded a saboteur and an enemy of the people.

(It does not appear that these various decrees, which of course gave tremendous scope for ecclesiastical indignation in the West, were ever put very seriously into effect; and they were not approved by the Bolshevik Central Committee. The Anarchist decree at Saratov, which caused every mother and daughter to flee the city, remained posted up on the town walls at least until 1920, so I am informed from English sources.)

Mr Kryshtofovitch, a former employee in the Russian Ministry of Agriculture, described the activities of the Chinese and Latvian supporters of the Bolsheviks:
‘As to the Chinamen, there are now 8,000 Chinamen or more in the Russian guard and two Chinese officers. They are fed well, clothed well, and are happy. They have round faces now, shiny, and like to work more and more for the Bolsheviks, and the Bolsheviks want more and more Chinamen…’

Colonel Hurban, of the Czech Army, emphasised that at the start the Bolsheviks had only these two elements to rely on as an armed force.

Sen. Nelson: ‘Go on and tell us what they did there.’

Col. Hurban: ‘At this time, as I told you, the Bolsheviks had only those Letts, because as to the Russian units of Red Guards, it is to laugh.’


Col. Hurban: ‘It is for children; it is for Boy Scouts.’

Sen. Nelson: ‘The beginning of the Bolshevik Army, then, was this detachment of Letts…Now, where did they get the rest of their forces—from what sources?’

Col. Hurban: ‘At this time they had a sort of burglar’s Army, but it was not a military force…All of the Russians asked us to overthrow the Bolsheviks, but since the Bolsheviks assumed power we have been absolutely neutral…’

Mr Albert Rhys Williams, a journalist, pointed out that the Russian people were ‘not entirely mesmerised and obsessed with American institutions. It is not entirely that they fear the things we call evil, but they also fear some of the things that we call good…They are not really obsessed by the idea of production. They have not the American idea of spending their energies in getting a living, but rather in living…They regard our life here, for example, where we have slums and palaces, where we have the extremely poor and the extremely rich, and where we have a bitter class war…as most undesirable…’

Sen. Wolcott: ‘Let me get your point. Your idea is there are ties in Russia connecting her with America; that these ties consist of men who have immigrated into Russia from America, and through those ties America could make valuable connections with Russia; and yet these ties, which are of such value in building up intimate connections between Russia and America, are at the same time engaged in abusing America. That seems to be, boiled down, your logic.’

Mr Rhys Williams: ‘The point is that they have abused America, but I have heard some of them—’

Sen. Wolcott: ‘And yet we can hope to have them bring Russia and America close together?’

Mr Rhys Williams: ‘The point, Senator Wolcott, is that they abuse the abuses of America; they abuse the evil things in America; but they know that more evil things exist in France, in England, or in Germany. Therefore they have a certain great influence in affairs. The point is, Can America utilise these men?’
Sen. Wolcott: ‘In other words, they dislike America less than they dislike others?’

Mr Rhys Williams: ‘Yes’.

Sen. Wolcott: ‘That is a very frail tie, I should say.’

Colonel Raymond Robins, of the American Red Cross, among a wealth of testimony, underlined the present position of the Church in Russia: ‘I never found anybody there who thought that the Church in Russia could exercise moral restraint and social power, either inside or outside of the Church. It had lost its credit absolutely. It had become associated in the revolutionary movement, in the minds of peasants and working-men, as a class institution. For instance, here is a peasant walking under the most holy gate into the Kremlin with me. He takes off his hat. Another crosses himself and kisses an ikon. I say to them, “You are religious?” “Yes.” “You believe in God and Jesus Christ?” “Yes.” “You believe in the Church?” “No!” The Church has been the spy system of autocracy for 200 years. It was that resentment against the organised church that made them accept, as it were, the materialistic philosophy.’

Colonel Robins also recounted a discussion on Allied intervention with a French diplomat in Russia. This French representative said to me, “I know it is not practicable, but it must be attempted.” Then I said, “Why not get Russia’s raw material and handle this economic situation here, and win the war on the Western Front?” Then this gentleman said, “What is it to us if the Allies win the War, and France loses the savings of a hundred years?” That was the heart of the French position in the Russian situation.

London

On February 19, Churchill, back in London after the failure of his mission to Paris, wired to Sir Henry Wilson, who was still in Paris, that he had seen the Prime Minister the day before, who evidently wished to make his peace with Churchill, and now said he had not intended that his telegrams should actually be shown to Colonel House, only that his general views be explained to him. ‘He [Lloyd George] does not wish to make war on the Bolsheviks. He is, however, quite willing to help the Russian Armies on the lines specified, provided that it is not too costly. On this point he wishes to be particularly informed. He was entirely in opposition to the cutting off of supplies from Kolchak, Denikin and Co as he considered that since we called them into the field for our own purposes in the German war, we were bound to help them in this way.’

Churchill added, ‘I do not like any time limit being fixed to the support of Denikin and Kolchak. Denikin’s victory [in the Terek] appears to be of importance and surely it will not be honourable to sell these Russian Armies in order to secure a frontier for the new states. In my opinion the two matters are wholly separate.’
Churchill then found that Maclay (the Shipping Controller), arguing that the War Cabinet decision of November 14 to give material aid to Denikin had been countered by the British Empire Delegation meeting in Paris on January 21, was withholding shipping to Novorossisk. On the 19th, Churchill therefore wrote a sharp note to Maclay, who replied the same day agreeing to send some ships, but not to bring motor transport from Italy, which ‘apparently involves a good deal of tonnage and this is being delayed until we get some indication of the views of the War Cabinet’. On this letter, Churchill scribbled to the DCIGS: ‘Are you satisfied. If not continue to agitate & I will help you. Do not let there be any hitch.’ The DCIGS scribbled back: ‘I will not cease to agitate.’

Churchill proceeded to squash the Shipping Controller. ‘In view of the discussions which have taken place in Paris’, he wrote in a short paper to the Cabinet, ‘I propose to allow the supplies and stores, including the 100 aeroplanes (of which we have an enormous surplus in this country) to proceed as arranged to General Denikin’s army, unless the War Cabinet desire that the matter should be again brought before them. Attention is drawn to the important success recently gained by General Denikin’s army which makes it urgent to give him the supplies he has been led to expect.’

Churchill then publicly urged such support for the White Russians. ‘If Russia is to be saved, as I pray she may be saved, she must be saved by Russians’, he stated at a Mansion House lunch on the 19th. Britain could help smash the ‘foul baboonery of Bolshevism’ by sending them munitions and volunteers. ‘But Russia must be saved by Russian exertions’, he underlined.

News then suddenly reached London that Clemenceau had been shot at and wounded—presumably by a Bolshevik. (It turned out to be a lone anarchist.) As soon as he heard of this, Lloyd George at once wrote to Philip Kerr that it meant that Prinkipo was off, as it was now ‘quite impossible’ to deal with the Bolsheviks; and they could only consider alternatives. He agreed with Churchill that ‘Russia must save herself’ with the support of British supplies and volunteers, and that Britain was bound to protect the border states from Bolshevik invasion. But Kerr should advise House that the Allied military must be told to state the cost first. ‘Hitherto they have declined absolutely to commit themselves to the expense.’ Who, in fact, was going to pay? ‘Pin them down to the cost of any scheme before sanctioning it’, he ordered. Philip Kerr, once again, was given—temporary—*carte blanche*. But Lloyd George seems to have forgotten that he had tacitly approved Bullitt’s mission to Moscow.

The Prime Minister then wrote a letter to Churchill (which is missing) on various military matters, but evidently did not fully explain his revised views on Russian policy. Churchill replied on the 21st to the various points raised: the retention of a British Army on the Rhine; the raising of a volunteer army; and the general transition from war to peace. He went on: ‘4). With regard to Russia, you speak of my “Russian policy”. I have no Russian policy. I know of no Russian policy. I went to Paris to look for a Russian policy. I deplore the lack of a Russian policy, which lack may well keep the world at war for an indefinite
period and involve the Peace Conference and the League of Nations in a common failure.’

Various British troops had been sent to various parts of Russia before he came to the War Office. ‘Until I receive instructions to withdraw these various troops and let the Russian situation crash to the ground, I must do my best to nourish them and sustain them. But it is very difficult, in view of the indecision of the Cabinet and the ignorance of the public; and so far I am not responsible for sending a single man to Russia’, he underlined.10

If it was decided to go on helping Denikin and Kolchak, Churchill would ‘specially’ organise certain volunteer units to help the Russian Armies ‘with the technical services you mention’, and would try to replace the conscript troops by these technical volunteer units gradually ‘so as to avoid a sudden collapse’.

‘I may add that it is clear to me that you are altogether failing to address your mind to the real dangers which are before us.’ Continued Russian chaos meant no peace in Europe, no economic revival, no League of Nations, and no Peace Treaty. When Russia did rise again, Europe would be in constant ferment, especially the little states the Allies were now calling into being. And when the Allies had abandoned Russia, she would be restored by Germany and Japan; and these three powers would provide a menace similar to the one faced by the Allies before the war, ‘and I wonder that with your vision you have not perceived the danger’.10

On February 21, Sir Henry Wilson was back in London, having lost confidence’ in Denikin and Kolchak. ‘I gave Winston my Russian proposals which, he said, were most cold blooded’, Sir Henry Wilson records that day. ‘He talked much wild nonsense about sending 6000 men each to Denikin & Kolchak.’11

The same day, Churchill formally replied in a long paper to Sir Henry Wilson. ‘The Allied obligations towards the anti-Bolshevik States and Armies in the former Russian Empire are of two kinds.

a) An obligation of interest to the seceding States on the western fringe of Russia which have claimed the protection of the League of Nations.
b) An obligation of honour to Russian leaders, like Denikin and Kolchak, whose armies were called into the field by our appeal and with our support in order to take the pressure off the Western Front during the German war.’

As there was no present need to decide on the permanent future of the new border states, he agreed that once frontiers had been delimited, the Allies should protect them, and, if necessary, drive the Bolsheviks out. (Nor was it necessary, he remarked, for Allied forces to ‘stop their pursuit of the Bolsheviks when they reach the frontier’. Churchill thus again oddly makes no real distinction between Russia and the border states.) Britain could only provide the British Squadron in the Baltic or British conscript troops from Germany. If America and France each sent three or four divisions from Germany, Britain should do the same. She
should then protect Esthonia, America protect Lithuania, and France protect Poland, Czechoslovakia and Roumania. But if the Allies would not send conscript troops, and only give ‘aid other than by armed force’, Britain should only send the British Squadron, and America should protect both Esthonia and Lithuania.  

But British support of Denikin and Kolchak should not depend upon Bolshevik behaviour in the west. They had never promised British Armies to Denikin and Kolchak, but had habitually given help in every other possible way, which Britain was bound in honour to continue, as long as they kept the field and acted in Allied interests. Thus, whatever the Allies or the Bolsheviks did about the border states, the former ought not to abandon Denikin and Kolchak; while the stronger Denikin became, the easier would be the task of the Allies in the west. (‘If we are going to fight in the front garden, it would be folly to cast away the forces which are available in the back garden to draw off the enemy’s strength.’) Thus, British policy both in the border states and with Denikin and Kolchak was a common policy of ‘walling-in the area of Bolshevik anarchy and denying it new unravaged areas to feed on’.

He therefore hoped that Sir Henry Wilson would agree to send not only munitions and a British Military Mission to Denikin, but also 40 tanks (needing 400 men), 2 RAF Squadrons (500 men), 50 armoured cars (300 men), and a machine gun battalion (1,000 men); which, together with a General Staff of 800 men, would amount to 3,000 British volunteers. (He also urged that some 2,000 Chinese ‘volunteers’ be selected from amongst the Chinese coolies, who were working on the British tanks at Bermicourt in France, so that ‘our small high class personnel’ should not be burdened with ‘unnecessarily heavy labour’. They were not, however, to be shown on the list. Thus, both sides in the Russian Civil War were to have their ‘Chinese executioners’.)

In Siberia, the Canadians, less any volunteers, should return home so that Russian troops could be trained in their barracks; and the two British Regiments at Omsk should be replaced by a British Military Mission of 1,500 volunteers to assist Kolchak, and the Siberian railway situation should be cleared up. In North Russia, where Britain might have to evacuate her troops altogether in July, and transfer British supplies to Denikin, it was unclear what to do about the Archangel Government, to whom Britain was ‘heavily committed’.

He concluded by asking Sir Henry Wilson to prepare a paper showing the monthly cost of these British Missions, and whether ‘any proportionate beneficial result would be produced upon the Russian Armies’. If agreed, the War Office thus need not bother about ‘any question of political principle as to the status to be assigned to Russia while under Bolshevik rule, or as to the relative claims of the Border States on the one hand or Kolchak & Denikin on the other’.

On February 22, Sir Henry Wilson noted: ‘Another talk with Winston about Russia. I saw Finlayson this morning back from Archangel. He says Ironside must know end of March whether he is to quit Archangel or not otherwise he will get into a mess. I told Winston that we really must be given a policy.’
‘Please ask the proper officer’, Churchill minuted the same day, ‘to pick me out at least 15 facts from the war telegrams of the last months showing Bolshevik strength, actual & potential; and an equal number showing weakness.’

This was quickly produced, and was as follows:

1  
**Estimated Actual Strength**

a) Archangel and Murmansk 41,800  
b) Western Front 58,375  
c) South Western Front 40,000  
d) Don and Kuban Areas 149,000  
e) Eastern Front 115,578  
f) Turkestan Front 22,508  
**TOTAL** 427,258

2  
**Estimated Potential Strength** 1,300,000

3  
**Elements of weakness**

a) Multiplication of local risings and opposition to mobilisation.  
b) Desertions en bloc and bad morale of troops.  
c) Growing unpopularity of Bolsheviks with workmen and peasants.  
d) Shortage and bad distribution of war material and food.\(^{14}\)

‘Another talk with Winston about Russia’, records Sir Henry Wilson on the 23rd. ‘I am now putting up a further paper about all the theatres in Russia advising delimitation in the west, evacuation at Archangel, instructional staffs only with Denikin & Kolchak & handing over Trans-Caucasia to Italy.’\(^{15}\)

Next day, ‘Winston cordially agreed with the whole of my Russian papers and proposals’, notes Sir Henry Wilson, ‘& has now written a covering note & it is all printed & goes to the Cabinet on Wednesday [the 26th].’\(^{15}\)

Later that day (the 24th), Churchill strongly urged the War Cabinet to consider their Russian policy the next day. The matter was urgent, as the position was the same as it had been six weeks before. The Prime Minister retorted that it had already been discussed three times in Paris, and it was not the British Delegation’s fault that no definite decision had been reached. It must be discussed in Paris, since it was an Allied decision. But British policy had been agreed, ‘and actually stated in writing’. Further discussion in Paris was being held over until his return, when he would press the Allies to adopt the War Cabinet’s policy. Churchill stated that Sir Henry Wilson had made four proposals to carry out this policy, and he wanted certain measures approved; there might be a ‘serious disaster’ at Archangel in the spring unless some decision was quickly reached. The Prime Minister asked sarcastically if Churchill wanted the Cabinet to adopt some other policy. Only the Allies could now ‘usefully’ discuss Russian policy. Sir Henry Wilson suggested that Churchill should show his paper to the Cabinet. This was agreed; and the matter was again left.\(^{16}\)
That evening, Churchill sent Sir Henry Wilson’s paper to Lloyd George, with a brief covering note urging a ‘definite policy’.17

Sir Henry Wilson’s paper embodied most of Churchill’s proposals. ‘In view of the enormous size of the country, the destitution of the inhabitants, paucity of communications, the deplorable condition of the railways, and the military exhaustion of the Allies, the invasion and occupation of Russia at the present time’, he began with commendable frankness, ‘is not considered to be a practical military proposition.’17

They must thus stick to what was possible. As Allied ‘primary responsibility’ was to protect the border states, they must first define their frontiers, and then give the Bolsheviks ‘peremptory orders’ to withdraw; however, their refusal ‘may entail direct military intervention’, he warned. America should protect Finland and the Baltic States, and France and Italy protect Poland and Roumania. If America was reluctant, then England should protect the Baltic States. In North Russia, British troops and their Russian friends must be withdrawn as soon as the weather allowed, ‘probably commencing June’. This might be a difficult operation, and both Generals Ironside and Maynard must have definite orders before the thaw in late March. In Siberia, Britain should continue the despatch of supplies to draw off Bolshevik troops; but once Allied agreement was reached on the management of the Siberian Railway, the two British regiments should be replaced by a British Mission of up to 2,000 volunteers. In South Russia, Britain should also continue her supplies and send a similar British Mission; but she should make it quite clear to Denikin (and Kolchak) that British troops would not fight, but simply cover his rear and flanks by holding the Caucasus, and protecting the Black Sea and the Caspian. Britain should thus retain two divisions on the Batoum-Baku line, and continue to hold Transcaspia as long as she supported Denikin and Kolchak. If they could thus build up a ‘really coherent’ fighting force, the Allies might later revise the ‘scale and description’ of their support, Sir Henry Wilson suggested. But definite Allied policy must now be announced to raise White Russian morale, and counteract Bolshevik propaganda; at present, the task of British officers in Russia was one of ‘extreme difficulty’. But, he concluded, unless all the Allies, ‘and more especially America,’ take joint action, ‘we cannot command success, nor have we any right to expect to see success crown our efforts.’17

The Prime Minister sent what was frankly an offensive answer next day (the 25th) that it was ‘only a partial reply’. In spite of ‘repeated requests’, the War Office had still not properly advised on any of the three alternative policies suggested on February 12; and to justify this, he complained that no figure was given for the cost of resuscitating the South Russian railways, and no mention was made of Italy occupying the Caucasus. In fact, nothing was said about cost; and whether any given policy meant ‘millions or tens of millions or hundreds of millions ought to weigh in our decision’, he wrote. He had tried for weeks to obtain some estimate from the War Office, and it was no use ‘clamouring’ for a decision on Russian policy until the War Office replied. But so far as a policy
decision was possible without this information, Churchill had been given ‘very definite instructions in writing’ before he went to Paris. ‘You do not seem to have succeeded in securing any decision’, wrote Lloyd George. ‘I certainly suggest no blame to you’, he added. ‘I am not even criticising the Allies.’ They also wanted facts and estimates which their ‘military men’ had not provided. There was ‘extraordinary reluctance’ in the War Office to supply information. The King had asked for some a week ago. ‘Surely there must be some ledger easily accessible to an intelligent clerk…’ Lloyd George, in fact, wished to delay a decision until the American envoy Bullitt had returned from Moscow, and until Foch’s Napoleonic designs had been finally scuppered in Paris.

On February 26, Churchill reminded the War Cabinet that the War Office paper had been circulated, and again urged them to discuss Russian policy before the Prime Minister returned to Paris. Lloyd George again said it would be very little use, since all the Allies were concerned. ‘He knew the Cabinet’s views and he would press these views at Paris.’ Chamberlain was concerned about South Russia. Though Britain had sent troops to the Caucasus ‘on our own initiative’, it seemed doubtful if British control of Baku would lead to British control of the oil supplies. There was, though, much to be said for sending military supplies and a few experts to Denikin, provided he merely fought the Bolsheviks; but Sir Henry Wilson’s proposal to send up to 2,000 men was ‘rather different’. Curzon remarked that Denikin knew British support was conditional upon him attacking Bolshevism, and not the Caucasus States. Churchill interrupted sharply that he wanted a ‘definite policy’ laid down for each Russian theatre. The Prime Minister replied that the War Cabinet were ‘quite clear’ about British policy, but cost was the deciding factor. The War Office must state the cost of the alternative policies. He must have this before he returned to Paris. Churchill stated that the War Office was making every effort to estimate the minimum cost in each case. It was agreed that the War Office should submit the necessary paper before the Prime Minister’s return to Paris. The matter was then again left.

On the 27th, Churchill replied to Lloyd George’s letter of the 25th, and sent a statement of the cost of British assistance to Russia to date, which was, he pointed out, ‘related to no concerted policy’, and leading to no result. (There is no such statement in the files; but a little later, another was prepared showing that the total amount of British assistance given to all White Russian forces up to March 31st was £45.5 million.) But the War Cabinet, who were used to dealing direct with the CIGS, well knew the difficulties of obtaining ‘precise plans and estimates of cost’ about Russia. Everything was uncertain, and the military factors were ‘at every point intermingled’ with political decisions, which had not been taken.

In Paris, he had proposed a military enquiry to ‘frame a plan’ to make war on the Bolsheviks, so that the Allies could then decide whether to ‘drive it through’, or ‘boldly face’ the alternative. But Lloyd George had objected ‘even to the use of the words “prepare plans for making war on the Bolsheviks”’, and the Americans were opposed even to the formation of the Russian Council. It was thus no use remaining in Paris. ‘Even armed with your fullest authority and
power’, wrote Churchill pointedly, ‘the task would have been a very difficult one.’ He now enclosed a General Staff paper, which answered his questionnaire in a ‘somewhat different form’. (This also is missing, together with the further estimate. But this appears to have stated that it would cost £73 million, together with transport expenses, for a period of six months.)

He had already sent Lloyd George, Sir Henry Wilson’s ‘definite proposals’ for action. ‘You are aware that they do not embody the policy which I would pursue myself’, he wrote. They simply tried to meet the ‘immediate practical needs’ in the absence of any Allied decision on ‘war or peace’. He enclosed an estimate of their cost as well. Finally, he quoted the minutes of the War Cabinet of January 10 that a decision on Russian policy should be the ‘first matter’ to be settled in Paris, ‘Since then nothing whatever has been decided’, he wrote. Though he recognised the difficulties, ‘I do not feel that the War Office is to blame’. The Prime Minister should go back to Paris, and, with the necessary War Office help, ‘hammer out a policy’, and by his ‘personal authority’ force the Allies, ‘or some of them’, to come to an agreement. ‘No one below you can do it’ Meanwhile, he asked for approval of the ‘makeshift policy’ in Sir Henry Wilson’s paper.

Lloyd George did not reply.

South Russia

Churchill then just had to cope as best he could with the developing situation in South Russia, where Denikin was still very hard pressed. For on February 19, the Bolshevists had launched a heavy surprise attack on the Don Cossacks on their Tsaritsin front. Sazonov had rushed to General Milne in Constantinople, again urging Allied help for the Don Cossacks, the only force in South Russia now fighting the Bolshevists; if they collapsed, all hope for Denikin would collapse with them. Milne, of course, could do nothing.

The retreating Don Cossacks, whose forces had now dwindled through casualties and desertion to a mere 15,000 men, soon began to take refuge behind the River Donetz and the River Manytsch. But the Donetz basin and the road to Rostov were being energetically defended by General Maievsky, the Deputy Commander of the Volunteer Army (who was in fact carrying on such brisk warfare with his armoured trains that the Bolshevists thought that he had more than double his actual force); and Denikin was able to send a Volunteer Army group north to stabilise the position there until the thaw, and then the spring floods, came to their rescue. But the danger on the River Manytsch was now acute.

Once again, there was better news from the Caucasus. On the 19th, General Briggs reported that the defeat of the 11th Red Army in the Kuban was now complete; adding that ‘over 6,000 prisoners [had been] taken and 1,500 Communists shot. Pipeline from Grosni is working’. This drew an immediate and angry rebuke from the DMI. Denikin should be told that while Bolshevik outrages must be punished, the wholesale shooting of prisoners by the Volunteer
Army would undoubtedly assist Bolshevik propaganda in England, and everywhere else.\textsuperscript{22}

There was no good news at all from the French zone in South Russia. On February 19, Reilly had wired strongly criticising French action in the Ukraine. If failure to defend Kiev was excusable on military grounds, there was no excuse for subsequent negotiations with the Ukrainian Directorate, as the nature and fate of Petlura had been plain months ago; and after the fall of Kiev, it had lost all semblance of political and military power. As a moving force, stated Reilly, Bolshevism was dead; and there had never been a more opportune moment for combining all military forces in an united effort to smash it. The immediate fate of Russia, he warned, would be settled by the Allied Powers in the next six weeks. Provided 10 to 15 Allied divisions protected the territory won back from the Bolsheviks, so as to allow mobilisation to go ahead, the Volunteer Army could start to clear South Russia by early summer.\textsuperscript{22}

The French realised the need for haste. Just before the assassination attempt on Clemenceau, he had sent a Russian officer on behalf of Admiral Pogoulaiev, who was in charge of the Russian troops in France, to inform Denikin of French plans for their use. And while French negotiations with the Ukrainian Directorate continued, Berthelot sent his nephew Captain Fouquet, together with Andro, back to Denikin to demand that the Russian Commander in South-West Russia, General Sannikov, and the Military Governor, General Grishin-Almazov, be placed under the French Command, who would then authorise the formation of a local Russian Government at Odessa. Mixed Franco-Russian brigades would then be formed until Denikin could carry out a mobilisation. Berthelot stated that such a move by Denikin himself at the moment would only cause a revolt in favour of the Bolsheviks, and forbade it; and he added that the Russian ships which Denikin claimed were in fact ‘guaranteed to us under the Armistice’, and were to be handed over. He also requested that Denikin should come and see him at Constanza in Roumania.*

As Colonel Freidenburg put the ‘request’ for the formation of the mixed brigades to General Sannikov in Odessa in the form of a 24-hour ultimatum, Captain Fouquet on arrival at Ekaterinodar sent a wire of congratulations to the new Ataman of the Don Cossacks, stating that the French Army was now at his disposal; and another wire to the local Russian Commander at Sochi, stating that the Allies had always recognised Sochi as part of Russia, not Georgia. Fouquet and the British Mission almost came to blows over this.\textsuperscript{21}

* Brinkley states that Berthelot merely authorised the French delegation to obtain Denikin’s approval for the appointment of A.I. Piltz, who was Grishin-Almazov’s civil assistant, as Governor of Odessa; but when they arrived at Ekaterinodar, they coupled this with other demands. Brinkley adds that Berthelot opposed Freidenburg’s proposals for cooperation with the Ukrainians; but on his final visit to Odessa in mid-February, he gave in.
Denikin indignantly refused the very idea of mixed brigades, and told Fouquet that he would go ahead with mobilisation; and though agreeing that General Sannikov should be under the French Command, he insisted that the Military Governor should continue to be quite independent. The question of the Black Sea Fleet could be settled by an Anglo-Franco-Russian Commission. But he would come and see Berthelot.

On February 21st, Reilly wired again underlining that the root of the bad feeling between the Volunteer Army and the French Command at Odessa stemmed from Berthelot’s demand for the creation of mixed brigades under French command, in which each regiment was to have 30 French officers and NCOs. The whole idea was quite impossible, stated Reilly, for though recruited from volunteers, the men would certainly be said to be defending class interests if they were to receive 250 roubles a month, which was four times the pay of the Volunteer Army privates; while the French demand that the officers, who were to be re-elected by the Volunteer Army from a list drawn up by the French, were not to wear shoulder straps (a very hot issue), was absolutely unacceptable to all Russian officers. (Margulies states that the French Command were considering the formation of six mixed brigades for South Russia. Each brigade was to consist of two regiments (2,000 men), a half regiment of cavalry (250 men), together with several artillery batteries, tanks and aircraft. Initially, there would be one French officer and one NCO to each Russian officer and NCO in the first basic units; when these were expanded, only Russian officers and NCOs would be added. An initial cadre of 100 French officers and NCOs was mentioned. It all seems remarkably similar to what the British were doing both in the Far East and in North Russia. But it was obviously feared that the French were going to expand this idea, and create a large force under French control.)

Reilly also complained that Colonel Freidenburg was especially tactless with the Russians. Owing to French-inspired confusion, he added, though Allied troops in Kherson and Nicolaiev received orders from both the French Command and the Volunteer Army at Odessa, Kherson was now in fact run by the Petlurists, and Nicolaiev by the Bolsheviks. There was some hope, though, that matters might be cleared up when Denikin met Berthelot in Roumania. Reilly suggested that Colonel Keyes should accompany Denikin.

On the 22nd, the War Office sent a strong protest to Paris about Captain Fouquet’s activities. Such promises of aid when none were forthcoming were reprehensible; and it was this which had probably caused the recent Don Cossack collapse. Captain Fouquet, the War Office complained, had even been saying that General Briggs had been sent by the French High Command, and that a new French Mission was coming to replace him.21

Denikin then wired to Franchet d’Esperey himself again rejecting the idea of mixed brigades. Franchet d’Esperey passed this on to Paris on the 24th, adding that Bolshevik agents in Odessa were becoming more and more active in lowering the morale of the French soldiers and sailors, emphasising the time they were being kept with the colours. Franchet d’Esperey therefore asked that the
despatch of nine regiments of Algerian Tirailleurs be speeded up, so that he at least had a ‘nucleus of troops absolutely proof against Bolshevism’.

At Odessa, all was rumour: the French had been beaten at Vosnesensk; they had demanded the removal of Shulgin; they had nominated Andro as Governor. On the 24th, Andro informed the CNUR of his meeting with Denikin’s entourage. General Dragomirov, he said, had told him: ‘I hope that on the question of mixed detachments, you gave the French a suitable rebuff!’

‘How could I rebuff them’, replied Andro, ‘when the French told me that on the insistence of the Odessa Municipal Duma a Russian field court-martial had acquitted two women who had been arrested in flagrante delicto distributing Bolshevik leaflets among French soldiers.’

Dragomirov had added that the Volunteer Army would not agree to a French occupation, and General Lukomsky asked: ‘How do you expect us to keep our good officers if you offer higher pay in the mixed detachments?’

Andro also informed the CNUR that he had seen a telegram from Denikin in General d’Anselme’s office, stating that any Russian officer who joined the mixed brigades would be court-martialled; he had also seen a document signed by Petlura, containing terms for the secession of the whole Ukraine to the French. That day, Freidenburg showed it to Shulgin. ‘Well, that means a total break with the Volunteers’, stated Shulgin. Freidenburg, records Margulies, ‘shrugged his shoulders and waved his hand…’ But the CNUR decided that Petlura was unacceptable, and ‘one more attempt must be made to induce Denikin to agree with the French’.

General d’Anselme rapidly began to lose patience. On the 28th, he told the CNUR that he was fed up with the situation, and was going to reorganise the Odessa district on his own terms. ‘Qu’est ce que je peux faire avec Dénikine qui me pète tout le temps dans les jambes; tout le monde se foutra de moi’, he complained to the leader of the CNUR party. Freidenburg said that there were two options: either the local Russians could organise a local Russian Government themselves; or he would organise a new Ukrainian Directorate, with authority over all South West Russia, and joint military units would be organised with it.

In late February, Reilly reminded the Foreign Office that General Schwartz, like many other Russian officers, was now unemployed, since Denikin refused to accept any Russian officers who had served under the Bolsheviks. Reilly strongly urged that use be made of Schwartz in any attack on Petrograd, whose occupation was vital. Schwartz, in fact, had been the Bolshevik Commander of Petrograd in the spring of 1918, and had been awarded a British Military Cross for his part in the abortive Allied attempt to overthrow the Bolsheviks on May 1.

At Ekaterinodar, Denikin’s entourage still remained quite uncertain of Allied intentions. On February 24, a letter was sent to the former Russian Ambassador Maklakov in Paris begging for immediate Allied aid to save Russia ‘from all the horrors of a break-up’. Munitions and supplies of all sorts were needed. ‘God forfend, however, that Russia be conquered by foreign, even though friendly, Powers…For the French and the English blood shed in and for Russia…they will
no doubt compel us to pay by spheres of influence; they will treat Russia like Turkey, Persia, Egypt’ In Russia, there was at that moment a crisis both of Bolshevism and of Socialism. In Siberia, Kolchak had eradicated both and formed a proper Government. But in South Russia, they still had three obstacles to overcome.  

1. **Bolshevism.** Not the ‘external enemy’ in Bolshevik Russia, but Bolshevism ‘driven inwards’, i.e. the anarchic elements in the Ukraine, which were ‘now exuding with elemental force from all pores’.

2. **Demons.** Though there would soon be a ‘complete capitulation of the semi-Leninists to the Leninists’, there would still remain Socialists like the ‘Union for Regeneration’ and the ‘Union of Zemstva and Towns’, who represented nothing but made the most noise, and were always agitating for Directorates; ‘such are the principal centres of those ever-chattering people’, who would stick to the Allied Command ‘like flies to the honey’, and in whom the Allies might ‘possibly presume the existence of that democracy which, unfortunately, does not exist in Russia at all’.

3. **Separatism.** It was mainly this that was preventing the formation of a South Russian Government, but ‘life itself will sweep away all these little Cavours’. Only the Volunteer Army under Denikin could form a proper Government. ‘The British appear to understand this. Do the French also understand?’ Their present misfortunes stemmed from the fact that the ‘worthy French Generals’ in South Russia ‘play at politics’.

On the 27th, the ‘National Centre’ party at Ekaterinodar wrote to Maklakov strongly complaining about Allied policy, and the Prinkipo proposal in particular. At a time when the Bolsheviks were in decline, and the only problem was the restoration of order, to place any Conference ‘on a level with military power means the enfeeblement of power’. Had the Allies decided that they no longer wanted an united Russia? ‘How short-sighted it is to think that Russia and Germany are enfeebled for ever. We see here quite clearly that Germany and Russia, in spite of all the heavy losses…will first recover. We know that Russia will, in twenty years, be one of the most powerful countries in Europe…even in the very near future Russia will be rebuilt of fire-proof material. Woe to him who abandons her in the moment of misfortune, who wishes to utilise the misfortune to endeavour to make Russia powerless and weak.’ But time was running out.

At Ekaterinodar, Briggs asked Denikin on February 27 on which front he was going to use the British supplies that were now arriving; was he going to use them in the French zone? At this, Denikin exploded. ‘I should like you to understand the difficulties with which I have to contend’, he replied. ‘I am Commander in Chief in South Russia, and I put up a plan of campaign requiring the assistance of Allied divisions, but as yet, have not been informed whether this plan is approved.’ He went on to complain about the British in the Caucasus, the French
in the Ukraine and Bessarabia, their call for volunteers and their seizure of
Russian merchant ships. ‘I refused all these demands…French in Odessa are
surrounded by Jews and merchants who discredit their country and are only out
for money. Berthelot never defined any boundary but demands everything west of
line almost due north of Sebastopol’, Briggs reported Denikin as saying. ‘Except
through British Mission [I] am out of touch with Kolchak. I have no knowledge
of French intentions and therefore can make no planned campaign. I command
five armies in field where situation very critical and have no time to attend to all
demands from various Allies. Task would be easier if a plenipotentiary speaking
for all Allies…could be attached to me.’

That day, the Foreign Office raised the matter of South Russia for the first time
with the Quai d’Orsay. Relations between the French Command and the
Volunteer Army were very bad, Lord Derby was told. While England wished to
maintain the December 1917 agreement, now reconfirmed, it should not be
allowed to impair Denikin’s efficiency or prevent him from obtaining volunteers
from whatever sources he could. Some *modus vivendi* must therefore be found
between Berthelot, as Allied C-in-C, and Denikin, so that they could maintain
their cooperation. But Britain did not favour the mixed brigades, as described by
Bagge and Reilly, since the French could not use them effectively in the absence
of a definite Allied policy. If Denikin could use them, however, his power would
be much increased. Lord Derby was told to impress this view on the French
Government, and to discover what agreement they had reached with the
Ukrainian Directorate, and particularly with Petlura.

When asked from Paris to account for his actions, Berthelot, who was clearly in
difficulties, now did the only thing he could do, which was to complain wildly to
the French Government. Ever since *the French* (he claimed) had set up an united
Russian Command under Denikin, he stated, Denikin had constantly interfered
and claimed the role of Military Dictator in South Russia, which had much
impeded the French Command in the area ‘allotted to the French by
international agreement’. Denikin had agreed to come and see him, then wired to
ask what the French sphere of influence was in South Russia and the Near East,
and sent new orders to the Russian authorities at Odessa that they were to be
independent of the French, and then wired that he could not come to see
Berthelot because of the bad military situation on the Don. ‘The Russian
Command has abandoned none of its claims and is placing obstacles in the way of
the French Command by carrying out parallel action intended to supplant that of
the French’, complained Berthelot. ‘This constant interference in our affairs’, he
went on, ‘and the bad military situation of the Volunteer Army on the Don
shows how helpless the Russian Command is and creates a new situation which
requires French-Volunteer Army relations to be urgently defined.’

* This wire was not received in London for some reason until March 17.
But reports received the same day only showed how helpless the French Command was. As Gregoriev’s two armoured trains shelled Kherson, Bolshevik troops came down the left bank of the Dnieper river. General d’Anselme sent up an artillery battery from Nicolaiev, but Gregoriev’s men then dismounted from their trains, and attacked Kherson. A Greek company, sent up in support, was routed. The whole district was by now boiling with discontent; and the Germans, who were still at Nicolaiev, were now openly in touch with the Bolsheviks.  

At Odessa, things went ticking on as before. On March 1, Colonel Freidenburg sent for Margulies to ask if they had formed a Russian Government yet. Margulies replied that the Ukrainian Directorate had still not agreed to exclude Petlura. Freidenburg agreed to wait. But the French had finally lost patience with the Volunteer Army counter-espionage, who were quite unable to track down the Bolshevik Propaganda Committee, which was having much success in undermining the shaky morale of the French troops and sailors, and was bringing out a paper in French called *Le Communiste*. On March 2, by means of an *agent-provocateur*, French counter-espionage seized eleven members of the Committee in a restaurant called ‘Les Dardanelles’ in the centre of Odessa, as they were plotting a combined naval and military mutiny on the arrival of Gregoriev. The French at once handed them over to the Russian Command, who, instead of trying them by court-martial, had them taken out of the town that night, and shot. Next day, the entire Odessa press protested vigorously, and accused the French of having these men shot without trial; and the Socialist parties complained to d’Anselme that this overrode the courts. Though d’Anselme ordered an enquiry and satisfied public opinion, the population remained convinced that these summary executions were the work of the French. Nothing went right for them. (The twelfth man, a French soldier of Russian origin, managed to escape from the restaurant. But he was later recognised in a dance hall and arrested. Before they shot him, the French Command made sure that he was given a court-martial.) Colonel Freidenburg then started his own negotiations with the new Ukrainian Directorate and their delegate, the Jewish Doctor Margolin, who believed in ‘federation from below’, and who were soon making extensive concessions, in every sense of the word, to the French.  

Denikin then sent a further plea not only to Berthelot, but also to Foch. Since not a single Allied soldier had been sent to the main Russian theatre on the Don, he stated, the morale of the Don Cossacks was now broken, and they were offering little resistance to the Bolsheviks, who were now approaching Novocherkask from the west. ‘This is extremely dangerous for the Volunteer Army in the Donetz basin’, Denikin pointed out. ‘If we cannot hold the coal region, the whole South and the Fleet will be without coal.’ He thus once again pressed for Allied troops to be sent to the Don. If there was further delay, French troops at Odessa would have to occupy a much wider area. This had some effect in Paris; and as the French Command feared that the Russian miners in the Donetz basin would rise up now that the Bolsheviks were across the Donetz river, they sent a Senegalese regiment to keep order in the local mines; which had
a disastrous effect. Bagge wired that d’Anselme had now lost all confidence in Sannikov, and urged the immediate recall of Freidenburg, who was hated by everyone—and not only because he was a Jew—and the despatch of a British representative to act as a buffer between the Russians and the French.  

This coincided with the arrival in London of Captain Hill with all Reilly’s reports, which were eagerly read in the Foreign Office. ‘In connection with Mr Reilly’s suggestion that a High Commissioner should be appointed to General Denikin’, minuted Leeper, ‘I learn privately that unless some such step is taken Mr Reilly will not stay longer in S.Russia as his present position is not satisfactory.* He wants to be definitely attached to a political officer and given some status himself as Secretary but I think it would be a very great loss if Mr Reilly left S.Russia. His reports have always been very interesting and reliable and there is no one else in S.Russia who can give us the political information we require.’

‘The reports are voluminous but interesting’, commented Sir Ronald Graham. ‘If, as I hope we may before long, the Allies recognise the Omsk Govt, General Denikin and his force, as the main instrument for the subjugation of the Bolsheviks, will become increasingly important, and the question of appointing a Commissioner with him must be considered.’

‘Captain Hill’, noted the Russia Department underneath, ‘promised Reilly he would send a telegram to him if he possibly could giving him information about his wife† in New York.’ Rapid enquiries were therefore made, and Hill then sent this terse message back to Reilly. ‘Reports sent in. Wiring fully few days. Nadine well New York.’  

The French now took action, and disastrous action, in the Ukraine. On March 5, Bagge wired that General d’Anselme, ‘representing Powers of Entente’, had now come to an agreement with Petlura, the text of which was forwarded by Reilly the next day. This stated that France would recognise the Ukrainian Directorate, which could retain the Black Sea Fleet, would support the claims of Ukrainian delegates to the Peace Conference, and would prevent the Volunteer Army from coming into the Ukraine. In return, France would control the Ukrainian finances, railways and all transport; and must approve any changes in the Ukrainian Directorate, who would attach the Ukrainian Army to the new White Russian Army under French command to be raised in the Ukraine. Reilly added that it had first been agreed that Odessa, Nicolaiev and Kherson were to be considered part of the Ukraine, in which France guaranteed that there would be no dictatorship during the Russian Civil War, but a democratic government. But these points had now been omitted.  

Andro, in fact, was to be the Russian Governor under the French Command, who had by now hurriedly organised a banking combine, made up of the Russo-Asiatic Bank, another Russian Bank, the Société Générale de Paris, and the

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* This probably refers to Colonel Keyes’ ‘great aversion’ to Reilly.
† He had reason for disquiet, since by all accounts his wife was being unfaithful.
Banque de Paris et des Pays Bas. ‘French banks do not fear financial status of Russian banks, but intend using them to forward French interests’, wired Bagge. The French Command had also set up an Inter-Allied Supply Commission with a Russian President, but managed by a French Vice-President, to control the entire economy not only in South Russia, but also the Caucasus, through the control of all Russian ships, a system of fixed prices, and the issue of certificates for all imports and exports. The Cooperative Societies, the Allied Consuls, the Zemstva, the Volunteer Army, the local financiers, were all represented on the Commission; but control remained firmly in French hands. Bagge wired anxiously that he had only agreed to join subject to approval by the British Government. But it was then discovered that there was very little wheat left, and Odessa was threatened by famine. Attempts were at once made to purchase grain from the Kuban; but the contractors there demanded payment in other goods, and negotiations dragged on.

Discussion was now going on, stated Reilly in a further wire, over the composition of the Ukrainian Directorate. Vinnitchenko had gone, and the French also wanted Petlura and Andrievski to withdraw; though Petlura, it was thought, might be allowed to remain as a mouthpiece. The French, warned Bagge in another wire, were now in fact closely linked with the most reactionary of the Ukrainian landowners, who had been behind Skoropadsky, and had backed German Oriental policy. They really wanted a new Hetman; and it was his former Russian officers, whom Denikin disliked, who were to join the mixed brigades. But Colonel Freidenburg was at the same time trying to placate such friends as the French still had in the Volunteer Army. Bagge considered the whole idea very unsound and short-sighted. ‘Policy of local French authorities of placating everybody, and in most clumsy way of trying to fuse together infusible elements, is either stupidity or duplicity; it shows their weakness [and] alienates everybody’s sympathies, plays into the hands of the Bolsheviks and Germans and must result in a disaster.’

Cooke, the new British Consul in Odessa, confirmed—if any confirmation was needed—that the Ukrainian Directorate was of small military value, and all reports showed that its forces were melting away either to join the Bolsheviks, or else to form private bands of their own. At the most lenient estimate, he could account for 15,000 Ukrainian and 30,000 Galician troops; but the Ukrainian Commander was promising an army of 200,000 men to the French Command. Meanwhile, helped by well-prepared local risings—largely caused by French ‘shilly-shallying policy’—the Bolsheviks were advancing, with nothing to stop them, into the Zhitomir-Proskurov area to cut off Galicia and get into Bessarabia. This military success, he went on, was accompanied by the ‘craftiest diplomatic action’; for while offering to recognise the Ukrainian Directorate with Kiev as its capital, and not to interfere in local Ukrainian affairs, the Bolsheviks were at the same time carrying on active propaganda amongst the Ukrainian troops.

The British Government, urged Cooke, must realise that there were powerful influences at work in Paris for an independent Ukraine. At the Quai d’Orsay, the
foremost figures were Jean Pelissier and Philippe Berthelot, General Berthelot’s brother, who was in turn assisted by his two nephews. Cooke thought that the French Consul Henno was the only Frenchman who really understood the Russian and Ukrainian situations, and was pursuing an Allied and not a French policy; but all his reports had to go via General Berthelot, who thus deliberately kept him out of touch with the Quai d’Orsay. The crux of the matter, Cooke stressed, lay in cooperation and coordination between the French Command and the Volunteer Army in all spheres.

But on March 6, Clemenceau apologised to the War Office about Captain Fouquet. Sanctions would be taken. Every French officer in South Russia, stated Clemenceau, had been instructed to keep strictly to the December 1917 agreement, and to bring Denikin and Krasnov together. ‘Orders have been issued to General Franchet d’Esperey to the effect that all dealings which Captain Fouquet might have carried out under the conditions which you reported, shall be cancelled [démenties ou annulées].’

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Amidst this confusion, Churchill concentrated on the British zone in South Russia, and on the promising aspects therein, namely Denikin’s victory in the Kuban and Terek.

On February 22, Churchill was shown an encouraging report on the recent successes of the Volunteer Army in the Kuban. ‘If the advance of the Volunteer Army continues, and they reach the Caspian’, the DMI pointed out, ‘it ought to have a great effect on the morale of the anti-Bolshevik forces in all areas.’ But this appreciation found Churchill in an irritated mood.

‘Let me have a copy of this map marked up to date and with all helpful details written in red & blue ink’, he minuted. ‘Let me have a note for the War Cabinet, of not more than 2 foolscap pages, explaining exactly what this successful operation amounts to & state what prospects it opens out for the future.

‘I presume it would be a very great advantage if General Denikin’s forces could establish themselves along the line of the Volga with their right on Astrakhan. Would not this greatly shorten his front as well as give him a strong river line? Is this operation going to be undertaken? Do you consider that there is any way in which our naval forces could assist? Is Astrakhan ice-bound at the present time?

‘We ought to know exactly what General Denikin’s future plans are, and you should not hesitate to indicate any practicable measures which we might conceivably take to assist them. Unless I know that such measures are possible, I cannot even submit them to the War Cabinet for a decision.

‘It is the business of the General Staff’, he pointed out sharply, ‘to continually be exposing all the possibilities of a military situation without regard to the political limitations which Governments may find it necessary to impose on military action. It is then for the Governments to say to what extent military considerations must be over-borne by decisions of policy…With regard to our 8 armed ships on the Caspian, if there is any doubt about their ability to retain command of that sea, surely some of the other ships manned by Russians should be taken over and armed.

London and South Russia

Amidst this confusion, Churchill concentrated on the British zone in South Russia, and on the promising aspects therein, namely Denikin’s victory in the Kuban and Terek.
‘Would it be possible to get some big flying boats on to the Caspian?’ he asked. ‘Surely we ought to have strong air forces there. Have you consulted with the C.A.S [Chief of the Air Staff] to see what is practicable? Whether it could be allowed is another matter. Let us know what is practicable first. We may live to regret bitterly the opportunities and resources we are losing through the present indecision.’

The question of the Russian flotilla on the Caspian indeed called for urgent attention. For the Admiralty considered that when the ice melted at Astrakhan, and the Bolshevik ships now frozen in there could resume operations, the continued presence of the eight Russian ships off Baku, whose crews were already pro-Bolshevik, would be too much of a menace for the British flotilla. On February 11, therefore, they had ordered that these ships were to be sunk or captured if General Erdeli, who had been sent up by Denikin with the agreement of Admiral Calthorpe, could not pay them off. But there were difficulties to both courses of action—Erdeli had hardly any money, and Milne was complaining that the arrival in Baku of these men with a grievance, who were already in arrears of pay, would complicate an already difficult position.

Admiral Calthorpe therefore suggested that the men should be properly paid off; and proposed that while the Admiralty would guarantee the money, the British Army should provide it, and it could all be charged ultimately to the Volunteer Army.

On February 18, therefore, the DCIGS requested immediate approval for the expenditure of £40,000.

‘How many of these ruffians are there & how much are they to get apiece in English money a) at local values b) at what it will cost us’, asked Churchill.

There were about 500 to 700 men, he was told; and at the lower figure, the cost at the London rate of exchange would be £83,000, each man getting £166. But the Navy said they could get 100 roubles to the pound at Baku, which would bring the cost down to £40,000.

Churchill decided to consult the Treasury:

My dear Austen,

I am informed that it is necessary to make this payment on military grounds. Will you kindly say whether you will sanction it, or whether you desire it to be brought before the Cabinet.

Chamberlain replied the same day:

My dear Winston,

These papers should I think go to Curzon, who presides over the Committee which deals with this part of the world. I have no means of judging of the policy of buying off these men. If Curzon & his Committee decide that it must be done, we must find the money. ‘Charging it against the Russian Govt.’ is a farce, of course.
So off went the file to Curzon.

My dear Curzon,

Please see attached papers & correspondance & let me know whether & when I can act. Time presses.

Curzon replied to Churchill on the 23rd:

My dear Churchill,

I am entirely against subsidising these ruffians or giving them anything & we discussed it at an E[astern] Committee at F.O. yesterday. I wrote a strong telegram to Milne afterwards asking for his justifications for the proposed double outlay of £40,000 for these naval cut throats and £500,000 for the land blackguards. I should like to veto both. 2. I asked P.M.’s consent to employing our naval forces in helping Denikin…But he has not yet given it. I hope we shall get it at tomorrow’s Cabinet. This policy of half-hearted drift is lamentable. 2

Thus reinforced, the War Office also sent an angry wire to Milne that there was ‘strongest objection to proposed payment of 20 million roubles to Bicherakhov’s force to whom they do not acknowledge any obligation and 4 million roubles to crews of Russian ships who have rendered no service and are suspected of having Bolshevik leanings’. An urgent explanation was called for.

Admiral Calthorpe informed the Admiralty on the 26th that if the British Government did not guarantee the arrears of pay for the crews of the Russian ships on the Caspian, ‘it is not likely that anyone else will. Unable say whether serious opposition to disembarkation of crews will be offered, but in view of imminent break-up of ice, we cannot afford to wait longer.’ An ultimatum was therefore issued that the Volunteer Army was to leave Baku, and that the Russian sailors were to hand over their ships. At this, five Russian ships broke out of the harbour, apparently thinking that Commander Norris could not reach them. The British Coastal Motor Boats (CMBs) then appeared; and after the Russian ships in harbour had had their guns and engines removed, and their crew made prisoner, the five ships outside were told that they would be torpedoed if they did not surrender within ten minutes. At this, they at once returned, and were seized, and the crews disbanded—unpaid. (Two torpedoes were actually fired, it seems by mistake. In one of the ships’ logs, this entry was found: ‘3.25. They fired a torpedo. 3.28. Decided to surrender.’) 2

Churchill’s exhortations about Astrakhan were meanwhile being followed up. For Denikin’s success in the Kuban had impressed the Admiralty. On the 19th, they had informed both the War Office and Admiral Calthorpe that they would now allow British seaplanes to operate inland to assist the Volunteer Army to obtain command of the Caspian, which could be done most effectively by the capture of Astrakhan. ‘Admiralty had no [previous] information of successful advance of Volunteer Army towards Caspian’, they wired. ‘Advantages to British Caspian
Squadron of advance of Volunteer Army towards Astrakhan is fully realised as is the desirability of obtaining a more advanced base from which bombing operations can be undertaken against Bolshevik ships at Astrakhan.\(^3\)

The Don Cossack collapse indeed made action imperative. On March 1, the Admiralty informed the War Office that since the Don Cossacks had retired south from Tsaritsin, the Volga was thus left open for Bolshevik destroyers to proceed down to Astrakhan when the ice melted. This, the Admiralty stated, made the capture of Astrakhan vital; and was also a strong reason for further British support for Denikin. The Admiralty asked that General Briggs should urge the importance of the capture of Astrakhan upon Denikin. The DMO replied on March 3 that Denikin knew this, as both Blackwood and Poole had made clear. Since Denikin had told Kolchak that Astrakhan should be in his sphere of influence, the DMO enquired whether the British flotilla would attack the Bolshevik flotilla at Astrakhan when navigation opened; if so, General Briggs could give Denikin an outline plan of operations, and ask him for military support on their left flank. This was referred to the Cabinet; and the same day, the Foreign Office informed Balfour in Paris that the War Cabinet had decided that the Admiralty were to support Denikin, but were not to land naval forces ‘without express permission’. The Admiralty then replied to the War Office that they had asked Admiral Calthorpe, but they thought that if the Bolshevik flotilla stayed in Astrakhan, shallow water would prevent all naval operations, except for bombing. Britain could thus only deny them the use of the Caspian, and attack them if they came out. The Admiralty, in fact, considered the capture of Astrakhan and other places near the mouth of the Volga to be a military operation, to which they would give such support as they could, but a naval brigade would not be landed.\(^3\)

But as Denikin was still transferring troops from the Terek to stop the Bolshevik advance on the Don, he obviously could not advance on Astrakhan yet; while Briggs wired that Denikin’s chief medical officer considered the very existence of the Volunteer Army to be threatened by the typhus outbreak in the Kuban, the Terek, and on the Don; he put the numbers affected—with perhaps a little exaggeration—at nearly a million. There was also a real fear that cholera would break out in the spring, and endemic plague on the Volga; they would be impossible to localise, he warned, and might well spread into Europe.\(^3\)

In the Caucasus, serious friction now began to develop between the Volunteer Army and the British. As General Erdeli had made clear to General Thomson that Baku was vital to Russia, and that only the British Army could stop the Russians from taking it, Thomson told Erdeli clearly that the Volunteer Army was not to come south of the line Petrovsk-Sochi. But he did not tell Denikin; and on the 23rd, when Briggs told Denikin that the British Government had no wish to support the Georgians against the Russians, Denikin asked angrily why he had not been told before about this dividing line. Two days later, however, Thomson reported that Denikin had given semi-independence to the Circassians, the Ossetins, the Missiaradins (another local tribe), and—after a stiff fight with them, resulting in the Volunteer Army enrolling some 1,500 recruits—to the Ingushi;
and he was calling on the Chechens to follow their example. The Foreign Office was most displeased; and on the 26th, when the War Office passed Denikin’s wire on to Knox for Kolchak, his request that Daghestan and the other Caucasus states should be in his sphere was, on Foreign Office advice, omitted.  

On March 3, the War Office, with the approval of Lord Curzon, therefore simply instructed Briggs to inform Denikin once again that he should conform to Allied policy in return for British help, and not coerce the Caucasus states. It was not intended to retain British troops in the Caucasus, but they would for the moment guarantee Denikin from attack in the rear; and he should thus not enter Daghestan unless in hot pursuit of the Bolsheviks, and the British Government did not favour his sending a Russian Governor there. Britain would do her best to keep the Caucasus states neutral, and he should do nothing to increase friction with them. The War Office felt that Denikin, after his brilliant victory in the Terek, could now cooperate with Kolchak and give the Bolsheviks a decisive blow, provided he had the necessary supplies; and it would be regrettable, the War Office pointed out sharply, if Denikin were to force the British Government to hold back these supplies. However, this very petty blackmail seemed quite unnecessary, since there was never any real intention to deprive Denikin of munitions for this reason alone; and Denikin probably knew this.

**Siberia**

In Siberia, all appeared to be drift and confusion, according to the British High Commissioner, reporting to Lord Curzon on February 22 from Vladivostok. ‘I confess that out here’, wrote Sir Charles Eliot, ‘we wish you saw your way to take stronger action against the Bolsheviks, and also to give more information and instructions. Since the proposal for a conference at Prinkipo was first made, I have not received one word about it from the F.O. and but for the fact that the Ministry of F.A. at Omsk received some official telegrams from Sazonov, I should be inclined to think the whole proposal a mere newspaper rumour. It was rather difficult for me to know whether I should urge Kolchak to accept the invitation or not, but as he is a most obstinate person and never takes advice, it doesn’t matter very much. *(Note here: At last Kolchak has received a telegram from the WO explaining the position, but we have nothing from the FO.)*

‘Knox is, as you say in your letter, a most excellent person, but I think he went rather far in helping Kolchak to his seat as “Supreme Ruler”, and of course now he backs him through thick and thin. Kolchak’s great merit is that there is no better man to dispute his place: his great fault is that he doesn’t inspire enthusiasm even among his own adherents. He is honest and respectable, but I fear that he may be losing his claims to the latter title, since a brother Admiral has divorced his wife, whom Kolchak fancied, and sent her to Omsk in order to console the loneliness of his high position. This patriotic act is much admired by Russian officers, but it throws a curious light on the telegrams which Kolchak has induced me to send to his own wife through the Foreign Office, imploring her to leave
Russia for some less dangerous land. In my innocence I really believed that he
was anxious for her safety.'

The main question, of course, was what the Bolsheviks were, and what was
to be done with them. They were not all of one kind. ‘In Siberia, except in the
Ekaterinburg district, they are comparatively mild-mannered brigands. That is to
say they have not much political organisation, and their activity finds an outlet in
such exploits as seizing a railway station, and taking the contents of the till with
not more atrocities than are necessary. All the district of Krasnoyarsk is full of
bands of this sort. When I came down from Omsk the other day, one of these
bands looted a station four hours after my train had passed through it…Bolsheviks
of this kind often fraternise with the peasantry’, he went on. ‘The latter generally
dislike Bolshevik principles, when they understand them, but if the peasants of a
village have a dispute with the Government about taxes, they naturally listen to
any Bolshevik bands who come along and tell them that the Government is
wrong.

‘Of course, these irregular Siberian Bolsheviks are ready to join the more
organised Bolsheviks of European Russia whenever they get a chance’, he added.
‘The officers (fighting for the Bolsheviks) are said to be gaining the confidence of
the soldiers, but people wonder whether Bolshevism will not enter another phase,
in which the military element will become predominant and make short work of
working men and Jews, for whom soldiers have not much sympathy.

‘The discipline and military efficiency of the Bolsheviks has undoubtedly
greatly improved during the last six months, and I fear that the military position
of the Kolchak army on the Ural front is not good. They have been badly pushed
back in the south (Ufa & Orenburg) & though they have advanced in the north
(Perm) there are obvious objections to pushing out a finger into enemy territory,
since it can be easily cut off.’

As far as Eliot could understand the British Government’s attitude, they did not
wish to fight Bolshevism, and thought that the Russians should do so themselves.
‘That seems to me eminently reasonable.’ Clearly a great general movement like
Bolshevism could not be defeated, even if it were temporarily crushed with the
help of foreign troops. But the British Government still supported the anti-
Bolshevik Governments at Omsk and at Archangel, and had some troops there.
‘It seems to me unfortunate that the same sort of thing is not being done in the
East of the Black Sea, which appears to be our sphere, and where our troops are
in touch with Denikin. If he could effect a junction with Kolchak’s troops, probably
the Bolsheviks would be cleared out of the basins of the Don and Volga,
and lose the grain, coal and iron which come from the former. It is also
unfortunate that five or six months ago, the Czechs concentrated all their efforts
on effecting a junction not with Denikin, but with the Archangel forces, being
under the mistaken impression that these forces had reached Vologda.’ What he
now heard of the growing efficiency of the Bolsheviks, and the want of
enthusiasm and experience in the new Siberian Army, ‘makes me fear that the
obstacles to the capture of Omsk in spring are not great’.
But Eliot hoped that Allied control of the Siberian railway might have far reaching consequences. ‘The Americans are now face to face with what they call a business proposition: the American Ambassador from Tokyo [Roland S. Morris], who is here at present and practically the head of American organisations here, from being almost a Bolshevik in theory, has become most militant in practice and talks of protecting the whole line, right into European Russia, with detachments of U.S. troops. I hope that the Allies will be able to work the line successfully; it ought not to be difficult, for its present state of collapse is due to the imbecile incapacity of the Russians rather than to any great natural difficulties, but all “inter-Allied” operations are terribly slow, and I am afraid that we shall have to count on Japanese obstruction to every project that does not give them a free hand.’ The local Japanese agent always gave satisfactory assurances; but Japan worked through agents who could be disavowed. The General Staff at Tokyo also worked independently of their Foreign Office.

‘But the ruling idea of the Japanese seems to be to have a tête-à-tête settlement of some kind with the Russians. They would not send up troops to Omsk when we begged them to do so, but at present there can be no doubt that different kinds of Japanese agents are offering direct assistance to all Russian parties—Bolsheviks, Monarchists and Kolchakists.’

In early March, Sir Charles Eliot was writing again to Curzon from Vladivostok. The three Siberian Railway Committees had now got to work, which was highly satisfactory in view of the moribund condition of most Allied activities in the Far East. The restoration of traffic on the Siberian railway now seemed possible, ‘and it appeals to the Americans, partly as a simple business proposition, and partly because we are wisely allowing them to take it under their special protection.

‘Mr Morris, the U.S. Ambassador at Tokyo, who came over here to start the Railway Commissions & take temporary charge of American interests in Siberia, left here I think with a more healthy frame of mind than he brought with him. He is a lawyer and apt to treat diplomatic questions as an advocate. He sees things vividly and makes strong statements, often forgetting what he said yesterday. But he certainly went away saying that the U.S. ought to do all in their power, not only to re-establish normal transport on the line, but also to afford military protection within a certain zone and assure a safe passage across Siberia, and even across European Russia.’

Speaking only for Siberia, this seemed a policy capable of execution, and which could lead to great results; for apart from obvious inconveniences, such as the detention of supplies and troops, the present stoppage of the line was largely responsible for the political and social chaos in Siberia. ‘The workmen do not work, get no pay, and are Bolsheviks. The peasantry on the contrary have plenty of money, but there is nothing to buy with it. They remain in their villages, will not take the trouble to supply the towns with food, and resent the ordinary operations of Government such as tax-collecting. They remark with some justice that since Governments change so often, no Government should claim a year’s
taxes: the taxes for a quarter are the most it can reasonably expect to receive.’ If under international management the Siberian railway could give work and wages to its own employees, and to the numerous factories which manufactured supplies for it, and if it could import goods for sale, which would restart normal relations between the peasants and the people in the towns, the whole situation would be much less threatening, for according to all accounts, ‘the vast majority of Siberians are very bourgeois in their sentiments, and have no liking for Bolshevik theories, though for one reason or another they may join in an outbreak’.

The danger, of course, was that there might be a serious outbreak before traffic had been restored, and better economic conditions created. ‘There seem to be large bands of Bolsheviks—or at any rate of disorderly persons—in the Krasnoyarsk district. If they ventured to make some annoying, though trivial, attacks on the line in the horrible cold of January, it is to be feared that their spring fancies may take shape in more formidable enterprises. Also it is not quite clear how we are to get rid of Semenov. At present everybody is intriguing to win his good graces, and even the Americans have made an apparently serious, but I trust not permanent proposal, that the military protection of a part of the line should be entrusted to him.5

‘I understand that if reasonable funds are forthcoming, the re-establishment of moderately regular traffic on the line is not from the technical point of view a very difficult problem of railway management. The monstrous thing is that the Russians should ever have allowed matters to come to the present pass. They are good mechanics, but they fail entirely when continuous supervision is required. The engine-drivers won’t supervise their engines, but let them get out of repair & the inspectors won’t supervise the engine-drivers. The more I see of Russia today, the less hope I have of anything being done without direct foreign control, as in the case of the Railway. The Russians are more helpless than Turks or Chinese in political matters. They all talk about politics but in a detached manner like newspaper correspondents, and badly-informed correspondents too who suggest impossible forms of foreign intervention. Even a man like Kolchak has only one idea of action, namely to fight the Bolsheviks (with Allied help, of course). Such ideas as that he ought to look after the national finances, conciliate and unite the various political parties, select suitable administrators for different posts and provinces, hardly enter into his head. If you suggest them in the course of conversation, he will talk about them at length, but as things which other people ought to do.

‘People here are becoming used to the idea that the Allies will not fight Bolshevism and find consolation in the prediction that it will sooner or later burn itself out. I have not heard of many new facts to support this view, but if the accounts which we receive from European Russia are approximately true, it does seem impossible that the present state of terrorism and starvation should continue much longer, because even the terrorizers must have such a poor time. It appears that whenever the Siberian armies have penetrated into European Russia (e.g. beyond Perm) they have had an enthusiastic reception, and generally speaking the
news from the front is good, but the Orenburg district is a melancholy exception. The Bolsheviks have had considerable military successes there, and the Cossacks are reported to be joining them. It is gratifying to be able to add that the Bolsheviks soon wear out their popularity in Siberia. In almost all cases, the mass of the population has turned against them after a few months of their rule, though after another few months there may be clamours for another change.’

Eliot, meanwhile, was glad that the Foreign Office was taking up the question of enemy prisoners in Siberia—mainly Magyars—who were in considerable distress, and thus most dangerous. But it was somewhat remarkable that in June last summer, when all central and western Siberia was under Bolshevik rule, more of these prisoners had not been set free. Plenty, of course, did become Bolshevik soldiers and leaders, but there were still some 200,000 interned.

He also reported various movements for autonomy among several non-Russian races, such as the Mongols and the Kirghiz. But as they were not of the nature of armed insurrections, they were not likely to come to much.

In spite of foreign troops and men-of-war, even Vladivostok was not in an orderly state. The other day I sent my secretary to leave my card on a Russian who like many dignitaries here resides with his family in a railway carriage. On entering, he found the lady of the carriage gagged and bound. It is not true, as frivolously reported here, that he simply left the card and withdrew with apologies for intruding. He called the police & rescued the lady. This will give you an idea of our present conditions. Robbers can enter a carriage standing in Vladivostok station at about 3 p.m., bind & gag a person found in it, & make off with the valuables, the police meanwhile taking no notice or perhaps thinking it better to take none.’

So ended Sir Charles Eliot’s two long reports.

Behind the lines, the Allied Generals were endlessly arguing about who was really in command in Siberia. In mid-February, Japanese troops in the Far East suffered severe casualties in clashes with Bolshevik bands. But the American Commander, General Graves, remained strictly neutral; these people, he claimed, were simply Russian peasants who were being grossly ill-treated by the Siberian Cossacks—whom the State Department were in fact arming.

(This led to a sharp exchange in the House of Commons, when Colonel Wedgwood asked why American troops had taken no part, and whether British troops were being used ‘for this sort of warfare?’ Churchill gave the same reason that General Graves had given, adding that British troops would cooperate with other Allied forces in keeping order.

Colonel Wedgwood: ‘Yes, but if there is a difference of opinion between American troops and Japanese troops as to whether these people are insurrectionary Russians or Bolsheviks, can we have an assurance that British troops will cooperate with the Americans and not the Japanese?’

Hon. Members: ‘Why?’
Mr Churchill: ‘I think these matters must be left to the discretion officers on the spot.’

The Baltic

Serious consideration then had to be given to the military position in the Baltic. In September 1918, some Russian officers had formed a small Russian Northern Corps, with German help, at Pskov. When Bolshevik troops attacked after the Armistice (which required German troops to maintain order in Russian territory they occupied, and in Latvia until a Latvian Army could be formed), the local German Command at the Latvian capital of Riga allowed the Russian General A.P. Rodzianko to form some Russian infantry regiments there. But as German troops would not fight, the Bolshevik invasion made rapid progress. On November 29, The Times had announced that the Bolsheviks had captured Pskov and Dvinsk, and bombarded Narva; but a British Squadron, bound for the Baltic, was now approaching Copenhagen.

After the fall of Pskov, the Russian Northern Corps retired to the west of Lake Peipus, while their commander Colonel Neff went to Reval, where the Estonian Government agreed to support his troops, provided they did not exceed 3,500, and did not interfere in Estonian affairs, until Allied troops arrived. Rodzianko then arranged with the Germans and Latvians for the Russian Northern Corps to withdraw to Riga. But the British Squadron went first to Reval, where arms and supplies were landed for the Estonian troops (and the cruiser Cassandra struck a mine). On December 17, The Times stated that the British Squadron had shelled Bolshevik troops who were invading Estonia some 60 miles east of Reval. This news alerted the Bolsheviks; and on December 25, a farcical naval engagement took place off Reval when Bolshevik warships sallied forth to repel this capitalist fleet. For as soon as they put out from Kronstadt, the cruiser Oleg discovered that she had no coal on board, and turned straight back into port, followed by the battleship Andrei Pervosvanni, thus abandoning the two destroyers Spartak (with Raskolnikov, the chief Bolshevik Naval Commissar, on board) and Avtroil, which steamed bravely on to Reval, where the Spartak made contact with the British Squadron next day, was pursued, stranded and captured. The Avtroil, lagging behind, was captured the day after. Furious telegrams were then exchanged by Lenin, Trotsky and the C-in-C Vatsetis.

(HMS Caradoc later reported on January 11 that the Russian officers of Avtroil were ‘very communicative, as they wanted us to know everything—not being Bolshevik’. They were merely serving in their ships to make a living wage, while their wives and families were held as hostages in Petrograd, ‘in case of the ship failing to return’. The officers had to buy their own food, or live on what the lower deck would let them have. They said that the gun crews of Fort Krasnaya Gorka (which guarded the entrance to Kronstadt harbour) were badly trained; while the
The food situation in Petrograd was ‘deplorable. The only meat available is bear meat, which is obtainable about once a month. The officers all looked very underfed and ill, but the men were in excellent condition, only very dirty’, reported Caradoc to the Admiralty. ‘Both Avtroil and Spartak were beautiful ships...’

Estonian troops put up a stout resistance and held off the Bolshevik invaders. The War Office was much impressed by them. Later on January 9, the Foreign Office suggested that if no British troops could be sent to Esthonia, a British General with some staff officers and a small volunteer force might go instead. On the 21st, the General Staff commented that the Estonians had ‘certainly pulled themselves together with great energy and are deserving of all the support we can give them’. Rifles and machine guns had already been sent, and guns and motor transport were on their way. ‘We must however stick our toes in over a British General, for without troops, he is useless and becomes a source of irritation, but could we not send a few “volunteer” officers?’

‘Don’t send volunteers’, minuted the DMO. But at Riga, where the British Squadron was trying to train some Latvian troops, the situation deteriorated as the Bolsheviks advanced. General Rodzianko was told ‘categorically’ by the British Consul Bosanquet that British troops would not be sent, and that the British Squadron would not defend Riga, which must be held by local forces. But though the German Command had well equipped the Baltic Landeswehr (a local militia formed by the German Baltic Barons and their supporters), neither they nor the Russians had enough troops, and the Latvians were untrustworthy. As the Bolsheviks approached Riga, the uprising, and the Latvian troops mutinied (as the War Cabinet were informed on December 31). British marines and the Baltic Landeswehr surrounded their barracks, which the British Squadron bombarded, and disarmed them. But the Bolsheviks took Riga, forced the German ‘Iron’ division out of Mitau (to the south), and then seized Vilna, the capital of Lithuania. At this, the Germans rallied somewhat. German officers joined the Baltic Landeswehr, and the old Russian Prince Lieven formed a Russian unit under the German Command. Thus, when the War Cabinet withdrew British warships from the Baltic at the end of 1919, the Bolsheviks had largely expelled the Germans, and held much of Latvia and Lithuania; only Esthonia held out, to which the small Russian Northern Corps retired.

The man who imagined that he commanded the Russian Northern Corps was old General Nicholas Yudenitch, a veteran of the Turkish campaign in the Caucasus, who had a strong siege mentality, and had apparently been earmarked as head of a Russian Military Government, if Reilly’s coup d’état of August 1918 had been successful. He was now in Finland with a little group of Russian officers, but no men. In mid-January, when satisfied with the ‘sympathetic attitude’ of General Mannerheim, the Finnish Regent, he asked both Latvia and Esthonia to join him in military operations against the Bolsheviks. But in Latvia, all fighting came to an end after the Bolshevik occupation; and though the Finns were helping the Estonians to repel the Bolsheviks, Yudenitch soon realised that they
would recall their troops if Esthonia came to terms with him. All the border states, in fact, suspected the Russians of reactionary designs.10

Yudenitch then decided to make a further approach to the British, and a high level one, apparently via one of the Russian Grand Dukes. On February 18, Churchill’s secretary received a letter from J.T.Davies, Lloyd George’s secretary, stating that the King had asked the Prime Minister what British assistance had been given to the White Russians, and in particular to General Yudenitch in the Baltic, as the result of an appeal he had made in December, ‘and if no such assistance was given, he would like to know the reasons for withholding it’. The Foreign Office, who were consulted, replied the next day that though British arms and supplies had been sent to Esthonia, Britain could not assist Russian reactionaries like the former Tsarist Prime Minister Trepov; and though Yudenitch seemed to have cut himself off from them in January, he had made no further demands for assistance.11

But this matter was followed up. For on the 19th, Teddy Lessing (who had been the contact man between Lloyd George and the Russian bankers over the Bank Schemes in early 1918, and who, on his return from Russia in the late autumn, had had interviews with both the Prime Minister and the King) came into the War Office to state that the White Russians were being harshly treated, and Allied assistance was not being properly supervised; the Russian character did not seem to be properly understood; neither Poole nor Briggs understood Russia. ‘Each country must send its best available man to represent it at the Russian headquarters in its sphere, where he must have a free hand to promote the policy of his government’ He should also have power to veto firmly any policies likely to cause or aggravate differences between the various White Russian forces. Lessing urged that General Smuts be sent out to Denikin. ‘The fall of Petrograd’, he added, ‘would be a blow so severe that it might almost prove fatal in itself to the Bolshevik Government.’

Lessing’s ideas intrigued Churchill. ‘This is worth reading’, he noted. But the DMO was unimpressed. This officer has no military training, is by birth a Jew, and it is not advisable to utilise his services in Russia’, he minuted. The possibility of capturing Petrograd, he stated firmly, was ‘contrary to the opinion of most good judges. Petrograd is of little value now, and unless immediate steps are taken to feed the population, its occupation would be a blunder. We cannot give representatives a ‘free hand’ in all directions—cooperation must come from this country.’

‘I don’t think Lessing can teach us much!’ added Sir Henry Wilson, and passed the file back to Churchill.12

But Lessing seems to have had more influence than the CIGS imagined. ‘The King sent for me at 6.30’, records Sir Henry Wilson on February 21, ‘& talked about Russia for an hour & of the necessity [of] taking & feeding Petrograd!’12

On March 4, the Foreign Office received a long complaint from Yudenitch that the Finns were now making difficulties for him in Finland, and that this was due to the Germans. In early January, he claimed, Ludendorf had come to
Stockholm, where it was agreed that the only way to save Germany from ‘disastrous and humiliating’ Allied peace terms was to support Bolshevism in Russia until it had spread to England and France, and then step in and kill it in Russia. As Finland could by a ‘sudden stroke’ seize Petrograd and kill Bolshevism too soon, it was agreed to discredit the Finnish Government and counteract White Russian plans by fomenting revolution in Finland. Shortly after, a violent anti–White Russian press campaign had started up. These German schemes would not be countered by Allied ‘aloofness’, Yudenitch complained; delay could only favour the Germans, who knew that Mannerheim could do nothing without Allied support, since Finland could no longer obtain Russian grain. He urged the Allies to arrange for White Russian troops to assemble in Finland and Esthonia, and for their cooperation in an attack on the Bolsheviks.13

Yudenitch’s letter was accompanied by a letter from Professor Kartashev, the President of the Russian Committee in Helsinki (and the former Minister of Religion in the Provisional Government), stating that they could wait for the Allies no longer, and had decided to attack Petrograd on their own. They wanted an Allied credit of 300 million francs to buy food and munitions.

The Russia Department was unimpressed. ‘The DMI has expressed his opinion about the futility and danger of any such exploit’, minuted W.H. Selby. Sir Ronald Graham agreed. ‘It is probable that such an attempt at this moment would be ill-advised and doomed to failure’, he added.

Before the file reached Lord Curzon, a staccato report on General Mannerheim had arrived from Admiral Grenfell, a former British Naval Attaché in Russia. ‘The Regent is naturally ambitious, a handsome man, success with women has weakened his character. Rather vain about present position, unstable, rumoured hopes prestige of entering Petrograd as conqueror, thereby gaining the personal support of grateful Allies and monarchists Russia, securing him permanently in power. Every indication now points Regent personally favours the adventure… [which] is quite certain to produce lamentable results inside Finland, and is very uncertain to succeed.’

‘M.Scavenius said 6 weeks ago that it would be quite easy’, noted Curzon. The Foreign Office made no reply, merely warning Consul Bell at Helsinki to watch out for and report any suspicious signs.13

On March 4, the Russian General Golovin came over from Paris to discuss the provision of Allied supplies for Yudenitch. (General Golovin ‘impressed me very favourably’, Colonel Kisch wrote from Paris to Colonel Steel, before sending him over.) At the War Office, Golovin told Colonel Steel that Denikin and Kolchak had given him full power in the supply question. Steel was rather reserved; he told Golovin what Britain was doing for Denikin and Kolchak, but as Generals Briggs and Knox had already sent full details, there was really no need for him to make further demands as well. Golovin then handed him a list of what Yudenitch needed. Basing his requirements on the rather optimistic figure of 50,000 men, Yudenitch now asked for 50,000 rifles (and 150 million rounds), 1,000 machine guns (and 30 million rounds), 200 field guns, 60 howitzers, armoured cars, etc.
(‘Desirable 100 tanks!’ noted the General Staff derisively.) Steel warned Golovin that there was at present little chance of Britain supplying Yudenitch, but suggested that Golovin might like to speak to Sam Hoare, though he should not say anything about military supplies from the War Office. (It is not clear whether Colonel Steel knew that Golovin had already met Hoare; probably he did.)

By early March, however, the Admiralty was considering strong naval action in the Baltic. On January 26, Admiral David Beatty (C-in-C, Grand Fleet) had passed on to the Admiralty certain papers, which had been forwarded by Major Scales (Assistant Military Attaché at the British Embassy at Stockholm, who was in charge of the British Intelligence network in the Baltic). These were:

1. A report, dated 19 December 1918, on the formation of the Russian Northern Corps, by an agent ‘believed reliable’.

2. A report, dated 18 October 1918, by Admiral Altvater (C-in-C of the Bolshevik Navy) to Trotsky on the reformation of the Baltic Fleet (obtained by the same agent). This recalled that the provisions of the Brest Treaty and the shortage of coal had made them place the Fleet into a state of reserve. But they could, if necessary, have a strong enough naval force by spring to safeguard Bolshevik interests in the Baltic. It was thus suggested that 4 battleships, 2 cruisers, all ‘Novik’ class destroyers, and all new submarines be kept in ‘armed reserve’. But for this, they needed large coal stocks. As these were not available, he urged that only 4 battleships, the destroyers and submarines be used. If there was not enough coal for this force, then only 2 battleships, the destroyers and submarines, should be mobilised. He urged that a decision be reached.

3. A report, undated (but apparently of similar date), by Berens (Chief of the Bolshevik Naval Staff) to Trotsky on the naval situation (again obtained by the same agent). This stated that their most likely enemies in the Baltic would be the Allies, ‘principally England’. Berens then discussed the possibility of German support for the Allies. ‘The naval strength of the Allies is unlimited’, he warned. The only remaining Bolshevik controlled minefields were those recently laid before Kronstadt. If they were continued down to the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland, and renewed near Finnish waters, and covered by the guns of their warships in Kronstadt, they ‘could hold up the enemy for some time should they attempt to enter this harbour [Kronstadt]’. Their ships in best condition were: 2 battleships, 1 cruiser (Oleg), 8 destroyers of the Novik class, and 6 to 8 new submarines. They had enough crews; but ‘coal reserve [is] very small’, he warned. ‘Our Fleet therefore is not in a position to undertake operations taking any length of time.’ He thus suggested using only 1 battleship, 1 cruiser, 4 destroyers, and 6 submarines.

‘Without Germany’s support [for the Bolsheviks], we must bear in mind that the appearance of the Allied Fleet in the Baltic and Finnish Gulf is very probable, and Reval may be occupied from the sea at any moment.’ They would thus only have Kronstadt as a base. Before navigation closed for the
winter, all they could therefore do was to threaten to bombard the Baltic ports, land a small number of troops, and support them from the sea. ‘It must be borne in mind, however, that in this case, the Allied Fleet might put in an appearance and our ships would have to take cover in Kronstadt where they would be shut in by the ice and enemy.’

4. A map (see map 6) of the Kronstadt area minefields, also from the agent ‘believed reliable’.

The Admiralty had also received a wire from Stockholm on January 9, evidently emanating from secret sources as well, stating that the Bolshevik submarine Toor, the only one in service, but in very bad condition, had just received orders to proceed to the Latvian port of Libau, ‘sinking any Allied vessels it might meet’. But at a meeting of submarine crews, it was decided that it was useless to oppose the Allies, and the order had been refused. Other Bolshevik vessels were being commissioned, and the battleship Andrei Pervozvanni had orders to fit out for sea, and coal and munitions had been loaded. But though the Novik class destroyer flotilla was cruising in the Gulf of Finland, ‘orders issued to fleet [are] not obeyed’, stated the message. The battleship, 2 cruisers and another vessel were thus ‘standing at Kronstadt with steam up’. The battleship Petropavlovsk was not prepared for sea yet; and 3 other ships were lying unfit in the river Neva.

On January 29, the DNI summarised the situation. ‘Operations are unlikely to start at the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland before beginning of April’, he minuted. From information received, the following Bolshevik vessels ‘might be available’ for spring operations: the battleships Petropavlovsk and Andrei Pervozvanni; the cruiser Oleg; 4 Novik class destroyers; 6 submarines. (‘Russian submarines have seldom shown any initiative even under the most favourable conditions’, he remarked, ‘and submarine crews have lately stated that it is futile to attempt to oppose the Allies.’)

In early March, the Operations Division of the Admiralty, armed with a very exact plan of the boundary of the Kronstadt minefields, and of the guns on the nearby forts (obtained in early December from the Bolshevik Naval Staff, and forwarded to Stockholm by ST 25, the chief British secret agent in Petrograd), drew up a plan for an attack on Kronstadt in April or May, when the weather conditions, according to the Admiralty Hydrographer, would be ‘excellent’ for bombardment. ST 25, it was noted, had reported that eight 12-inch guns were in use at Fort Krasnaya Gorka. ‘The battery commands the whole of the approaches to Petrograd bay and may be considered the most formidable obstacle to a bombardment of Kronstadt’ Their range was 35,000 yards; while the 11-inch guns of other batteries nearby had a range of 18,000 yards. Thus, though the attack should be made by a naval force able to deal with the enemy, should he come out and force a Fleet action, the main bombardment should be carried out by the long range guns of Monitors, ‘as it is obvious that a Battle Fleet would not be able to approach within range of the man-of-war anchorage at Kronstadt owing to the mines and extremely heavy land defences’. The British naval force should consist of 4 battleships, 6 monitors, 3 seaplane carriers, etc.
Map 6 The British agent’s map of the Kronstadt area minefields, early 1919
Possible enemy counteraction. ‘It is hardly considered probable that the enemy would force a Fleet action owing to the presence of superior forces, and therefore he would probably remain at anchor and rely on the coast defences to deal with our ships, delivering any attacks by destroyers on the bombarding force by night. It is not considered that he will attempt a submarine offensive owing to the presence of mines and to the amount of floating ice which would damage the periscopes.’

Plan of attack. The Kronstadt defence would, in fact, make the long range bombardment of the Bolshevik Fleet an ‘extremely hazardous’ operation. There were also the mines, which could not be swept to allow heavy vessels to approach, because of concentrated enemy fire. Thus, the ‘only conceivable’ form of attack would be long range bombardment by the 18-inch guns of Monitors; first, to reduce Krasnaya Gorka; second, to destroy the Bolshevik Fleet. ‘This latter operation could only be carried out after Fort Krasnaya Gorka had been reduced’, stressed the Operations Division.

Bombardment of Krasnaya Gorka. This should be carried out by 2 Monitors only; use of more would cause confusion in aeroplane spotting. They went on: ‘There is no doubt that the best position would be in Kaporskaya Bight, whence fire could be conducted over the land and possibly out of the arc of fire of the enemy guns at Krasnaya Gorka.’ It would be necessary to sweep a channel up to this position, and beyond. The 18-inch and 15-inch Monitors would then advance to bombard Kronstadt at 32,000 yards range. The Battle Fleet would come in behind to support them, though they would be out of range of Kronstadt.

‘The advance of the British force, if the above programme could be successfully carried out, would be such that the enemy could at length be brought under fire of our battleships, and in addition monitors etc should have advanced to such a distance to enable them to deal with the defences of Kronstadt in detail, as the remaining defences consist of old guns, the ranges of which are extremely limited.’

This plan was submitted to the Assistant Hydrographer, who generally concurred. ‘The presence of our battleships is hardly necessary’, he remarked, ‘excepting in the event of the enemy forcing an action, and it is very likely the only 2 enemy battleships could quite well be dealt with before their guns are in range of our monitors.’

In early March, the DCNS was urged to consider Port Baltic, not Reval, as a base for spring operations against the Bolshevik Fleet in Kronstadt, which would be ice-free by early May.

On March 6, meanwhile, Admiral Phillimore (who had taken an active part in the Dardanelles operation, had then been naval attaché to the Tsar, and was now Air Commander in the Atlantic Fleet) submitted a paper on possible naval and air operations in the Baltic and Russia generally, based on the assumption that:

‘a) The Bolshevik menace must be put an end to.
b) Any operation without British help will probably prove abortive.
c) It is highly undesirable that any more British military forces should be locked up in the interior of Russia.’
From DNI reports, it would ‘not require a very strong push’ to expel the Bolsheviks from Petrograd, and Yudenitch’s force was close at hand. ‘No heavier blow could be struck at Bolshevik prestige than by the capture of Kronstadt’, stated Phillimore. ‘The effect on Petrograd would be great, and it would react on Moscow.’ In fact, after an air attack, the Bolsheviks might even evacuate Petrograd without a land assault.

The paper, though, was based on the fallacy that the guns of Kronstadt and the nearby forts had been dismantled (so Phillimore had learned when in the Baltic in 1916, he claimed), and that destroyers could steam into Kronstadt, after an air raid, and land marine parties. If the worst came to the worst, the Navy could sink all ships at Kronstadt, and then withdraw, he stated. But if Petrograd were captured, he went on (making the usual dangerous assumption that small forces let loose in the Russian interior were capable of anything), Britain could use the ‘wonderful internal water system of Russia’ to link up with British forces in the White Sea, establish flying bases on lakes Onega and Ladoga, ‘and perhaps eventually patrol the Volga in local steamers’. Small British naval and air force contingents could then support the Russians, to give ‘that foreign stiffening that the Russians so often require’.

Phillimore went on, ‘The project seems to be feasible, in the probability of Bolshevik inefficiency…Though unlikely, it must be assumed that some of the forts may have to be reckoned with…Enemy submarines may probably be disregarded, but mines certainly cannot be; and the force must be preceded, the whole way up the Gulf of Finland, to the buoys of the Kronstadt fairway, by minesweepers in advance.’ On the capture of Kronstadt, 2 further forces, each 250 marines strong, must land on either side of Petrograd, to cut the railway lines to the east and west. This whole operation would require a force of 6 light cruisers, 2 Monitors, 3 aircraft carriers, 16 destroyers, 2 submarines, 6 minesweepers; and 2,500 marines.

This paper was handed by Admiral Madden (second in command of the Grand Fleet) to Admiral Beatty in London; but Beatty does not appear to have handed it on to the Admiralty.15

North Russia

It was the military position at Archangel that worried the War Office the most. General Ironside had to be reinforced. For though some men had been sent into Archangel by icebreaker from Murmansk, there were still 2,000 British troops to come overland along the White Sea shore by sleigh; but there were very few dog-teams, and no moss on the White Sea shore to feed the reindeer! While the countryside was being scoured for horses, General Maynard, the British Commander at Murmansk, used these troops to secure the shoreline by seizing Segeja and its railway bridge, thus preventing any Bolshevik attack from the south. But the troops’ morale could not withstand the savage winter conditions. As the British troops went on to Archangel by horse-sleigh, French troops refused point
blank to take over at Segeja, which was left to a small mixed Serbian, Canadian and Russian party.\textsuperscript{16}

Morale at Archangel was worse. On February 24, the American Consul Poole received the text of a letter from the American Secretary of War to Congress explaining that it was at the British Government’s request that President Wilson was sending more railway troops to Murmansk to assist the ‘prompt withdrawal’ of all Allied troops in North Russia at the ‘earliest possible moment’ in the spring. The Secretary of War added that he had been informed by the British War Office that they felt no apprehension about the military position at Archangel.

Two days later, there was a full-scale British mutiny at Archangel. The Yorkshire regiment (which had just arrived from Murmansk) refused to relieve American troops on the Dvina river front. On March 1, a French regiment refused to relieve them either. Ironside dealt with the British, but failed with the French. ‘Most of the mutinous men were lying on their beds’, he records, ‘and they did not stand up when we entered…‘Assez de cette guerre contre les Bolshevistes!’’ they muttered. Large numbers were arrested. Consul Poole wired the State Department that though the Secretary of War’s letter had improved American morale, neither his British nor his French colleagues had any news of an early withdrawal, and Ironside had warned him that there was likely to be similar trouble with the American troops when they had to return to the front line. There were now 121 French mutineers under arrest, and Ironside was insisting upon severe disciplinary action against both British and French ringleaders; several might have to be shot. American troops were to be drilled by their Colonel, during their local leave, to try and keep them in hand. ‘We were drawing terribly near to the end of our tether as an efficient fighting force’, Ironside admitted.\textsuperscript{17} (Two British Sergeants in the Pay Corps were court-martialled, and sentenced to death; but were reprieved by the King.)

Churchill was thus deeply concerned about North Russia. On March 4, he minuted to Sir Henry Wilson that he wished to receive ‘definite proposals’ about the number of troops needed to maintain full security there, and to cover the withdrawal. ‘I will then do my utmost to meet yr requirements.’\textsuperscript{18}

Such was the military situation on the various Russian fronts. In South Russia, Churchill was actively cooperating with the Admiralty over the Caspian and the possible seizure of Astrakhan, at the mouth of the Volga. In Siberia, there now seemed to be a lull; but whether it presaged action or further inaction leading to drift and virtual collapse, it was at present impossible to say. In the Baltic, the military situation appeared to depend on Allied willingness to send supplies of all sorts: but the Admiralty had the naval situation at the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland—in the waters before Kronstadt and Petrograd—well in hand; they were well apprised of the warships available to the Bolsheviks; and had a large-scale but entirely practical plan of action ready, which only needed political approval. In North Russia, it was not so much Bolshevist strength as low Allied morale that was now causing acute concern to Churchill and the War Office.
But Churchill’s agreement on Russian policy with Lloyd George, reached in secrecy on February 13, now seemed to be on the rocks; and the Prime Minister had veered away again.

London

Churchill’s Parliamentary supporters now came to his aid. On February 27, Sir Samuel Hoare had written to Churchill to inform him that he was Chairman and Walter Guinness the Secretary of the ‘Coalition Group on Foreign Affairs’, which represented a ‘biggish body of coalition opinion’, whose members he listed. As the Russian problem was daily becoming ‘more military and less political’, they felt that it should be ‘extracted’ from the Peace Conference, and dealt with by the Allied General Staffs; and since they realised that Allied intervention was impossible, Hoare and Guinness had recently been to Paris to discuss the question of ‘limited assistance and clearly defined obligations’ with the Russian Political Conference.19

The Coalition Group therefore suggested:

1. Russian Export Committees should be set up in Archangel, Siberia and South Russia to exchange British food and munitions for Russian goods; and thus avoid the ‘danger of unlimited British credit’.
2. The Allied General Staffs should at once draw up a plan with the Russian Military Mission in Paris, who thought that they could beat the Bolsheviks, if at once given Allied munitions, clothing, food and technical advice, for the 800,000 troops which they needed. With such help, it was claimed, Generals Yudenitch and Miller could produce 60,000 troops on the Finnish and Archangel fronts. General Mannerheim would also help in Finland; though the Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov, ‘never very sympathetic to the Finns’, feared that they would make use of the present difficult Russian position to demand complete Finnish independence. In Siberia, Kolchak had some 300,000 troops, of whom about 100,000 had rifles. In South Russia, Denikin had a ‘potential force’ of 200,000 troops, of whom 50,000 had rifles, while 35,000 rifles had been taken from the Bolsheviks. It was also hoped to obtain from 100,000 to 200,000 volunteers at Prague from the 800,000 Russian prisoners in Germany and Austria. Hoare claimed that the Czechs would help ‘by all means in their power’, while the Crown Prince of Serbia had promised to send 30,000 Southern Slavs from the South. But as the Prague Army’s line of advance lay across Poland in harvest time, they might assemble on the line of the Danube river. (These figures make interesting comparison with Savinkov’s figures (which follow), and those prepared in the War Office and elsewhere.)

General Golovin, ‘one of the greatest Russian strategists’, stated Hoare, had worked out the whole campaign in detail; and if the Allied General Staffs would
assist, ‘General Golovin is convinced that he can destroy the Bolsheviks’ power before October’. Hoare asked if he and Guinness could come and see Churchill.\(^\text{19}\)

Churchill sent Hoare’s letter to the Prime Minister, with this note: ‘I think I had better see them. Their views are not very different from those we hold, & are within the limitations of what is practicable. Please return.’\(^\text{19}\)

Lloyd George found these proposals to be rather too similar to the grandiose plans he heard were still being developed by Foch in Paris. He did not reply, nor return the letter; but instead sent Churchill some short letters on minor matters, both to divert his attention, and to gain time. On the 27th, General Milne had passed on a wire from 27th Division in the Caucasus stating that as Georgia refused to settle her debts for oil, no oil had been pumped for some time from Baku; and either the Allies or the British would have to pay the 15 million rouble debt, plus a monthly advance of 3 million roubles, or the railways would soon cease to function. The ‘only solution’ was for the British to pay, and a British officer was just off to Baku; and if it was in fact the only way to make the oil flow again, he ‘means to pledge British responsibility for debt’.

This news was much resented at the Treasury. ‘It is surely wrong that we should be involved in these heavy charges for other people’s debts’, minuted Chamberlain on the bottom on the 28th, and sent it on to the Prime Minister. ‘Why should we not evacuate?’

The same day, Lloyd George sent it on to Churchill with a cross note that it was ‘quite unjustifiable’, and an ‘indication of what I fear will inevitably occur if we continue to occupy and accept the responsibility for the Government of these regions. Please let me know what reply you have sent to G.H.Q., Constantinople’, he demanded.\(^\text{20}\)

On March 1, Lloyd George wrote to Churchill about another ‘disquieting telegram’ from Constantinople. The French are becoming quite intolerable. The third power in point of strength, they want to create the impression that they are the first in point of authority. We cannot allow our men to be ordered about in the East where prestige is more essential to us than in any other quarter of the globe. Franchet d’Esperey must be told quite peremptorily that if he meddles Milne will be put under Allenby…What did you tell Clemenceau about this business?\(^\text{21}\)

On March 2, Churchill replied curtly to both of the Prime Minister’s letters, stating that the matter of the Baku oil had been dealt with ‘spontaneously’ by the War Office, ‘as you would have wished’. He pointed out sharply that he was studying ‘very carefully’ all the Russian telegrams; but as the War Cabinet often dealt direct with the General Staff, and ‘frequent consultations’ had taken place, both in London and in Paris, at which he had not been present, and Curzon’s Eastern Committee often gave direct orders to Sir Henry Wilson, ‘I consider that I have hitherto been an observer rather than a responsible actor’.

He agreed that Britain ought to leave the Caucasus ‘as soon as possible’. But she might as well now wait until the Peace Conference came to a ‘provisional decision’ about Georgia. ‘It is also important that our warships should remain on
the Caspian until in any case Denikin has taken Astrakhan and has taken control of the mouth of the Volga.’ But once there, Britain should leave, even if the Italians did not replace her troops, and make it up to Denikin with a strong British Mission. ‘This is the policy which I should enforce if the matter were left in my hands’, he underlined, ‘and for which I would in these circumstances take a full measure of responsibility.’

On Lloyd George’s instructions, he had wired Milne a fortnight ago to ‘use every method of courtesy to the French, but in no circumstances to give way to these improper demands’. He then explained what he had told Clemenceau in Paris. On return, he found that Sir Henry Wilson had received ‘certain directions’ from Curzon, and had gone back to Paris, but was returning to London that day. Churchill stressed that it was clearly for Lloyd George himself to settle this with Clemenceau. Churchill would go back to Paris on Friday, the 5th; but unless required at the Prime Minister’s side ‘as your lieutenant in these quasi-military affairs’, it would be better for him to remain at the War Office, ‘where I have plenty of very interesting work to do’.

He concluded, ‘What about those young fellows [i.e. Samuel Hoare and Walter Guinness] who are pressing me on Russian matters. Would it not be a very good thing for us both to lunch with them on Wednesday [the 3rd] and have a friendly private talk? Are they not a class of your supporters with whom you ought to be in personal touch?’

Again, Lloyd George did not reply.

**Paris**

Foch, in fact, had developed his ideas at greater length to the Peace Conference on the 25th, during a discussion about the despatch of General Haller’s Polish troops from France to Danzig. The Eastern problem, he stated, would be no more difficult to solve than the Western problem, provided the ‘very special difficulties’ were appreciated. From 1812 up to 1917, Russia had been the graveyard of every invading army which did not have a proper base, good communications and enough men. Now there was the additional problem that the enemy, though badly organised and widely scattered, was ‘acting like a violent virus’. To beat the Russian Bolsheviks, the Allies must therefore set up a base of independent border states, Finland, Esthonia, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Greece; and raise great numbers of troops from them to cover the Russian territory involved. They need not be all that well organised; but if placed under the Allied High Command and properly supplied, then ‘1919 would see the end of Bolshevism, just as 1918 had seen the end of Prussianism’.

To this, Balfour replied hastily that the mobilisation of all Eastern Europe into a great army ‘to be hurled against Russia’ could not be accepted as Allied policy.

On February 28, Sir Henry Wilson was back in Paris, and discussed his Russian proposals with Foch, ‘with which he entirely agreed, except that he has no belief in either Denikin or Kolchak—and I am afraid I agree’, records Sir Henry Wilson.
That day, Foch again outlined his scheme before the Council of Ten for a ‘vast attack’ on Bolshevik Russia by both the White Russian Armies, and ‘all the peoples which lie along the fringe of Russia’, under Allied command. The base was to be Poland, and the rear was to be based on the Danzig-Thorn railway, behind which the Germans were to be ordered to withdraw. Foch, Philip Kerr later reported to Lloyd George, was now doing ‘everything he can’ to keep General Haller’s Polish troops in France to train them as the ‘spear-head of the Russian invasion’, fearing that they might otherwise become demoralised, if not scattered, if sent to Poland now.22

On March 3, when Philip Kerr forwarded to Lloyd George an account of Foch’s grandiose designs, he also outlined the plans of Boris Savinkov, the leading figure on the Russian Political Conference in Paris. The Bolsheviks, Savinkov told Philip Kerr, now had 400,000 troops, and would have 600,000 by the campaigning season in the spring; but only 50,000 to 60,000 were any good. The White Russians had 200,000 troops, an ‘extraordinary expansion in the last six months’. Savinkov planned to organise near Prague and in Poland a Russian Army of 200,000 troops from Russian prisoners, Czech, Slav and Polish volunteers, ‘paid and equipped by the Allies’. There would then be a ‘concerted offensive’, which would ‘indubitably smash up’ the Bolsheviks, who could neither resist technical equipment, nor move their reserves about owing to lack of railway transport.22

(These figures should again be compared with the War Office figures, and with Hoare’s figures, obtained from Golovin. It seems that Savinkov, that ‘seductive nihilist’, as Lloyd George called him, was exaggerating the present White Russian numbers to a considerable extent.)

But though in favour of Allied intervention, Savinkov did not want either Allied conscripts or volunteers, only Allied money and supplies. He was confident that the White Russians would beat the Bolsheviks eventually; but without Allied help, not until 1920. There would be a joint White Russian offensive in the spring, ‘and I gathered that he thought that the result would probably be indecisive’, reported Kerr. But his appeal for Allied help was not based on ‘indignation’ with the Bolsheviks, for stories of Bolshevik atrocities were ‘une blague’, as they were certainly committed by both sides. He was against Bolshevism as a ‘permanent policy for Russia’, and wanted Allied support so that Russia could ‘stand with the Allies as a friendly and orderly democracy’. The Bolsheviks were ‘eventually going any way’, but the great danger was that Germany would make offers, ‘and that Russia would accept them because they could get nothing better’.

Philip Kerr informed Lloyd George that he had the ‘gravest doubts’ whether Savinkov and the French would ever be able to induce the Czechs, Poles and others to march on Moscow at all; but he warned that this scheme was being ‘actively encouraged’ by Foch.

(It is clear that enormous attention was paid to this letter from Philip Kerr at 10, Downing Street. Savinkov’s reasons for wanting Allied support, and his views on atrocities, are marked with a thick red pencil line in the margin. But his plans,
and Philip Kerr’s ‘gravest doubts’, are marked by a double line, all presumably by Lloyd George himself.22)

London

On March 3, when Churchill introduced the Army Estimates, and asked the House of Commons for £440 million, he stressed that the Russian and German problems had to be dealt with now. The Allies, however, could not agree on Russian policy. But the Peace Terms should be presented to Germany at once; and unless Britain had a strong Army to enforce them, she would have no influence in Germany except by ‘starving everybody into Bolshevism—and I should like to know what would be the sense of that’, he stated. A confused and ragged debate on Russia followed.

Sir Donald Maclean (leader of the opposition liberals) criticised both the high figure of the Army Estimates, and the ‘enormous and increasing’ British commitments to the Russian people and the Russian Army. ‘I want to know what people and what Russian Army?’

Sir Edward Carson: ‘We are protecting the people who helped us during the War!’

Sir D. Maclean: ‘What are the facts? What particular people in northern Russia helped us in the War as a consequence of which we are bound by honour and by interest to keep an armed force there?’

Captain Stanley Wilson: ‘Archangel is an English port.’23

The Tory right-wing then stepped in. Lieutenant Colonel Guinness hoped that Churchill would impress his views upon the ‘lotus eaters of Paris’. The Russian problem was a military problem, and ‘limited liability’ warfare would solve nothing. If the White Russian Armies did not succeed, ‘we shall probably have to step in and do the work for them’. Churchill was then variously praised for not handing the North Russian people over to ‘Chinese execution’: asked if Allied volunteers could not be sent to stop the Russian ‘rotten apples’ from infecting the European ‘barrel’: warned that British parents were ‘alarmed and amazed’ that their sons were being sent to Russia. Mr Hogge asked if Churchill supported the Prime Minister’s statement that no more British troops would be sent out. British people did not want a conflict with Russia. ‘The soldiers do not want it…recently the soldiers who walked into Downing Street in order to air their grievances sang, “We don’t want to go to Russia!”’

Mr Churchill: ‘They were never asked to go.’

Mr Hogge: ‘But what we want to know from this side of the House is, will they ever be asked?’

An Hon. Member: ‘How can you tell?’
Mr Churchill again explained that the ‘terrific question’ of Russian policy could only be settled in Paris.

Sir D. Maclean: ‘Will my right hon Friend tell us with any degree of particularity what share the Allies are bearing in this tremendous task in Russia?’

Mr Churchill: ‘The share is not unequal. I could not say it is exactly equal, but it is not unequal. All are in it to a certain extent, and all are in it with extreme reluctance.’

It was essentially the military situation in North Russia and South Russia where political approval was needed for the necessary War Office action. These, therefore, were the two Russian theatres that came up for active consideration by the War Cabinet on March 4. Churchill referred his colleagues to their meeting on February 26, and asked if he could now be informed more definitely on Russian policy. The Prime Minister again said that the Peace Conference would discuss the matter as soon as he returned to Paris. British policy, he said, was to withdraw British troops from Russia, and then supply the White Russians, Churchill retorted hotly that it was impossible to evacuate North Russia before June, until when British troops must be properly reinforced to ensure a proper withdrawal. Was Britain to withdraw as soon as the ice thawed, and remove the British supporters?

The Second Sea Lord supported Churchill. Whether the War Cabinet decided on an evacuation or an advance in North Russia, the Admiralty also had a heavy responsibility. They were thus about to send out 6 Monitors, a repair ship, several river craft, with 2,400 naval ratings, which should arrive at Murmansk about May 1. The dangerous period at Archangel would be for some 5 or 6 weeks from that date, when the Dvina river was open, but the White Sea still closed. River craft were being sent out, as Britain had been beaten last year on the Dvina river, he admitted.

The Prime Minister again tried to stall. Costs were essential for a decision on Russian policy, he said, and he had only just had the cost of ‘all these various Russian commitments’. British troops and supplies, and their transport, would cost £73 million alone for six months; and if naval costs were added, the total would come to £150 million a year—all for very small operations. But Chamberlain accepted the naval expenses as necessary for either an evacuation or an advance. He urged that British troops be withdrawn from North Russia, if the Allies agreed.

When the First Lord pressed for an early decision on the evacuation of North Russia, Churchill stated hotly that he was not responsible for the present situation, and still uncertain what the War Cabinet wished. If naval forces in North Russia could be reinforced, then so must British troops. The sooner he was told what British policy was, the sooner he could start. Unless the War Cabinet gave him the necessary authority, he was ‘deeply apprehensive that the
consequences might be absolutely disastrous’. He wished to evacuate North Russia, and avoid a catastrophe.

Curzon supported Churchill. The War Cabinet were now agreed on North Russia, and should allow the War Office and Admiralty to take the necessary steps to cover the evacuation. At Sir Henry Wilson’s request, he agreed to find out how many Russians we would have to take with us from North Russia.

The Prime Minister fully agreed that Britain should evacuate North Russia as soon as possible, and he would urge this on his return to Paris. The War Cabinet thereupon agreed to press for an ‘early evacuation’ of North Russia, for which Churchill could make the ‘necessary preliminary arrangements’, and asked the Prime Minister to make this known in Paris. Churchill was also asked to circulate the War Office paper showing the cost of maintaining British troops in the various Russian theatres.24

Churchill turned to South Russia. How long were British troops to remain in the Caucasus? Until the League of Nations decided the fate of Georgia? What did the First Lord intend to do with the British Flotilla on the Caspian? If Britain left the Caucasus, how would she make it up to Denikin? The Prime Minister again tried to stall, and raised the question of costs. Chamberlain remarked that British troops in the Caucasus and near the Caspian were not serving any British interests, and Britain had no obligations there. Churchill stated that he wished to evacuate the 30,000 British troops in the Caucasus, and make it up to Denikin with a British Mission of 1,800 instructors: to send a similar British Mission to Kolchak, and recall the two British regiments in Siberia. All this was reasonable; and if Britain’s White Russian friends failed, even with this support, she was not to blame.

Curzon supported Churchill. The Eastern Committee could consider what action to take if British troops were withdrawn from the Caucasus. The Prime Minister agreed to this, but hoped that the Eastern Committee’s proposals about the Caucasus would not tie his hands in Paris.24

**North Russia**

That evening, Sir Henry Wilson sent a personal wire to General Ironside at Archangel, enquiring what reinforcements he would need to cover a withdrawal, if the Allies so decided; and what would be the latest date for Ironside to receive such an order.

On March 5, in an over-long, ‘most secret’ and at times almost panicky minute, Churchill informed the General Staff that he was ‘extremely anxious’ about Archangel, and wished them at the ‘earliest date’ to show him plans for an evacuation in June drawn up by the ‘Generals on the spot’.25

What was the position about the air attack on the Bolshevik steamers on the upper Dvina? Was there a ship ready to take out the aircraft? ‘It seems to me that we ought to be preparing without delay a force of 5,000 or 6,000 men who could be sent if necessary to extricate these North Russian expeditions.’ The General
Staff should submit a scheme for assembling such a force ‘without the slightest delay’, and before Ironside or Maynard replied. He had obtained the necessary authority from the Cabinet the day before. ‘If it is not needed subsequently, all the better.’ Was this number of volunteers available? There is no need to tell these men where they are going at this stage.’

Should not reinforcements be sent ‘in a steady trickle’ from Murmansk to Archangel? ‘What news is there of the special ships which can break the ice and go straight into Archangel? How does that matter stand? How many men could they carry? How many voyages could they make in the time available before we are to expect heavy enemy attacks? I am certain that we are in increasing danger on this front. Do you observe that Trotsky has stated that he intends to wipe out the Archangel and Murmansk forces and clear the coast? Sometimes such statements are all bluff, but in the present condition of the Bolshevik forces it might help them to say beforehand that they could do a certain thing—knowing that they have the power to do it—and then to make good later on.

‘I am extremely anxious about this position, and from day to day my anxieties increase.’ He now had authority from the War Cabinet, had pledged Parliament that the War Office would ‘leave no stone unturned’, and therefore wished a ‘most intense effort’ to be made, having a ‘first charge on all our interests and resources’, to carry out the evacuation ‘in a manner not incompatible with the honour of our army’. He was also thinking of sending a personal message to the British troops that ‘if they are to see their homes again’, they must, until relieved or evacuated, maintain discipline and fight.25

That very day, the DMO informed Churchill that the Shipping Controller would not provide further ships for North Russia; he urged in the ‘most emphatic manner’ that ships must somehow be found to take out the eighteen aircraft to Murmansk.

Churchill needed no urging; he instructed the DMO to see the Shipping Controller at once and in person, and armed him with a letter stating that it was of ‘urgent military importance’ that a ship be at Sheerness on March 10 to take out the aircraft to bomb the ice-bound Bolshevik steamers so that they could not come up river in early May before the port was open. ‘I have the Prime Minister’s approval of the plan’.

But Maclay proved obdurate; no ship could possibly sail before March 14, he said, and he flatly refused to allow a specially strengthened ship to go into Archangel behind ice-breakers. It was finally agreed that as there was now very little time before the thaw, which would stop aircraft operating up the Dvina river, a ship now loading would drop some aircraft at Murmansk for Kem, and would then take the remainder, together with the sea planes, on to Archangel when open.26

But that day (the 5th), Ironside replied to Sir Henry Wilson that no more Allied troops would be needed to cover a withdrawal, and it was thus unnecessary for him to give a ‘latest date’. But naval forces would have to be reinforced to keep both the channel and the Dvina river clear from Archangel to the river
mouth. Russian troops, he warned, would melt away on our departure, there would be disorder in Archangel which would have to be put down by armed force, and many Russian people would have to be removed. He begged for secrecy, and asked when a definite decision could be expected.27

London

That evening, Bonar Law adopted a very cautious attitude on Russia during the debate in the House of Commons. The real meaning of Bolshevism was ‘penetrating more and more’ throughout England; people saw that it meant ‘nothing but ruin’. We were thus giving ‘very much more than moral support’ to the ‘side of humanity’, who knew that the Allies could not send troops. But it was not a simple problem, as the Allies had to reach joint agreement. ‘Something must be done, but I am not prepared to add a single word to what has been said… by the Prime Minister’.

By now, White Russian morale had suffered a disastrous lapse. That same day, the British Ambassador in Copenhagen wired that the French Military Attaché had heard from a reliable source that ‘practically all Russians of old regime have now decided that their interests lie in seeking support of Germany’.

Sir Ronald Graham agreed. ‘Certainly this is the attitude that many of the Russian refugees here [take], including, I am told, the Grand Duke Dmitri. They cannot get over the Prinkipo proposal, which, coupled with what they regard as our dilatoriness in arriving at a Russian policy, has completely disillusioned them.’ To this, Curzon added his monogram.

On March 6, the Eastern Committee met under Lord Curzon’s chairmanship to resolve the question of British support for Denikin, and the British presence on and subsequent evacuation from the Caucasus and Caspian. Churchill said he favoured the ‘quickest possible’ evacuation of British troops from the Caucasus, while supporting Denikin with a Military Mission, and munitions and arms, provided he did not cross a certain line which Britain could fix. Such ‘definite support’ would assist Denikin much more in his struggle against the Bolsheviks than the mere presence of British troops the other side of the Caucasus.

But the situation at Astrakhan and on the Caspian must be cleared up before Britain evacuated, and measures taken to prevent British troops being cut off at Krasnovodsk. Once Britain was rid of the Astrakhan fleet, her own ships could be handed over to Denikin, and become part of the mission. He would thus like to see the Admiralty proposals for Astrakhan put into effect as early as possible, and hoped at the same time to see Denikin move up and hold the line (and especially the mouth) of the Volga. It would then be possible to hand over the ships at the same time as Britain agreed a convention with Denikin on the conditions for continued British help. One condition, of course, would be a guarantee of Georgian independence. Churchill thought Denikin was likely to accept the conditions laid down, because without British arms and munitions, and the Military Mission, ‘he would be bound to fall’. While these naval operations were
proceeding on the Caspian, the War Office should draw up a plan of evacuation, and carry it out in three or three and a half months’ time. Churchill really did not see what British interests were involved in Georgia, Azerbaijan, Daghestan, and the other small states. There seemed no doubt that once Russia revived, they would be reconquered, and once more form part of the Russian Empire. What happened in the interval did not affect Britain, for she had no interests there.

Curzon said Churchill’s policy was ‘clear and intelligible’, but he only really appeared interested in Denikin, ‘and was indifferent to the new republics of the Caucasus’. Churchill, he felt, over-estimated Britain’s hold over Denikin; with Batoum and Baku within his grasp, it seemed unlikely he would march north, ‘when he might stay at home and take the prize at his feet’.30

Churchill replied that he feared that unless Britain had a ‘definite programme’, she would find herself still more deeply involved; but with such a programme, Britain might be able not only to get out, ‘but to get out in style’.

Curzon said the result of British attempts to establish the independence of these Caucasus States ‘seemed to be that we had a Military Governor in every State’.

Churchill retorted that it was quite obvious that the longer Britain stayed, ‘the deeper our claws would stick in’. It was very difficult to avoid sending out detachments when every sort of event was developing all over the place.

Admiral Fremantle remarked that the Admiralty had no purely naval interests on the Caspian. Naval operations there were subsidiary to military operations. So long as British troops, or Denikin, remained in the Caucasus, however, their safety demanded that the command of the Caspian remained under British control.

Captain Coode (Director of the Operations Division, Admiralty) said an advanced air base was needed to bomb the Bolshevik fleet at Astrakhan, as the aircraft at present on the Caspian could not fly from Petrovsk to Astrakhan and back; but long-distance aircraft could not hope to reach the scene of operations before April; meanwhile, the ice might begin to melt any day, and if bombing operations were to be carried out at all, they should be undertaken at once. It was true that now they had got rid of the ‘Russian Flotilla’, British ships on the Caspian could face the Bolshevik fleet at Astrakhan, especially since the shallow northern waters did not suit submarines; but destruction by bombing was preferable, as there was less danger of loss than in a naval battle.

Curzon said he felt that withdrawal from the Caucasus would also involve an early withdrawal from the Hamadan-Enzeli line, which would react on Persia. If Denikin were unable to keep the proposed undertaking, it should be remembered that there was very strong feeling in Paris about the independence of the Caucasus States, ‘and it looked as if the Georgians were going to receive recognition’.30

Curzon summed up that Denikin must not be allowed to invade the Transcaucasus or absorb the small states ‘for the present’.

The Eastern Committee decided that:
1. An advanced air base for bombing the Bolshevik fleet at Astrakhan should be sanctioned.

2. The British Government should agree a convention with Denikin, promising him arms and munitions, a strong military mission, and naval cooperation on the Caspian until he took Astrakhan (for which a time limit should be set), provided that he undertook to respect a frontier line (to be drawn up by the War Office and Foreign Office) with the Caucasus States.

3. The War Office, in consultation with the Admiralty and the India Office, should prepare a plan for the evacuation of the Caucasus and the Caspian, the evacuation to be from east to west, and to begin at once with General Malleson’s force in Transcaspia, on the lines indicated by Curzon.

Later on March 6, the War Cabinet had to referee a dispute between Churchill and the Shipping Controller about the tonnage needed to take munitions and supplies to Denikin. Nearly one and a half times as many ships as originally asked for were now required, involving 27 ships of 5,000 tons, said Maclay; France and Italy should be asked to help, he urged. Churchill stated that the Eastern Committee had recommended to the Cabinet withdrawal from the Caucasus, and compensation to Denikin of supplies and munitions, provided he did not interfere in the Caucasus states. British supplies, which were thus a lever both to enable Denikin to fight the Bolsheviks and to stop him ill-treating the Caucasus states, must therefore be sent to enable British troops to be withdrawn as soon as possible. Britain had to keep the power to control Denikin if he did not meet her wishes. It was useless to ask the French to help as Denikin was in the British sphere.

Curzon supported Churchill, and warned that British troops could not be brought away hurriedly. He agreed that Britain must retain control over Denikin through munitions and supplies to attack to the north, but not to the south; Britain was relying on him to beat the Bolsheviks, but he had shown a tendency to turn on an easier target to the south, as ‘he was a type of the old-fashioned monarchical Russian who regarded it as his natural role to bring the Caucasus States under subjection’.

Maclay complained vehemently that Britain should not have to supply all these ships. The Italians, for instance, were using Austrian ships, meant to be under Allied control, for an expedition to Libya; the position was becoming worse every day, these new proposals were also coming up; and he went grumbling on about his world-wide difficulties, when Churchill went for him. Though the War Office had devised the best possible scheme within the limits laid down by the Cabinet, it was becoming more and more difficult to carry out any coherent policy owing to these Shipping and Treasury objections. All Churchill now wanted was Cabinet approval for the despatch of these munitions and supplies to continue; he would then make the necessary arrangements with the Shipping Controller. And although Maclay refused to be mollified by Curzon, the Cabinet
then decided that he should ‘provide the shipping necessary to transport the material to the Black Sea for the support of General Denikin’.  

Paris

In Paris, where a great clash was building up over the German Treaty, Lloyd George on his return duly informed the Peace Conference about British policy for Russia. Foch had ‘great plans’ for an invasion of Russia, he stated on March 7, but had never submitted any estimate of the cost. He showed Clemenceau the estimates of the present operations, which he had just obtained in London—and only after considerable delay and pressure. When Clemenceau looked ‘staggered’, Lloyd George added that this did not of course include the cost of Franchet d’Esperey’s expedition in the Ukraine. The British, he stated, intended to evacuate North Russia and Siberia, but would ‘join the Allies’ in supplying Denikin and Kolchak so that they could ‘defend their own territories against Bolshevik attack’. Clemenceau and Colonel House both agreed with this policy. (This is Lloyd George’s own account of the meeting; he states that he took the ‘very unusual course’ of dictating a summary when it was over.)

Sir Henry Wilson, who had accompanied the Prime Minister, thereupon sent a top secret wire to Ironside that Allied troops would be withdrawn from Archangel at the earliest moment, possibly in June. He wished Ironside to send him comprehensive and definite plans for the evacuation, and to know what help General Maynard could give from Murmansk.

With Lloyd George back in Paris, and President Wilson due back in seven days, the Peace Conference was once more under way. Agreement of a sort was reached on the new German Army on the 7th, and the various Territorial Commissions reported on the 8th.

Churchill, exasperated at being continually put off by Lloyd George (who had not been present at the War Cabinet of March 6), and with full knowledge of the Bullitt mission, knew that he must somehow pin the Prime Minister down. ‘Churchill arrived late last night from London, & breakfasted with the P.M. this morning’, recorded Frances Stevenson, Lloyd George’s private secretary, on March 8. ‘Full of his speech in the House on the Military Service Bill…’ That morning (as Bullitt crossed the Russian border), Churchill had what he thought was a decisive interview with the Prime Minister.

Immediately on return to the War Office, he wrote a very careful letter to Lloyd George confirming that ‘it is your decision and the decision of the War Cabinet’ that British troops and those Russians who wished to leave were to be evacuated from Murmansk and Archangel ‘as soon as the ice melts in the White Sea’, and that more British troops could be sent out to cover this operation. It was ‘also decided by you and the War Cabinet’ that Britain should withdraw from the Caucasus as soon as possible, and compensate Denikin by the despatch of arms and munitions and a British Military Mission of 2,000 special volunteers, in
return for an undertaking from him not to attack the Caucasus states south of a line ‘which the Foreign Office are tracing’. Lloyd George had ‘also decided’ that the two British Regiments at Omsk should be replaced by another British Mission.

‘On these lines and within these limits’, wrote Churchill carefully, ‘I should be prepared to be responsible for carrying out the policy on which you and the War Cabinet have decided.’ He presumed that either Lloyd George or Balfour would inform the Allies of this decision. ‘If, however, I have wrongly interpreted your decisions in any respect, I hope you will let me know what you really wish’, he concluded pointedly, ‘in order that I may see whether it can be done.’

Churchill probably knew he would not receive an answer to his letter. ‘Winston thinks L.G. is riding for a fall by not facing the problem of Russia’, Sir Henry Wilson noted on March 9. But he gave the Prime Minister every chance to reply. Finally, on March 21, Churchill simply informed the General Staff at the War Office that his letter was, nevertheless, to be taken as their Russian policy.

It was, in fact, in this farcical way—on the basis of an unanswered letter—that British policy for Russia was fixed for the next five months. Thus, while French ‘major intervention’ in the Ukraine galloped on to rapid and humiliating defeat, the British were now committed to a course of action which the entire War Cabinet recognised could lead to no result, and would only prolong bloodshed in Russia. Churchill, ostensibly to avoid a similar humiliating defeat at Archangel, rapidly transformed this into a trans-Arctic dash to link up with a Russian champion in Siberia. But it was not until late July that the War Cabinet were to be called upon to survey the wreckage of this operation. Once again, they decided to withdraw, and once again Churchill spotted other Russian champions for them. Thus, as the War Cabinet refused to face the Russian dilemma, and Churchill tried to extricate them by unending military adventure, Russia was to be ruined, the Bolshevik regime consolidated, and the seeds of the Cold War sown.
South Russia

In South Russia, matters were even more critical than was imagined in London and Paris, and the French now began to reap the whirlwind. French relations with the local Volunteer Army forces were almost at breaking point. There was at Nicolaiev a considerable amount of stores and supplies; and since the Volunteer Army was short of everything, General Sannikov (the local Russian Commander) asked the local French Commander for guns and shells, rifles and ammunition, general supplies for about two divisions, and linen for the wounded, to be brought down to Odessa. This was refused. When Sannikov went to see General d'Anselme (the French Commander), who was harassed and nervous as usual, Colonel Freidenburg (his Chief of Staff) interrupted repeatedly. ' Impossible—non, non—ne cédéz pas, mon General.' Sannikov told Freidenburg sharply that he was talking to d'Anselme; but he was unsuccessful. 'They are always contrasting us with the Germans', said d'Anselme afterwards. ‘Of course, the Germans could keep perfect order here with 60,000 men.’ This frequent excuse never impressed the local Russians, who knew there had never been this number of Germans at Odessa, and were now noticing that the Greek troops were much smarter than the French. Freidenburg replied with a formal refusal on March 8. The supplies at Nicolaiev, he stated, belonged to the Ukrainian Directory, and part had already been distributed to the Volunteer Army. Nor, Reilly reported, would Freidenburg allow Sannikov to mobilise some 5,500 Russian officers and 1,500 men billeted in Odessa.¹

If there had been a definite plan, stated Reilly firmly, local Bolshevik risings could have been stopped. But now Bolshevik propaganda among the French troops was really having its effect as well: at Vosnesensk, a French regiment had held a meeting when ordered into action, and though its officers induced it to advance a short way, it had returned to barracks when fired on; and a French Zouave regiment at once got out of their train on discovering that they were being taken to the front. General d'Anselme now readily admitted that French troops were reluctant to fight. Sannikov, whom Reilly thought reliable, had been assured by both Berthelot and d'Anselme that there would be no French
agreement with the Ukraine; but this, in fact, might now be concluded within a few days, and Freidenburg boasted that his policy had triumphed. Once again, Reilly strongly urged that Freidenburg be removed. Sannikov preferred a complete rupture to the present state of affairs; he would withdraw from Odessa altogether, he told Reilly, advance the Don and then up the Volga to link up with Kolchak, and then return to clear the Ukraine.¹

There was then a disaster. When the Bolsheviks attacked Kherson on the 8th, the town rose en masse, and both men and women opened fire from roofs and windows on the Greek troops, who suffered heavily, and only just escaped on a French ship which arrived in the nick of time. A massacre ensued. The Greek survivors returned to Odessa boiling with anger at the French. Events moved quickly. General Milne (the British Commander at Constantinople), who was much disturbed by Bagge’s reports about Franco-Russian relations, now summoned both Bagge and Reilly; and after consultation, Reilly was told to return at once to London, and then go on to Paris to press for the urgent despatch of a British High Commissioner to South Russia to achieve Allied unity.¹

Before leaving, Reilly wired the Foreign Office, with Bagge’s approval, that the French attitude towards the Volunteer Army was really caused by Denikin’s harsh attitude towards all those Russian officers who had served either with the Bolsheviks, or with Skoropadsky, or with the Ukrainian Directorate, and who now formed a large body of malcontents in Odessa, whose presence there much harmed Volunteer Army prestige. For while Bolshevik officers taken whilst fighting were always shot by the Volunteer Army, former Bolshevik or Ukrainian officers had to face a court martial, and were usually degraded, as had just happened to two Russian Generals, who had been reduced to the ranks, one of whom Reilly knew personally had rendered the British cause great service in Moscow, and who held the British Military Cross. And the others, even to be taken to join the reserve, had to face a Court of Honour, whose decisions were taken by ballot; and they thus often faced the death penalty. All Jewish officers were disbarred. Reilly had discussed this matter with Sannikov and other Russian Generals; and they all thought that Denikin and Kolchak should grant some amnesty, for most Red Army officers were only serving under compulsion, or to save their families from starvation, and a relatively easy way out should be made for them. Reilly then left for London.¹

The loss of Kherson was soon followed by a rising in Nicolaiev, which the wavering German troops now supported. On March 11, d’Anselme told consul Cooke in Odessa that Nicolaiev would be evacuated that night, and all Allied subjects would be withdrawn together with French troops; the Germans, he said, could leave later on French ships under whatever agreement they could make with the Bolsheviks, who by capturing Kherson, had made Nicolaiev untenable.¹

The news of the French agreement with the Ukrainian Directorate reached the Foreign Office in London on March 13. ‘This agreement justifies our worst apprehensions’, noted the Russia Department. ‘It is a political instrument of a far-reaching nature, places the Ukraine in a special position as regards all other parts of
Russia and would thereby seem to anticipate the policy which is now being considered by the Allied Powers in Paris...Its most objectionable side is its obvious discrimination against General Denikin...In this connection I would draw attention to the proposal to allow the Ukraine to control the Russian Black Sea Fleet. This clause can only be aimed at General Denikin.

'We should be perfectly open about this', agreed Sir Ronald Graham. 'The French are negotiating in our name as well as their own.'

The Foreign Office informed the British Embassy in Paris to this effect on the 14th. As the French were negotiating in their sphere on behalf of the British, the December 1917 agreement seemed to have broken down. But as the Allies had to reach agreement over South Russia, the British Delegation must decide whether the matter was to be discussed with the French Government, or raised with the Peace Conference.

This Foreign Office note crossed the French reply to their previous note, which stated that the French Government wished to adhere to the December 1917 agreement, but felt that the French C-in-C in South Russia, who had few French troops, should be allowed to recruit those Russian volunteers who would fight the Bolsheviks, but not join the Volunteer Army. Denikin, however, refused to allow this; and without informing Berthelot, had made difficulties for the French troops in the Ukraine, and compromised their supplies. While relations between Denikin and Berthelot were of prime importance, British objections were thus secondary; as were those of the Volunteer Army, which had failed even to stop the Bolshevik advance on the Don. Until Allied policy was agreed, Allied operations in South Russia would remain, as far as France was concerned, under the command of Berthelot. The French Government could not see why even a distinguished Russian General should not serve under Allied Command, which had been adopted in principle. Moreover, the Bolsheviks held most of the Ukraine, while the remainder, save for two or three ports, was under the de facto Ukrainian Government, which did not recognise Denikin. All loyal Russians, in fact, should be able to assemble, out of range of the Bolsheviks, to re-establish unity. Denikin was badly informed. The French Foreign Minister was thus asking the Russian Political Conference:

1. To place under French command any Russian troops in zones held by Berthelot.
2. To take no political measures in those zones without asking the French.
3. To allow the French to organise such Russian volunteers and forces there who wished to serve under the French Command.¹

When Sir Ronald Graham drew Lord Curzon’s attention to this, he suggested that a further note should be handed to the French Ambassador, to whom Curzon might also speak, as, ‘I am seriously concerned at the situation which is arising in S.Russia owing to French mismanagement and intrigue.’
'I will gladly do so’, minuted Lord Curzon, ‘for we or rather the French are drifting on to the rocks. In the memo please have all the points seriatim however unpalatable.'

The French evacuation of Nicolaiev really alarmed the people of Odessa. On March 13, the Odessa press announced that Ataman Gregoriev now intended to march on the town, whose prompt surrender he demanded (and if Grishin-Almazov, the Russian Governor, refused, he threatened to flay him alive, and make a drum out of his skin). The population began to panic. The French Command therefore stated that they would proclaim a state of siege next day, appoint a new Russian Military Commander, and set up a local Russian Government under Andro de Langeron (the local grain contractor)—to which the Russian Command took strong exception. For while the French Chief of Staff Freidenburg’s negotiations with Petlura continued, the Red Army took Balta, north-west of Odessa (in their drive to link up with the Hungarian Bolsheviks), and cut the Ukrainian Army in two; and 15,000 Ukrainian troops were thrown back to Birzoula, just north of Odessa. They had contacted the French Command; and Freidenburg had induced General d’Anselme to break with the Volunteer Army, form a new Russian Army with these Ukrainian troops and the idle Russian officers at Odessa, and then proclaim a mobilisation, and send for more Allied troops.

On the 14th, the CNUR (the central Russian party) agreed to the French scheme, while the Volunteer Army leaders decided to avoid a rift with the French Command for as long as possible. But as a result of Freidenburg’s dealings with Petlura, and with a man called Khari (of the Russo-Asiatic Bank), who had been the ‘official banker of the Germans during their occupation’ (and was still in German pay), which had led to the restitution to the Odessa financiers of the funds seized in the Kiev banks, the Volunteer Army secret service (the ‘Azbouka’, or ‘ABC’) wired angrily to Denikin that this French Jew Freidenburg was not only in touch with the Bolsheviks, from whom he had received large sums of money, but was a German spy; and for good measure, Shulgin (the ‘Azbouka’ director, and leading reactionary) sent a copy to General Franchet d’Esperey.

Freidenburg, however, now told Andro to form a little coalition cabinet ‘representing all parties from Monarchists to Socialists’. But the CNUR refused to join: the Socialist parties, the ‘Union of Zemstva and Towns’ and the ‘Union for Regeneration’ also refused, and drifted over to the Bolsheviks; and Andro had to fall back on the ‘Agriculturists’, who finally supported the Volunteer Army. On the 15th, when Bagge returned from Constantinople to find Andro sticking up proclamations in d’Anselme’s name, ordering a curfew and blaming the panic on speculators, all Andro’s little cabinet resigned; and d’Anselme, out of his depth and now out of control, confessed that he had only taken Andro on as a ‘Civil Assistant’ as he could supply Odessa with 25,000 tons of flour ‘in a very short time’.
After more negotiations with the French, who now had to make concessions, Andro then tried to form a Council of Five, with Schwartz (the former Bolshevik Military Commander of Petrograd) as ‘War Minister’, and Grishin-Almazov (the present Military Governor) in command of the Volunteer Army under him. Schwartz wavered. But when he at last agreed to form a new Russian Army, if Denikin approved, the Russian officers insisted that it be under Kolchak, not Denikin! Nor could they reach agreement about the local police or the Prefect. At first, both were to be under Andro; but when the reactionary Grishin-Almazov was told to take over, the Prefect resigned. And so, ‘instead of a dictatorship of the Allied Commander-in-Chief’ (which was what the state of siege had been proclaimed for), d’Anselme found himself surrounded by something in the nature of a Bolshevik Soviet’, reported a British agent.

General d’Anselme however reassured the Municipal Council and the Zemstvo that the strategic position at Odessa was daily improving with the daily arrival of fresh troops, and that there was no cause for anxiety; sufficient food for Odessa was guaranteed. This statement was published in the Odessa press on the 16th, in both French and Russian, together with this decree: ‘Je me fais un devoir de déclarer que la resolution catégorique de ne point rendre Odessa aux ennemis est irrévocable.’ But Consul Cooke reported that Franchet d’Esperey had been told that evacuation was now inevitable; three shiploads of discontented German troops had now arrived in Odessa from Nicolaiev to add to the unrest.

The Foreign Office was baffled. ‘It looks now as if the French do not mean to evacuate Odessa’, minuted Sir Ronald Graham on seeing this wire.

‘M. Cambon [the French Ambassador] told me the French were sending fresh troops by sea’, replied Curzon.

But the War Office now expected the worst. On March 15, Sir Henry Wilson had a personal wire from Milne explaining the gravity of the situation. At Nicolaiev, where there had been a French Colonel and his staff, two Greek regiments and over 10,000 Germans, d’Anselme had ordered an evacuation; and the wireless station was now destroyed, and the whole arsenal was to be burnt. There was no method; and though the Greek troops had fought well both there and at Kherson, they had only been saved from total annihilation by fire from warships. Franchet d’Esperey wished Sir Henry Wilson to know that the Bolsheviks would be on the Dniester in a fortnight, where the Roumanians would be unable to stop them. Milne urged that Franchet d’Esperey should take over the Roumanian command, if Berthelot was relieved, as was hoped.

In Odessa, General Sannikov (the then Russian Commander), who strongly objected to Andro, warned both Bagge and Cooke on the 17th that the ‘town is provided with flour till [March] 29th’. The food situation was thus serious, and harvest prospects were hopeless, as nothing could be sown. But four divisions could not only defend the Odessa district, but recapture Kherson and Nicolaiev; and if they then held the river Bug line up to Vosnesensk, they would control an area containing 25,000 tons of grain. What he called the new ‘Confederate’ Russian
Army would recognise General d’Anselme in both military and civil matters, he assured Bagge, provided his Civil Council was appointed by Denikin.\footnote{1}

On the 18th, the Odessa press contained a conciliatory statement by d’Anselme to cover the failure of his political coup; he had no wish to interfere with the Volunteer Army, and had only appointed Andro without asking Denikin because of the inevitable delay in communications. That day, there was a parade of Volunteer units on their way to the front; and after a service, Archbishop Platon blessed the troops on the Cathedral Square, and their popularity in the town went up. But at Constantinople next day, just before boarding the French cruiser Jean Bart to take command at Odessa, Franchet d’Esperey told Milne’s staff that, though he would decide on the spot, he thought it best to evacuate both Odessa and the Crimea. Admiral Calthorpe protested at this ‘deplorable step’; but Franchet d’Esperey took little notice, and sailed.\footnote{1}

On March 20 (the day that Reilly evidently arrived in London), the Foreign Office despatched a very strong note to the French Embassy stating that the Ukrainian Directorate could never control the Ukrainian people, who wished to maintain union with Russia; and as the idea of Ukrainian independence, which was of German origin, could only serve German ends, ‘His Majesty’s Government can only view such proceedings with the gravest misgiving’. The British Embassy in Paris was also instructed to state that the Foreign Office did not agree with the recent French note, and to request the French Foreign Minister to take steps to make the French Command in South Russia cooperate more closely with the British. That afternoon, Harmsworth assured Sir Samuel Hoare at Question Time in Parliament that the British Government was not aware that any Allied envoys in South Russia had ‘officially recognised’ Ukrainian independence.\footnote{2}

On March 20, the War Office replied to Milne and Briggs about Berthelot’s demands to Denikin. ‘Little comment is necessary’, they wired. ‘Our sympathies are largely with Denikin. It is this same attitude of the French which has led to such an impasse in Siberia, and is entirely opposed to our views of handing over to the Russians complete control as early as possible.’ Allied agreement, ‘much less the sending of a common plenipotentiary, is not to be hoped for. The French attitude’, they explained, ‘is apparently caused by jealousy and pique due to the fact that the only real fighting force in South Russia is in the British but not the French zone of influence. Denikin will by this time have realised that our own attitude in contrast to the French is one of whole-hearted support (in everything but troops) in his campaign against Bolshevism.’ As Denikin could not hope for any real French support in the Ukraine and Crimea, he should concentrate his efforts in the British zone, ‘until such times that the success of his forces and the inevitable failure of the French enable him to extend his operations to the French zone’. (There were limits, however, to British support. For this wire crossed a truly frightening request from Briggs. As the printing press at Rostov had no more paper, Denikin wanted 3,000 million unguaranteed rouble notes printed in England. The War Office replied in alarm that the British Government could not
'for very strong and weighty reasons’ in any way comply; though Denikin could make private arrangements with a British or American firm.}'

On March 20, the Odessa press contained this statement:

‘We are informed by a highly authorised source that it has been decided in Paris:

1. To take all measures to defend Odessa.
2. To assure supplies for the town’s million inhabitants.
3. To entrust direct command of Allied forces in South Russia to General Franchet d’Esperey [who] arrives at Odessa today, as well as General Berthelot.’

That day, there was a further ignominious military disaster. A Bolshevik armoured train burst into Berezovka station (due north of Odessa), and seized the place in a few moments. There was panic. The surprised French and Greek troops retreated in haste, abandoning tanks and artillery. The French claimed that the Greeks in front of them had exposed the position of the tanks as they retired; the Greeks blamed the French, whom they now despised.

That evening, when the cruiser Jean Bart arrived at Odessa, Franchet d’Esperey took little trouble to hide his feelings, and spoke in contemptuous terms to French officers about the Russians. (He was even quoted by a normally reliable British agent as saying: ‘The Russians are barbarians and villains. Through them we were drawn into this war, and through their treachery were compelled to fight an extra year…and now the same traitors expect, even demand, our help. I—as a soldier—obey the commands of my Government. But my heart is not in the enterprise. You must not stand on ceremony with these people. Shoot them without further ado if anything occurs…I take the responsibility.’)

As Colonel Freidenburg screened his visitors carefully, Franchet d’Esperey was soon convinced that all Russians agreed with him. The local Russian Government, he told General Schwartz, would be the same as all other Russian Governments. There would be an immediate, mass mobilisation in the Odessa district to raise a new Russian army, into which the Ukrainian forces would be incorporated. Allied reinforcements would cover its organisation, more Allied supplies would be sent, and a real effort made to obtain Denikin’s agreement by formal recognition of Denikin as C-in-C in South Russia. Schwartz still hesitated, as all this would take some considerable time. Franchet d’Esperey agreed, but said that French troops in Roumania would cover his left flank; and he told Schwartz in rough terms to take over all Russian forces at once, including the Volunteers, who were about to try to save Berezovka. Schwartz finally agreed, provided Denikin were consulted first. Franchet d’Esperey declined. The Volunteer Army took this as a virtual coup d’état, and Denikin refused to agree. Franchet d’Esperey then spoke in no uncertain terms to some Russian politicians. However the alarmed officials who drafted his statements for the press, completely altered what he had said; he was now made to say that the struggle would be
vigorously pursued; that a big, new offensive would be launched to free Russia from the Bolsheviks, and large Allied forces would soon arrive; but whatever happened, measures had been taken to defend Odessa.

However, next day, as he ordered a complete military occupation, the Odessa press also stated that the French had only intervened in South Russia to enable the Russians to organise themselves, form a new Russian Army to drive out the Bolsheviks, and then call a Constituent Assembly. The Allies would help with supplies and material. But unless this Russian Army was now formed, French troops would be recalled. And Franchet d’Esperey sent a letter to the Mayor Braikevitch stating that the French would only support a local Russian government for this specific purpose. This however hardly reassured the people of Odessa, who knew the Russian officials all too well.3

But a British agent called Maclaren (who had been with Reilly in the Moscow area the previous summer), whom Reilly had left behind in Odessa, confirmed that ‘d’Anselme’s headquarters has unwittingly become very intimate with the remnants of the powerful German Secret Service organisation in South Russia’. In fact, ‘several men who appear to be the trusted agents of the French are known by British and Russian Intelligence to have been in German pay until shortly before the Armistice’. They were quietly recruiting Russian officers to serve as ‘Volunteers’ under Yudenitch in the Baltic.4

One of General Milne’s staff officers, who had accompanied Franchet d’Esperey, had by now come to the same conclusion as Reilly had. ‘When discussing the Russian anti-Bolshevik forces’, he later reported, ‘it is with difficulty that they [the French] distinguish between those men who are now in the firing line, and those who loaf in the Hotel de Londres at Odessa.’ For French officers and men, with their ‘overwrought nerves and tiredness of war’, lumped all the Russians together. ‘They have all been guilty of betraying France’, they stated. But the Russians felt insulted by the idea of mixed brigades, and especially innovations like changing to ‘uniforms similar to French pattern without epaulettes’.5

That day, the British staff officer took both Bagge and Maclaren to see Franchet d’Esperey. The meeting opened inauspiciously. After leaving them in the hall to see if the General was free, ‘as I mounted the stairs’, reported the British officer, ‘I was surprised to see a Sergeant on duty trying to eject my friends into the street. I went back to remonstrate, but I was prevented from doing this by the arrival of the General who, to the horror of the Sergeant, formally shook hands with the two British subjects…’

Bagge told Franchet d’Esperey bluntly that things would be all right if the French Command worked with the existing Russian forces, and if the economy was assured; and he explained why the Russians thought that the French wanted an independent Ukraine. Franchet d’Esperey denied this. But Bagge showed him both the text of the agreement, and the letters stating that the Ukrainians were to have the stores at Nicolaiev. He then wanted to call in Freidenburg, but was stopped. There was a pause. Franchet d’Esperey said he despised the Russians; but
on a remark from Bagge, said he only referred to those in the town. Finally, it was agreed that Denikin must approve the mobilisation, which must be carried out by Russians. Franchet d’Esperey wanted Schwartz as Military Commander. He was going to return Sannikov to Ekaterinodar, as he had proof of his bad faith. He broke off into a long tirade about his lunch in Paris with Lloyd George and Balfour. Bagge underlined the need to suppress speculation, and asked for some courtesy by French officials; he described the treatment he himself had received that morning. Franchet d’Esperey asked why a British division had not been sent to Odessa. Bagge replied that it was in the French zone. There was another pause. Franchet d’Esperey finally said that Freidenburg would be withdrawn.5

That evening, Franchet d’Esperey banished Shulgin and Grishin-Almazov before they could hand over a letter from Denikin complaining about French action, especially Freidenburg’s. Both, together with Sannikov and other Russian officers, then sent him another note complaining of the harm that French policy would have. But this had no effect, and ‘only caused (Franchet) d’Esperey to use insulting expressions with regard to officers of the Volunteer Army, including General Denikin himself’, reported the British officer. A decree was then published appointing Schwartz as Military Governor, with complete authority over all Russian troops, including the Volunteer Army, which was now placed under a new Commander; and a Defence Council was set up, consisting of d’Anselme, Schwartz, Andro and the Mayor Braikevitch, with some left-wing Russian politicians for colour. Schwartz at once tried to resign, but was brusquely refused permission. For once the socialist parties sided with Denikin, and vigorously denounced this ‘colonial regime…which violates the sovereignty of Russia’. Thus the French, who then denied everything, ended up by infuriating everyone.

Just before Sannikov departed, Franchet d’Esperey allegedly told him that a Russian Government under Prince Lvov (i.e. the Russian Political Conference) had been recognised in Paris both by the French Government and by Admiral Kolchak, and had allowed the French to occupy South Russia and organise a new Russian Army there. Though he promised to send food and supplies, some 7,500 technicians, 9 regiments of Algerian Tirailleurs and some cavalry, Franchet d’Esperey was under no real illusions about Odessa, but wired to Milne that he was ‘anxious to hold Crimea, and [had] ordered strong Greek battalion there immediately’. He asked if four British armoured cars could be sent. Milne flatly refused. Franchet d’Esperey then departed to Sebastopol. Milne’s staff officer, however, concluded that French troops at Odessa should be able to hold their own, provided there was really energetic control. But though Colonel Freidenburg, the ‘evil genius’ of the French Command, was to go, reported Consul Cooke, General d’Anselme was now ‘in a state of such nervous indecision as to unfit him to command in a crisis.’5
London and Paris

On March 14, as President Wilson rejoined the Peace Conference on his return from America, Churchill wired urgently to the Prime Minister in Paris that he was in ‘whole hearted accord’ with his decision to feed Germany, but was becoming ‘increasingly anxious’ about Russia, and was that day sending him two papers on Russia. The first simply reminded Lloyd George that the four month period since the Armistice had been ‘disastrous almost without relief’ for the White Russians. This was due not to any increase in Bolshevik strength, but to a lack of any Allied policy.

‘Prinkipo has played its part in the general discouragement and relaxation which has set in. The fact that the German troops were commanded to withdraw from the Ukraine without any provision being made to stop the Bolshevik advance, has enabled large portions of this rich territory full of new supplies of food to be overrun, and the Bolsheviks are now very near the Black Sea at Kherson. There are many signs of weakness in Kolchak’s forces, and, as you have observed, many Bolshevik manifestations are taking place behind the Siberian front, in one of which the Japanese have had quite severe fighting.’

Churchill also much regretted that Lloyd George had recently not allowed him to bring Foch to see him, to explain the ‘not unreasonable’ proposals, which Foch had already explained to Churchill. ‘I feel quite powerless to avert the grave developments I see approaching’, he went on. ‘You and President Wilson have, I fear, definitely closed your minds on this subject and appear resolved to let Russian affairs take their course. You are the masters’, he admitted, ‘but it is vain to suppose that any real peace or revival can come to Europe while Russia is in anarchy.’ After enormous possibilities and opportunities had been lost, and great resources dissipated, Churchill feared that the Allies would ‘nevertheless be drawn, in spite of all your intentions, into the clutches of the Russian problem’. When the Bolsheviks had conquered all Russia and Siberia, the border states, the Caucasus and Transcaspia, the League of Nations and the British Empire would ‘wake up to the fact that Russia is not a negligible factor in world politics.

The second Russian paper concerned Archangel—Churchill knew that British troops there, cut off by the ice for another three months, were in a most precarious position; and with the memory of the Antwerp and Dardanelles disasters still all too fresh in his mind, he had no wish to be saddled at the end of the war with a further debacle, for which he bore no responsibility, at Archangel. He had thus obtained an undertaking from the Prime Minister that he could not only send out more British troops, but also make ‘whatever military arrangements are necessary’ to implement the War Cabinet’s decision to evacuate North Russia ‘as soon as the ice melts in the White Sea’.

When General Ironside had wired that no more Allied troops would be needed to cover a withdrawal from Archangel, Sir Henry Wilson had asked him for definite plans. The War Office was now even more concerned about the Archangel position, for there had been a steady increase of Bolshevik strength on
the Dvina river front since early March; and on the 8th, the *Times* correspondent in Helsinki wired that Zinoviev had just stated in Petrograd that the North Russian campaign would be ended in two to three weeks’ time ‘by our complete victory, and not a single British or French soldier will remain’. Next day, the Bolshevik attack opened. But on the 10th, Ironside replied to the CIGS that he could send no plans for withdrawal until Lindley and Admiral Green returned from Murmansk. Meanwhile, he wished to know if British support would be continued after British troops left, and if they would be replaced by good Russian officers and men. Without them, he warned, no further defence would be possible at Archangel. This wire was greeted warmly in the War Office. If Ironside only wanted Russian troops, there was no point in sending British troops. The General Staff thus at once put a paper before Churchill urging that Russian troops in France, now being organised by the French (with whom the War Office had already drawn up a list of selected Russian officers), should be sent to North Russia. Meanwhile, the War Office replied cautiously to Ironside that as the downfall of the Archangel Government would be regretted, they were enquiring if Russian troops, both in France and Germany, could he sent out to Archangel, under Allied and Russian officers. It was also possible that General Yudenitch might transfer his force in Finland to North Russia. Ironside was asked for his views.*

The Admiralty was more concerned about the Baltic. On March 10, the Deputy Chief of the Naval State had written a strong paper on ‘The Necessity for a Policy in the Baltic Provinces’. In Esthonia, he wrote, the Bolsheviks had been ejected, but would probably attack again in late April, when the ice freed their naval forces at Kronstadt. In Latvia, now mostly held by Bolshevik troops, demoralised German forces had now been replaced by 12,000 good German troops, under the efficient General von der Goltz. When these troops arrived by sea, the Admiralty had asked if they could land, but had received no answer. The Baltic Squadron, acting in line with new orders, was now preventing them from being reinforced. The situation was thus highly anomalous. British naval officers were often asked to support anti-Bolshevik operations, but could take no action for lack of instructions. If there were naval operations in May in the Gulf of Petrograd, Admiral Fremantle pointed out, there would be losses; and if Britain continued as at present, there would be operations. He thus strongly requested that proper British Missions be sent to the Baltic.8

Hardly had Churchill digested this, when on the 11th he received an ill-written scrawl from William Sutherland (Lloyd George’s Press Secretary, and also his link with the Russian bankers), about the ‘projected Russian Advance from Finland on Petrograd’, which he had heard from ‘various quarters’ was the most promising in Russia, and important enough ‘to justify the War Office sending out at

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* In compliance with Ironside’s request, all wires to North Russia (marked ‘Ironmay’) now became ‘top secret’. 
once officers who can investigate & report on the matter fully.’ The Russians only wanted a small supply of food for Petrograd on recapture. Sutherland had recently seen many people from Russia and Finland, ‘& all agree that the prospect of food getting into Petrograd…might well be the most powerful of all High Explosive for removing Bolshevism from its principal dugouts’. Churchill was irritated to receive this. Sutherland, he knew, was ‘exceedingly talkative, often revealing secrets’; and as he had to be extremely careful in his contacts with White Russians at this time, he no doubt wondered where Sutherland had picked this up, and from whom. Next day, Churchill simply sent the letter straight on to Lloyd George, adding, ‘You may be interested to see the enclosed from Sutherland’.9

But he was most impressed with the Admiralty paper on the Baltic. ‘This Paper also should be circulated to the War Cabinet in a locked box’, † he minuted on the 14th. ‘The messenger should take it with the Archangel paper from hand to hand, waiting for it to be read & passed on. He is not to leave it with any of the Ministers, but to wait patiently until they have read it & take it on to the next. He shd be relieved when necessary…’ Meanwhile, Churchill asked for ‘definite proposals’ as regards the despatch of British officers to the Baltic, so that there would be no delay when the War Cabinet decided.

But on March 15, Sir Henry Wilson wired to Churchill that Foch was ‘entirely opposed’ to the proposal to train Russian troops in France, and send them out to Murmansk and Archangel after the Allied withdrawal. There was no sense in trying to bolster up Russians under those conditions, Foch stated, and he refused even to cooperate with the British. Lloyd George had also spoken to the CIGS on the same subject. ‘He [Lloyd George] is very apprehensive that we may be starting another very expensive “Denikin” and “Kolchak” in Archangel and Murmansk, and there is certainly something to be said from that point of view’, commented Sir Henry Wilson.10

He advised Churchill to wait for the Peace Conference to decide on what action to take in Russia, before he sent a mission to General Yudenitch, or began collecting Russian troops for shipment to North Russia. ‘When this decision will be given I have no idea, because as I have told you, the subject of Russia has never been considered, and so far as I know, is not yet over the horizon, but the Prime Minister is so averse from spending more money, either on a mission to Yudenitch or in training the Russians…’ Nonetheless, Sir Henry Wilson advised Churchill to pause before taking any further action.10

In London, the War Cabinet considered the Baltic and Archangel papers at noon on March 17. Curzon stated that it was useless to take ‘piecemeal’ decisions until a definite Russian policy had been agreed in Paris. It had recently been proposed that France should protect Poland, England protect the Baltic States, and the other Allies the other border states; but to this there had been no answer from Paris, save a proposal for a loan to Esthonia, which the Treasury had

† He marked it, ‘Return to me. Not Adm[iralty]’. 
rejected. Why was Britain, and why ought Britain, to back Kolchak, Denikin, a
’so-called Government’ in North Russia, and the Baltic States? All had different
aims. Denikin and Kolchak were ‘Imperialists seeking to revive the old Russian
regime’. So were Yudenitch in Finland, and Lieven in Lithuania. Any help Britain
gave them would simply ‘revive the old monarchical Russia’, which would re-
absorb the border states. In the Baltic, Esthonia was holding its own, but it was
only the 12,000 ‘efficient’ German troops that were protecting Latvia from
Bolshevism. Now Churchill wanted to organise Russian officers and prisoners; but
this was useless until a Russian policy was agreed in Paris.11

Churchill entered at this point. The two papers, he stated, were General Staff
papers, not his policy. When known, the War Cabinet decision to withdraw from
North Russia would deal a ‘considerable blow’ to the Russian cause; but it was
such an unpromising strategic line that it would be unwise to press the Russians
to defend it, as it could lead to nothing. He had just heard from Sir Henry Wilson
that he had spoken in Paris to the Prime Minister and to Foch, who was also
opposed to such an effort; while the Prime Minister feared that the War Office
proposals would simply lead to the same ‘costly enterprises’ as those with
Denikin. Before a British Mission was sent to the Baltic, they must obtain a
decision on Russian policy in Paris, Sir Henry Wilson urged; but when that
would be, ‘he had no idea’.11

The War Cabinet must face the fact that the Bolsheviks would overrun North
Russia, Churchill went on, and murder many people. He was ‘increasingly
distressed’ about the progression of events since the Armistice. ‘Everything was
going wrong.’ This had led to a great slump in Russian morale. At the Armistice,
the Germans held the Ukraine. Now, that whole rich area was in Bolshevik
hands, and they might soon have Odessa. There had been four months of drift. ‘It
was idle to think we should escape by sitting still and doing nothing’, he stated.
‘Bolshevism was not sitting still.’ Unless restrained, the Bolshevik tide would roll
over Siberia to Japan, drive Denikin into the mountains, and submerge the Baltic
States. No doubt when Britain’s friends were scattered, and India threatened, the
Allies would awake and put forth ten times the strength now needed to save
matters. ‘He could only express the profound apprehension with which he
awaited what was coming’, he added. He had been back and forth to Paris in vain.
He had had discussions with Foch, who had a definite plan without use of Allied
forces or money, simply by guaranteed loans to the border states. But both the
Prime Minister and President Wilson were against intervention.

The First Lord agreed. We were running the risk of ‘grave disaster’, and there
would be questions in Parliament which would be difficult to answer. He urged
the formation of a Baltic Committee to bring ‘definite pressure’ on President
Wilson. Admiral Fremantle backed him up. While the Treasury were refusing
loans for Esthonian flax and Latvian timber, they had lost a valuable cruiser and
eleven men; it was all ‘thoroughly unsatisfactory’. Curzon retorted that it was
hardly surprising that the Treasury had refused, as Esthonia and Latvia had both
asked for £15 million. He could only recommend an Allied loan of £2 million.11
Bonar Law asked how Britain could go on supporting ‘one part of Russia after another’, if America definitely stood aside. Chamberlain supported him. America would have nothing to do with such a policy, while the French simply borrowed ‘what they were lending or spending’, and the burden fell on Britain. The French had just asked him for British financial support equal to Britain’s entire pre-war expenditure, while America would only make loans to England and France to purchase American goods. ‘There was no way out for a ruined Europe unless the United States would untie her purse-strings.’ Europe could not shoulder these ‘ever-accumulating’ Russian burdens without American help. But he approved the formation of a Baltic Committee. Bonar Law agreed; but not a penny should be spent without American participation—French agreement meant nothing, as Britain would have to pay.

The First Lord urged that there must be an agreed Allied policy, or Russia would be reduced to endless anarchy and misery. How could Britain sign a Peace Treaty in Paris with Russia in this state? Chamberlain was adamant. As Britain could expect no French or Italian financial support, she would have to fight Bolshevism on her own, ‘and we should break down under the strain’, he warned. ‘There was a very real danger.’ But a Baltic Committee could see what might be done in those parts. Curzon agreed. Bonar Law asked if the cost could really be estimated. Admiral Fremantle replied that it would depend on whom the Bolsheviks concentrated their troops. Britain had helped to clear the Bolsheviks from Esthonia, but they had overrun Latvia, where British support was supporting the Germans. Churchill agreed; but Britain could control the Germans, if not the Bolsheviks. Chamberlain remarked that Foch had refused to allow the Germans to land more troops. Churchill retorted that the Germans were asking what exactly they were meant to do. Curzon urged a decision from the Peace Conference. ‘He doubted whether the appalling character of the situation was fully realised in Paris.’

Churchill underlined the difficulty of making estimates, when there were so many uncertainties. If, for instance, it was decided to wage war on the Bolsheviks, then the stock of Denikin and Kolchak would at once go up. Costs could not be calculated until the Allies made up their minds for a ‘vigorous campaign’ or not. Bonar Law rebuked him; defence of the Baltic States was separate from ‘the larger Russian policy’. Chamberlain repeated that it was impossible to fight the Bolsheviks ‘all along the line’ without American support. That should be made plain to the General Staff, who should confine themselves to the Baltic. Churchill retorted hotly that the ‘danger was growing every moment and spreading with extraordinary rapidity’. It was agreed that Curzon should press the Prime Minister to obtain a decision on Baltic policy from the Peace Conference.\textsuperscript{11}
The Baltic

That same day (the 17th), the General Staff at the War Office received further representations for action in the Baltic. Teddy Lessing (Lloyd George’s link, via William Sutherland, with the Russian bankers) again came into the War Office, and stressed:

1. The psychological importance to the Russians of Petrograd, where were located the very cumbersome (and probably immovable) printing presses, on which the Bolsheviks were churning out rouble notes.
2. The importance of Petrograd to Finland, which greatly feared the Bolsheviks, but for whom a prior guarantee of food was necessary, before any attack could be made.
3. The importance of Yudenitch’s movement, which should be investigated by a British Mission, who could ensure cooperation between Yudenitch, Mannerheim and Esthonia.12

General Maynard, however, who was receiving Ironside’s wires, wanted Yudenitch to come to Murmansk. Even if Archangel were evacuated, Maynard wired, Murmansk could be held and a successful attack launched on Petrograd, combined with an offensive from Esthonia, if Yudenitch arrived just before the Allied withdrawal, with Russian troops and workmen from France, and was given proper Allied support.12

‘Surely Yudenitch will be ill advised to leave his present position close to Petrograd in order to go off to Murmansk’, minuted Churchill when he saw this. But the DMO made no reply.

The Manager of the Russian Trade Corporation* then came into the War Office at Sutherland’s suggestion, with a memo from General Yudenitch’s Russian Committee,† which stated that Yudenitch, after recognition of Finnish

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* The former British Ambassador Buchanan was President of the Russian Trade Corporation, which consisted of the Vice-President of the International Banking Corporation of New York, a director of the Metropolitan Carriage, Wagon and Finance Company, and a director of the British and Foreign Trust; and the following Russians: Putilov (of the Russo-Asiatic Bank); Wischnegradski (of the International Bank); Grube (of the Siberian Bank); and Kamenka (of the Azov-Don Bank). Their London bankers were the London City & Midland Bank and the British Linen Bank, from whom the Russian Committee wanted a £1 million loan.

† Professor Kartashev was President of the Russian Committee, which consisted of Grube (of the Siberian Bank); Dobrynin (a leading figure in Russian insurance); B.Hessen (of the Russian Bank for Foreign Trade); Jules Hessen (Manager of the two leading Russian steamship companies); the Russian director of Shell Petroleum; the Manager of the Volga Steamship Company; Sheftel (former lawyer to the British Embassy in Petrograd); and S.G Lianozov (an oil magnate).
independence, had at last been allowed to organise a Russian force in Finland. ‘Bolshevism is now nearing its end’, wrote Professor Kartashev, the President, unequivocally; and the fall of Petrograd would certainly be followed by the overthrow of the Bolsheviks in Moscow by the inhabitants themselves. Petrograd, he stressed, could easily be occupied by a force from Finland, only 15 miles away; and there was a Finnish force already there. But they must be able to feed Petrograd on recapture. The Russian Committee also wanted a loan; while individual members had had small loans from Finnish banks, they could only obtain the £1 million needed from British banks if the British Government approved. They in fact requested:

1 A senior Allied officer to assist Yudenitch, and advise him in his dealings with the Finns.
2 An assurance of provisions for Petrograd, without which Yudenitch would not move; and a loan of £1 million.¹²

‘Please let me have yr views after a re-survey of the positions’, minuted Churchill to the DMO on March 22nd. As the War Office knew little about the Baltic, the matter was referred to the British Mission in Paris, who knew even less. Both the movement ‘organised by Trepov’* (as they wrongly called Yudenitch’s force) and the Finnish group should be discouraged; even if successful, it would only lead to a later war between Finland and Russia, for no Russian Government could allow Russia to be cut off from the Baltic, ‘and the wars of Peter the Great against the Swedes would have to be repeated.’ If the Finns failed, Finland and then possibly all Scandinavia would go Bolshevik. But provided the Allies could control him, Yudenitch could be wedged into the anti-Bolshevik cordon from the Baltic to the Black Sea. For though Finland and Estonia distrusted all Russians, he could be made to recognise Finland, and grant the Baltic States ‘at least provisional’ autonomy. There could then be a combined advance in the Baltic, and a ‘premature and abortive’ attack could be avoided.

The DMO thought this ‘very interesting and instructive’; and as Bolshevik pressure at Archangel must somehow be relieved, he would back any ‘effective organisation’ to bring immediate pressure on the Bolshevik forces at Petrograd. He, in fact, cared nothing for Baltic independence. There the matter was again left.¹²

* V.N.Trepov, who had been Russian Prime Minister in late 1916, and was a thorough reactionary, had been associated with a Russian movement in Finland; but had long since broken with Yudenitch.
But in Paris, Lloyd George was much more concerned about Germany than Russia. On March 10, he had strongly urged the Peace Conference to feed Germany. British troops were indignant at maintaining the German people at starvation level—and this was creating Bolshevism. The Russian ‘muddle’ might wait; but if Germany went Bolshevik, and perhaps Spain, the break-water would be swept away. Germany was in fact the breakwater; Bavaria had already gone Bolshevik, and things were worsening in Munich. Clemenceau again argued that the Germans were using Bolshevism to blackmail the Allies. But Lloyd George persisted. It had been decided six weeks ago to feed the Germans, since when the French had done nothing but obstruct. He appealed to Clemenceau to stop this. When Colonel House supported Lloyd George, it was agreed to send food to both Germany and Austria.

But though the German position was clear, and could thus be remedied, the Russian ‘muddle’ was indeed chaotic. On March 11, Frank Polk (the Acting Secretary of State in Washington) sent Lansing in Paris a wire from Consul Imbrie at Viborg, on the Finnish Gulf, giving an account of appalling conditions in Petrograd. On February, he stated, there had been only 991,000 people alive in Petrograd; and as 113,000 had probably died in the last month, and half this number again had probably left, there were now only some 800,000 people there. He gave horrific descriptions of the suffering caused by famine, smallpox and typhoid, and lack of drugs. At this rate, he added, there would be no one left in three months. Polk concluded, ‘[State] Department is impressed with question of how long the Allied Governments can properly delay some organised attempt to remedy conditions of distress such as those described in this report’. The Swedish Red Cross was willing to undertake relief, if financed by America or the Allies.

But on March 12, an excited wire reached Paris from Bullitt in Petrograd that reports of frightful conditions were ‘ridiculously exaggerated’. Chicherin and Litvinov stated ‘positively’ that they would repay the foreign debt, had ‘full confidence’ in the American Government, but the ‘greatest distrust’ of the French, who, they feared, would supply and reinforce the White Russians during the proposed armistice; they wanted a ‘semi-official’ guarantee that America and England would make France keep the armistice terms. Though Bullitt refused this, he was certain that the Bolshevik Government would be reasonable, ‘and that I shall have a communication of the utmost importance to transmit.’ He then left for Moscow, where intensive discussion ensued; for the Bullitt mission was taken very seriously. ‘The decision is very important,’ Chicherin wrote to a colleague. ‘If we do not reach an understanding, the policy of blockade will be pressed with vigour.’

On March 14, when President Wilson rejoined the Peace Conference on his return from America, the Territorial Commissions were ready to report, and the military terms provisionally agreed; and thus the main issues of the German Peace
Treaty could at last be thrashed out by the Council of Ten. But on the 14th, when Lloyd George and President Wilson informed Clemenceau that they could not agree to occupation of the Rhine, but would offer France an Anglo-American military guarantee instead, there was a temporary deadlock, and relations between the Big Three deteriorated. Next day, as the President refused to attend a discussion of the military terms of the Peace Treaty (he had not studied the matter, he claimed), Bullitt and Steffens left Moscow, together with Arthur Ransome, who the first American envoy, William Buckler, had strongly urged should also come to Paris, as he was so knowledgeable about the Bolshevik position.  

Alarming news then suddenly reached Paris about Hungary and Roumania. Hungary refused to withdraw her troops from the disputed border territory of Transylvania, with its large Hungarian population, which the Allies had awarded to Roumania; and it was realised that further Allied pressure would probably make Hungary go Bolshevik, and link up with Bolshevik Russia. On the 16th, the Roumanian War Minister told Foch that a wire had come from Bucharest on the 11th stating that both the Hungarians and the Ukrainians were preparing to attack Roumania, but Franchet d’Esperey had laid down a new neutral zone; and the Roumanians were not to advance until the Hungarians withdrew. Roumania, Foch was warned, was the last rampart against Bolshevik Russia, which had already attacked her in Bessarabia; and there was no difference between Russian Bolsheviks and Ukrainians. Unless Allied arms and supplies, now promised for three months, were finally sent, and the Hungarians withdrew from Transylvania, Roumania could not hold out on both fronts.

On the 17th, the Peace Conference had a further dispute over the German Treaty. President Wilson refused to agree to a German Volunteer Army, as he had not been present when the decision was taken. At this, Lloyd George lost his temper; if the President persisted, he would challenge the decision to set up the League of Nations, at which he had not been present. The President rapidly gave in, and all the military terms of the German Treaty were then passed. ‘In my opinion they are all much too drastic, but the French insisted on them, and the Frocks* agreed’, wrote Sir Henry Wilson.

But Russia could not be ignored. Foch then stated bluntly that the ‘very existence’ of Poland was threatened. Lemberg was surrounded by the Ukrainains; and its fall would entail the fall of the Polish Government. Some Polish troops from Odessa and a Polish regiment from France should be at once sent to Lemberg, supported by 10 to 12 Roumanian divisions, who must be supplied. He again urged a ‘resolute’ Allied policy to stop the spread of Bolshevism, and the constitution of an Allied High Command. Lloyd George then went into another room with Sir Henry Wilson, who warned him that Foch was going to raise the

* Sir Henry Wilson’s contemptuous term for all politicians.
whole border states question. As Lemberg did not belong to Poland, the Allies should tell the Poles to leave the town, and give them Danzig instead; but something must be done to stop the Bolsheviks.

At this, Lloyd George scented danger; and when they went back into the Council room, he gave them an ‘amazing strategical lecture’, noted Sir Henry Wilson. Foch’s proposal, he said, amounted to the ‘perpetration of a great mischief’. Roumania had nothing to do with Lemberg, but once Roumanian troops were there, they could be used to make up a great army for the invasion of Russia. Supposing this policy was right, who was going to pay? The proposal also suggested the transfer of Polish troops from Odessa. Did the Peace Conference realise what was happening there? It had been said that the Ukrainians had a powerful army, and would roll the Bolsheviks back to Moscow. But in fact Allied as well as Ukrainian troops had been driven back to a narrow coastal fringe. Kherson had been lost, the Bolsheviks were pressing on towards Odessa; and that whole grain district had fallen into Bolshevik hands. Now it was proposed to remove all these forces to take part in some quarrel at Lemberg. These proposals, in fact, meant helping the Bolsheviks, since Petlura was fighting them, and now it was proposed to destroy him. Why should the Peace Conference anticipate the Polish Commission, which had not yet decided whom Lemberg belonged to? Had the Poles felt strongly on the matter, they could have defended themselves. They should make a temporary settlement, as at Teschen.

Foch responded that his proposals were also those of the Polish Commission, and were ‘very moderate and restricted’, and would gain time. At present, the Bolsheviks were gaining ground everywhere in South Russia, and preparing to launch a big attack on the lower Dniester. They must therefore prevent the wings of the anti-Bolshevik forces being rolled up, and the centre being pierced. Foch asked if an Allied Staff could ‘étudier’ the question of moving Polish troops from Odessa and Haller’s Polish troops from France to Poland, and of moving Roumanian troops up to save Lemberg. Lloyd George agreed to the first, but not the second proposal; the Allies could not attack the Ukrainians at Lemberg, while Franchet d’Esperey was helping them at Odessa. ‘Foch very angry’, records Sir Henry Wilson. ‘The whole discussion was ignorant and amateurish to a degree’, he complained, ‘but it was anyhow a first discussion on the fringe of the Russian question. And this after over four months of Armistice!’

That evening, a wire from Bullitt arrived in Paris for President Wilson, containing peace terms, which the Bolsheviks had agreed on the 14th, and would accept if formally put forward by the Allies before April 10. The Allies, it was stated, should propose a general cease-fire in Russia, and a two-week armistice, during which a peace conference in Norway should discuss peace, based on these principles:

1 All Russian groups and the Allies to hold their Russian areas, and not attack other Russian groups.
2 The Allied blockade of Bolshevik Russia to be raised, and trade with the Allies restarted.
3 Bolshevik Russia to have full use of all Russian and Finnish railways and ports.
4 All Russian groups and the Allies to exchange official envoys and nationals.
5 All Russian groups and the Allies to make a general amnesty, and all prisoners to return home.
6 After such agreement, all Allied troops to be withdrawn from Russia, and no further Allied military support for White Russian groups. All Russian forces to be reduced.
7 The Allies to hold all Russian groups responsible for the Russian foreign debt.

The statement concluded, ‘The Soviet Government of Russia undertakes to accept the foregoing proposal provided it is made not later than April 10th, 1919’.19

Bullitt’s next wire arrived in Paris on the afternoon of the 18th. ‘The Soviet Government is firmly established and the Communist Party is strong politically and morally’, he stated confidently. ‘There is order in Petrograd and Moscow. There have been no riots and no uprisings in many weeks. Prostitution has disappeared. Robberies have almost ceased. One feels as safe as in Paris’, he added. The Red Army was ‘growing, high spirited and well-equipped’, while the common people no longer had that beaten look, but carried themselves like free men, ‘and very like Americans’. Allied intervention had forced the Mensheviks and the SR.s to support the Bolsheviks, while the Cadets had left Russia. But the Allied blockade was causing ruin Only 25 per cent of the railway engines were working, and these entirely for the Red Army; and they had to run on wood, since Kolchak cut them off from the Perm coal, the British cut them off from the Baku oil, and Denikin and Krasnov had destroyed the Donetz mines. But Bullitt stated firmly, ‘It is the conviction of all the men with whom I have talked…that the Soviet Government is the only constructive force in Russia today’. They could now in fact run the country, if only they had the means. But if Allied intervention and blockade continued, famine and anarchy would swallow up the Bolsheviks with all the other Russians. The only other Allied policy was to make the peace offer, which Bullitt had already wired. The Bolsheviks were thus ready to compromise. ‘They received me because they had gathered the impression that President Wilson was beginning to see through the lies against them to the very simple truth that a dull, inexperienced, a young people were trying rudely but conscientiously and at the cost of great suffering to themselves to find a better way to live for the common good than the old way.’19

Later in the evening, a further wire from Bullitt arrived, asking Colonel House to show both his previous wires to Philip Kerr. ‘You must do your utmost for it’, he urged House, ‘for if you had seen the things I have seen during the past week
and talked with the men I have talked with, I know that you would not rest until
you had put through this peace.\textsuperscript{19}

But Bullitt’s important and excited wires reached Paris at the worst possible
moment, and it is doubtful if the President even saw them on the 18th. For as
quarrels over the German Treaty continued, the Council of Ten began to break
up. The Polish Commission’s report had been the last straw. Lloyd George
refused to place two million Germans in Upper Silesia under Polish rule, and sent
the report back. When the Polish Commission, supported by Clemenceau and
President Wilson, stuck to their point of view, and The Times violently attacked
Lloyd George, the Prime Minister threatened to go back to London; only on the
18th had he even consented to remain in Paris.

Sir Henry Wilson was in despair. ‘This Paris conference is heading straight for
disaster’, he wrote that evening, and went off to impress upon Hankey (who had
for long felt a ‘vague and indefinite uneasiness’ that the accumu
lation of penalties
under the Peace Treaty would place Germany in an ‘utterly impossible position’
that the ‘fundamental difficulty’ was the Russian problem, which had never really
been examined.\textsuperscript{20} Hankey was ‘enormously impressed’ by Sir Henry Wilson, and
at once wrote the strongest possible paper for the Prime Minister. It was already
admitted, he wrote, that there would be no real peace without the ‘right’ Russian
policy. Russia threatened the world; for if Bolshevism could not spread, ‘the
intensity of its destructiveness is so great that it must burn itself out like a bush
fire’. Thus, the ‘great and imminent danger’ was that it would spread throughout
Europe ‘and destroy European civilisation’.

How would the German Treaty oppose the two Bolshevik weapons of force
and propaganda? The ‘outpost line’ of border states could not possibly contain
Bolshevism. ‘On the contrary, they show all the worst qualities that we have
become accustomed to in the Balkan states.’\textsuperscript{*} They were already fighting
amongst themselves. They could not resist Bolshevik propaganda; and when the
Bolsheviks attacked (as they certainly would, as Russia was now cut off from the
sea, save in South Russia), ‘they will just whine for assistance from the Allies and
go on fighting each other’. But if the ‘outpost line’ was weak, what was there
behind it? Germany and Austria had both collapsed, Germany was to have her
army drastically cut, lose territory, and pay a ‘prodigious indemnity’. As she could
resist neither Bolshevik force nor propaganda, it was thus a question ‘whether
justice and policy can run hand in hand in present conditions’. Was there not the
‘gravest danger’ that the Peace Treaty might thus drive Germany in despair to join
the Bolsheviks? The first Allied objective, Hankey stressed, was not the
humiliation of Germany, ‘but the peace of the world’. But there would be no
peace if Germany organised the ‘teeming millions’ of Russia under the Bolshevik
banner. ‘Look at a map of the world’, he urged Lloyd George. ‘Germany may

\textsuperscript{*} The four pencil lines in the margin are presumably by Lloyd George himself.
become either the barrier against the westward penetration of Bolshevism, which may then burn itself out, but it is equally well situated to become the head and the brain. Are we not at the parting of the ways? May not the future of civilisation depend upon which path Germany is forced or allowed to take?21

On the 20th, Lloyd George broke up the Council of Ten, and the Big Four then met alone, without even a secretary, to try and reach some agreement. But there was little success. ‘We discussed Danzig’, records Sir Henry Wilson on the 21st, ‘and the Boche refusal to allow [General Haller’s] Polish troops through, and for three hours we wrangled and came to no decision of any sort’, he wrote. ‘It was a miserable exhibition of unashamed incompetence.’22

But that night, news reached Paris that Hungary had erupted into Bolshevism. (When an Allied note was presented on March 20, requesting that Hungarian troops be at once withdrawn from the neutral zone between Hungary and Roumania, the Hungarian Government resigned; and, in coalition with the Bolshevik agent Bela Kun, at once formed a Soviet Government, which promptly concluded a military alliance with Bolshevik Russia to try to resist Allied demands.)

Hankey’s paper now had its due effect. Lloyd George, both exhausted and alarmed, took Hankey, Sir Henry Wilson and Philip Kerr off to Fontainebleau on the 22nd to think things over. But even as Lloyd George and party were driving out of Paris, The Times announced that Kolchak’s troops had just started a big advance—while General Ironside guaranteed to link up with him from Archangel!

**Siberia**

In late February, Admiral Kolchak had left Omsk (without the knowledge of the British High Commissioner, Sir Charles Eliot), for a tour of the front, and found a ‘general improvement’ on the Ufa and Perm sectors (so The Times correspondent had wired from Omsk on February 21, in a report printed on March 5, under a small headline; ‘Kolchak’s coming offensive’). Admiral Kolchak thus returned to Omsk ‘in high spirits’, wired The Times correspondent on March 1 (in a report printed on March 14) to find the streets lined with his new troops, ‘fine lads, healthy and typical peasants’. Though they paraded without arms, British readers were assured that they were ‘comparatively easy’ to get into shape; in fact, a mixture of ‘this rustic element’ and the better educated town youths would make a ‘splendid’ Russian Army. The Times correspondent then called on Admiral Kolchak, whom he found dressed in a plain black uniform, with three eagles (but no crown) embroidered on his gold shoulder straps. Kolchak, he reported, had black hair, black piercing eyes, aquiline features, ‘and a long head like a Norman’. But Kolchak would say nothing. For though the War Minister Stepanov had postponed calling up the five divisions, as agreed with General Knox, and Knox had firmly told Kolchak’s Chief of Staff Lebedev that Kappel’s Volga Corps must be properly trained before any move was made, the Russian
Command now thought their new peasant boys alone could cross the Volga, even without Kappel.  

But nothing was said. Knox at this moment was far away in Vladivostok, violently berating all American officials for their general ignorance and lack of sympathy with the efforts of the Omsk and British Governments; General Graves was simply being hypnotised by the local peasants, and knew nothing of what was happening at Omsk.

Nor did Knox. For on March 2, without any warning, the Northern Army suddenly began to advance on the Perm front towards Viatka, and the Western Army launched an offensive towards Samara and Kazan on the Volga; and even Kappel, in reserve, was afraid of ‘being late for the capture of Moscow’. Amidst blinding snowstorms, General Gajda, the Northern Army Commander, drove the Bolsheviks rapidly back from the Kama river in the north (Gajda himself losing two horses, which simply sank out of sight in snowdrifts). But in the centre, when the Western Army advanced with two shock battalions (on which both sides depended for serious fighting, the historian George Stewart points out, ‘since their ordinary troops were apt to consider carefully the result of a battle before engaging in it’), the enemy line was broken; and two Bolshevik regiments at once came over ‘to what was obviously the winning side’. This news came via Harbin (on March 10), and was printed in The Times on March 22, under the medium headline: ‘Kolchak’s Heavy Blow’.

Meanwhile, as the deep snow made the heavily wooded countryside quite impassable, the Bolshevik troops, fearful of being cut off, had abandoned Ufa on March 13, and retreated rapidly down the roads, along which Kolchak’s ‘rustic element’ were marched—until their boots fell to pieces.

**North Russia**

In North Russia, the Bolshevik offensive was also threatening Murmansk. On March 17, as General Maynard heard rumours of an uprising in the city, the War Office warned him that two fresh Bolshevik divisions were concentrating against his front. But that day, General Ironside welcomed the War Office proposal to send out Russian troops from France and Germany, as the real need at Archangel was for Russian officers. This had cleared the air, and no more Allied troops would now be needed to cover the evacuation; 13,000 Russians would also have to be brought away. The Archangel Government, he felt, should be told of a gradual British withdrawal this year. Lindley agreed; a gradual withdrawal would increase Bolshevik difficulties until the next harvest, enable the Siberian troops to reach Viatka, and help the Estonians hold out.

But on the 18th, Sir Henry Wilson wired that no Russian troops could be sent at all, as the proposal had been vetoed in Paris. Next day, he wired again. Could 5,000 fresh British troops, he asked Ironside, strike a hard enough blow to prevent a Bolshevik offensive this year, and thus give the present North Russian troops a fair chance of holding out, before handing Archangel over to them? On
March 22, as Maynard seized the conspirators at Murmansk, Ironside replied. Having just had word that a small Allied party, coming down the Pechora river, had just contacted a Siberian outpost, he now guaranteed to take Kotlas (the Dvina river port, to which a branch railway line ran up from Viatka), and link up with the Siberian Army, and then withdraw in the late summer—provided 5,000 fresh British troops came out; that the Siberian troops would cooperate; that the British flotilla on the Dvina river was brought up to strength; and that Bolshevik forces elsewhere in Russia were held down.²⁵

This guarantee, coupled with the news of Kolchak’s advance, was to have a terrific effect at the War Office, especially on Churchill. It was based on precious little. After months of Arctic winter, mutiny and general Russian gloom, Ironside seems to have been carried off his feet by wild Russian elation at the first spark of good news.
The Russian kaleidoscope had again been shaken: a new pattern had emerged with all its intricacies and subtleties. In Paris, where the Council of Four had strenuously ignored the Russian problem in favour of the German peace treaty, it was now suddenly forced upon them when one of the border states, Hungary, erupted into Bolshevism—just as the American envoy Bullitt returned with peace terms from Moscow.

In London, where Churchill was desperately anxious for the safety of the little Allied force in North Russia, Ironside’s ‘guarantee’ to link up with the Siberian Army, which had suddenly blundered forward, was not at first taken very seriously. The mutinous state of the Allied troops at present at Archangel and Murmansk was of far greater concern than what Ironside might or might not be able to do with fresh troops. Woven into the whole Russian problem, like an unpredictable wild-joker, was the dilemma of the French troops at Odessa.

Moscow

The Bolshevik position in mid-March was in fact more sombre than was realised. There were revolts and risings. On March 10, the Putilov works had come out on strike in Petrograd. On the 12th, Trotsky’s attack on the Southern Front had been forestalled by a Cossack rising in the Donetz, which General Denikin at once moved to support. In Moscow, where the 8th Bolshevik Party Congress was about to open, the military problem was thus the main topic. Many delegates, Zinoviev especially, were highly anxious about the use of ‘military specialists’ and wished to limit Trotsky’s power. Party workers complained that they were subordinate, not to any purely Party organ, but to the Military Revolutionary Council; and many had left the front to attend the Congress.

News of the loss of Ufa to Kolchak and the defection of two Bolshevik regiments reached Moscow on or around March 14 (the day that the peace proposals to be given to Bullitt were approved) during a Central Committee meeting, and caused much concern. The Party delegates were told to go back at once to the front, and Lenin passed a note to Trotsky: ‘Hadn’t we better kick out all the [military] specialists and appoint Lashevitch* Commander in Chief?’ Trotsky scribbled ‘Childish!’, and passed the note back. Next day, he
showed Lenin a General Staff report that there were some 30,000 former Tsarist officers in the Red Army; the percentage of traitors and deserters was thus very small. Lenin, who had had no idea of these figures, was impressed. There was then further trouble in Petrograd. On March 15, more factories, including the Baltic and Tramway works, came out on strike. Lenin came from Moscow, but had a bad reception; while Zinoviev was greeted with cries of ‘Down with that Jew’, and had to escape. Next day, Latvian troops shot all the ringleaders, and arrested the others; and partial order was restored.¹

On March 16, the Central Committee heard that certain Army delegates were saying that their return to the front meant that they were refused a hearing; others claimed it was a subterfuge, as Trotsky’s departure and their recall would make it impossible to discuss military policy. Trotsky protested strongly at the word ‘subterfuge’; the retreat from Ufa had made the position extremely serious, and he must leave for the front. Though the general order for recall was then cancelled, it was decided that Trotsky and those Army delegates whose return was essential, should leave at once for the front, and that military policy should be the first question on the agenda.

Before leaving, Trotsky told Izvestia that he was sure the official policy would be approved; only the Ural Regional Committee had attacked the ‘military specialists’, and half-heartedly at that. Trotsky then boarded his train. On the 17th, on the Moscow-Simbirsk line, he sent greetings to the Party Congress. He then warned Lenin that they had learnt from wireless intercepts that an unified command had been set up by ‘all our enemies’, and that a ‘general offensive, combined with internal uprisings, was in preparation for March’. He cited the attacks by Kolchak, Petlura and Denikin, the uprising on the Don, and strikes and mutinies at the Putilov works, at Briansk and Syzran on the Volga. ‘Against this moment America sent off its eavesdroppers [i.e. Bullitt and Steffens] to assess whether we should hold firm or not and to determine its own policy.’²

(In fact, unified White Russian command was not realised until May. The wireless intercepts which Trotsky had picked up seem to have been merely the first radio contacts between Denikin and Kolchak, via the War Office in London. The Whites were not nearly good enough to coordinate a ‘general offensive’ for March, nor was one being prepared; while it was absurd to suppose that Petlura was cooperating with Denikin, for example. The Bolsheviks made a desperate effort to twist the story of the mutiny at Briansk, which led to wild accusations of Volunteer Army brutality by Colonel Wedgwood in the House of Commons on March 18. Churchill replied acidly that the Volunteer Army had never been within 300 miles of the place.)

* At this time, the Commander in Chief was I.I.Vatsetis, who had been a Tsarist Colonel. M.M.Lashevitch, an old Bolshevik, was at this time Commander of the 3rd Army.
But as Trotsky’s train sped to the Eastern Front, he found the situation even worse than imagined. As Kolchak advanced, the peasants had risen up along the Volga near Samara, Simbirsk and Kazan; and his train was halted.

On March 20, the Bolshevik Party Congress considered military policy. As so many wanted to speak, a special Military Section was set up. After tense discussions, when treason by ‘military specialists’, their bureaucracy, their military discipline, and their retention of insignia (always a sore point even in the old Tsarist Army amongst the rank and file), were severely criticised, the opposition obtained a majority. On the 21st, the Party Congress was told that the military situation was thoroughly bad; they were 40 per cent below strength for commander personnel. After more brisk discussion, the opposition was defeated; but a Commission was appointed to work out a compromise.3

That day, Trotsky wired sharply from Simbirsk to Lenin and Stalin that the uprisings nearby were mainly due to the slackness of the local Party organisations. Senior Cheka agents must be sent out, as well as more personnel to calm the peasants behind the line, who were enraged at having their food requisitioned by the Bolsheviks. ‘The movement has acquired a broad character’, Trotsky warned. The peasants were as angry with the Bolsheviks as they were with Kolchak’s troops. Next day, Trotsky wired again that he was removing the 5th Army Commander, and wanted another man sent out. ‘Let him take 4,000 rifles along with him for the Ufa workers, who are mustering in Belebei…’

On the 22nd, when news reached Moscow of the formation of the Bolshevik Government in Hungary, there was great jubilation at the Party Congress, and many of their troubles were forgotten. Lenin realised that Bela Kun’s chances were slim; but when he asked for a military alliance with Bolshevik Russia, the C-in-C Vatsetis at once instructed the Bolshevik Military Commander in the Ukraine to concentrate against Petlura, and link up with the Hungarian Army.

But the struggle over military policy continued. On the 23rd, the Party Congress was urged to accept Trotsky’s official policy as a resolution, and take the necessary measures; but to add a secret resolution, containing some of the opposition’s ideas, to appease them. This was approved. On the 25th, Zinoviev informed the Central Committee that the Military Section of the Party Congress was now unanimous about military policy, thanks to some concessions and secret resolutions, namely that the General Staff and Field headquarters should be reorganised, and that there should be obligatory monthly meetings between Trotsky and Party workers. The Party Congress had thus administered a ‘serious caution’, and its directions must be treated with sufficient heed, stated Zinoviev. Lenin should talk things over with Trotsky. Lenin asked Zinoviev to put his statement in writing; the Central Committee would then add its own resolution as a conclusion. It was therefore decided that Zinoviev should draw up a paper for Trotsky in three parts containing Zinoviev’s statement, the secret resolutions (explaining why they expressed the ‘genuine wishes’ of the Party Congress), and the resolution of the Central Committee, whose sanction must be obtained to the final document.
Late that evening, Trotsky answered his critics in Moscow. The real reason for
the retreat on the Eastern Front, he wired, was the ‘system of slackness, grumbling
and criticism implanted from above’. The Army newspaper was just an ‘organ of
discussion and criticism’. Instead of an order being at once carried out, ‘it became
a subject for discussion’. Thus, despite the strictest orders, ‘the Ufa bridge has
remained undemolished. The Army regiments continue their senseless and
shameful retreat’. Trotsky recommended that the culprits be subjected to ‘severe
punishment’, and the critics on the newspaper removed, and the paper ‘transformed into a militant organ for the inculcation of firm discipline’. He added
for good measure, ‘A check-up is to be made by special commissions on the
conduct of commissars and all members of Party cells in those regiments that
retreated without cause.’

In late March, Trotsky replied to Zinoviev’s paper. Though not contrary to
War Department policy, it was ‘supremely general and vague’, he wrote, and
partly ‘based on a misunderstanding’. It was not stated how Field Headquarters or
the Military Revolutionary Council should be reorganised; was Trotsky himself,
for instance, to tour the fronts or not? It was certainly desirable to organise the
General Staff properly, attach more Party delegates to it, and have regular
conferences with Party delegates at the front; but the simultaneous recall of
responsible Party workers was scarcely possible. Finally, Trotsky denied that
Military Commanders had special insignia; the Red Army private, the Commissar
and the Commander all had the same.

Trotsky then turned to Zinoviev’s report, which stated that the opposition
consisted of two groups: a body of ‘offended gentry who count for little’, and a
‘very important and solid group’, which agreed about the partisan movement and
the ‘military specialists’, but not with Trotsky’s attitude towards Party members
working in the Army—which Zinoviev demanded must change.

‘I regard Comrade Zinoviev’s report as entirely incorrect’, and his argument
‘extremely dangerous’, stated Trotsky. It was true that there were two opposition
groups; and one, ‘the pretentious Party intelligentsia’, was largely made up of
‘offended Soviet officials and cases of nervous exhaustion’. But the Bolsheviks had
no need of the advice of the second, who were not the ‘voice of truth itself’, who
oversimplified every question, so as to reduce it to their own level, and were
making ‘not a class-proletarian but a plebeian protest against the “wooing” of
“military specialists”…This political attitude is not that of a triumphant class
become its own master and its own builder’, Trotsky pointed out, ‘but that…of
the old state of dependency’.

But the opposition did reflect the ‘fearful difficulties of the dictatorship of a
hungry, internally-rent working class, alongside an ill-informed, discontented and
mutinous peasantry’. But while there could be differences of opinion in the
Bolshevik Party, they could not be allowed in the Red Army, which was an
‘artificial organism which always develops vast centrifugal tendencies’, Trotsky
warned. During an ‘intense and implacable’ civil war, there must be complete
unity to sustain it. He well knew ‘how great is the temptation to substitute so-
called “comradely”, i.e. household discipline for formal discipline’. But neither to Army Commanders nor to Party Commissars was his attitude ‘comradely’; and Trotsky thus rejected both Zinoviev’s proposal to substitute explanation for coercion, and his assertion that no good Party members would assume responsibility for War Department policy.

‘The trouble, of course, is’, Trotsky admitted, ‘that a vast store of weariness, irritability and nervous tension has built up over this period…We are approaching the months of greatest difficulty; the pressure exerted by the enemy is increasing.’ The Red Army could only be held together by tightening up discipline, by ‘resolute and, in many cases, savage imposition of order. The slogan of the opposition is: “Ease off the screws.” I, however, adhere to the point of view that it is essential to “tighten up the screws”.'

Zinoviev appeared to want to adjust the system to the weariness of certain Party members. Trotsky hoped that the Central Committee had not approved this aspect of his report; for if so, ‘I personally would not myself see any possibility of counting on the Party being successful in the severe struggle ahead of it’.  

Paris

On March 25, as the New York Times published their first news of Kolchak’s advance, Lloyd George returned from Fontainebleau with an important paper on the German Treaty. Only a just peace would be a permanent peace, he stressed. He thus urged, first, that Germany must not be surrounded by small states, each with German minorities, clamouring for reunion; the Polish Commission’s proposal to place some two million Germans under a different people, like the incorporation of large Magyar populations in other new states, must lead to war in East and South-East Europe. Second, only the generation responsible for the Great War should pay reparations. Third, once the present weak German Government, which was the only alternative to the Spartakists, had signed the Peace Treaty, the Allies must restore the German economy; otherwise, Germany would join the Russian Bolsheviks. ‘We cannot both cripple her and expect her to pay.’ Fourth, the European democracies must be protected against Bolshevism or imperialism. Until the League of Nations had power, England and America should therefore guarantee France against further German aggression. But to secure a real peace, the Peace Conference must also deal with Russia, for Bolshevism threatened the border states, all Asia, ‘and is as near to America as it is to France’. Thus the Russian problem was again bypassed.

That day, the Quai d’Orsay replied to the recent Foreign Office note, denying that any French agreement had been reached with the Ukraine, but suggesting immediate Anglo-French talks in Paris. But the British Embassy added that Balfour thought that, though exception might well be taken to French negotiations with the Ukraine in the Allied name, but without British consent, it was not worth raising this question until there was a ‘definite decision’ on Allied
policy for Russia; for nearly all the Ukraine had now been evacuated, and the French Government was considering General Berthelot’s recall.

A definite decision was taken later that day. For at 5 p.m., Lloyd George sent for the DMI to advise the Big Four on the Bolshevik outbreak in Hungary. If there were not enough supplies and transport both to hold on to Odessa and to supply the Roumanian Army, asked the Prime Minister, which was the less important? The DMI stated that it was more important to supply Roumania; Odessa was mainly of moral value. Foch then came in and gave the same answer. But when he tried to start a general discussion on Russia, he was merely requested to submit a plan within 48 hours for a new front, from the Black Sea along the Dniester to Poland, under French command. Foch urged that it should be independent of Franchet d’Esperey, and suggested Mangin (the hero of Verdun) as commander; but he was thought ‘too impetuous’. Foch said he would submit a paper on what French supplies could be sent to Roumania, and what the other Allies must send. The Prime Minister said England would at once divert to Roumania as much as possible of the second 100,000 sets of equipment intended for Denikin. (This had been approved by the War Cabinet the day before.) Foch retorted that any material sent to Denikin was thrown away, as he was the head of an army which had no government; and a government without an army could be more useful than an army without a government.

‘This tirade pleased the Prime Minister very much’, the DMI reported to Sir Henry Wilson, ‘and you will no doubt hear more of it’ In fairness to Denikin, Foch’s attitude was the result of Franco-Russian friction, ‘for which we regard the French as almost wholly to blame’. Foch strongly urged a continuous front from the Black Sea to Poland to close the gap, which gave the Bolsheviks relatively free access to Hungary; it would not be difficult to support the Roumanian Army. President Wilson would not commit himself to supply the Roumanians, but seemed to be sympathetically inclined. ‘I think he rather resented Foch’s attack on Denikin, as he pointed out that Denikin was at least holding up very considerable Bolshevik forces’, stated the DMI. The sting came right at the end. ‘It was decided to evacuate Odessa, only this is very “hush”’. This so angered Foch that he refused to transmit the necessary order.8

Lloyd George had thus rounded off a good anti-French day. He had firmly refused French occupation of the Rhine: he had prised the French out of South Russia; and as soon as they were gone, he could make peace with the Bolsheviks. For that evening, the Bullitt mission returned to Paris—having parted company with Arthur Ransome in London, where the Foreign Office and the Secret Intelligence Service (for whom he was a paid agent) for once combined. They not only prevented Ransome from going on to Paris, but for some time also successfully gagged him.9

In Paris that evening, Bullitt had a long interview with Colonel House, who was enthusiastic about the Bolshevik peace proposals; and there and then, arranged for him to see President Wilson next day at 6 pm.9 Bullitt immediately wrote a report for the President. There was a ‘distinct division’ on foreign policy
among the leading Bolsheviks, he stressed. Trotsky ‘and many theorists’ wished to provoke further Allied intervention, which would in turn provoke revolution in France and England, while Lenin and Chicherin ‘and the bulk of the Communist party’ considered the main problem now was to save Russia and Europe from starvation; a Bolshevik conquest of Europe would be pointless if America replied by starving Europe. To reach agreement with America, Lenin was thus willing to compromise, and to meet the Allies ‘half-way’. Though opposed by Trotsky, the Bolshevik peace proposals were ‘finally adopted unanimously’, stressed Bullitt.\(^\text{10}\)

But in Paris, Bullitt was already in difficulties. On the 26th, as Lincoln Steffens was grilled by ‘well informed’ British intelligence agents, with ‘imaginative minds’, Bullitt received a more hostile reception than he expected when he discussed his peace proposals that morning and early afternoon with the American Delegation; and was told that the President could not see him that evening because of a headache—which may well have been genuine. Steffens then took up a promise, apparently made to him by President Wilson after the Mexican revolution, to see him if he said: ‘It’s an emergency.’ The man who took in the message told Steffens that the President at once sprang to his feet, and said. ‘No, I won’t see that man. That’s the man that convinced me on Mexico.’ With Colonel House’s approval, Bullitt then went round to see Philip Kerr, who at once informed Lloyd George, who was ‘deeply interested’; and Bullitt was summoned to take breakfast next morning with the Prime Minister.\(^\text{11}\)

On March 27, as the *New York Times* printed a report from London via Montreal, headlined ‘Kolchak pursues broken Red Army’, Bullitt thus went to the rue Nitot to take breakfast with Lloyd George, General Smuts, Hankey and Philip Kerr. Bullitt handed the Bolshevik peace proposal to Lloyd George, who said he had already seen it, and passed it to General Smuts. All agreed that it was a very important document, which should not be allowed to lapse. But Lloyd George asked what he was to do about British public opinion. ‘As long as the British press is doing this kind of thing, how can you expect me to be sensible about Russia?’ he asked, waving a copy of the *Daily Mail*. All reports from people coming out of Russia were ‘in the same general direction’, he admitted, but they would have to send in a ‘complete conservative’ before they were generally believed; the names of Lord Lansdowne, Lord Robert Cecil, the Marquis of Salisbury and General Smuts himself were mentioned. When the breakfast ended, Lloyd George told Philip Kerr to inform President Wilson that if he brought Lenin’s proposal before the Council of Four, he could count on Lloyd George’s support for its consideration and ‘probably acceptance’; and Kerr at once passed this on.\(^\text{12}\)

President Wilson was by now under great strain over the German Treaty. His secretary Tumulty had just wired from Washington that there was ‘great danger’ as his American opponents were blaming him for the delay in Paris, which had ‘increased [the] momentum of Bolshevism and anarchy in Hungary and Balkans’. He must fix the blame on someone else. The President therefore issued a brisk statement that day that the League of Nations discussions had not delayed the
Peace Treaty. But the situation remained tense; and when the President now heard that Bullitt had seen Lloyd George first, he was ‘so furious’ (so Philip Kerr was told) that he refused to have anything further to do with the matter.\textsuperscript{13}

That afternoon (the 27th), the Council of Four heard Foch’s plan for dealing with the Bolshevik outbreak in Hungary by the occupation of Budapest and Vienna, and the closing of the gap between Roumania and Poland by a force of Allied troops. This was discussed by the four Prime Ministers, with Foch and Sir Henry Wilson present. Lloyd George and Clemenceau then took Sir Henry Wilson separately to one side to ask if he approved. ‘I said that it was not for me to say whether military action was now an answer to Bolshevism’, he stated. If it was, Foch’s plan would do for a start, but it was impossible to say what would follow; but in this case, there was no time to lose. If military action was not the answer to Bolshevism, some other plan must be adopted, or it seemed probable that the different states of Europe would one by one declare themselves ‘Bolshevik’, and if this happened, he did not see how any terms of peace could be enforced. If, on the other hand, the Prime Ministers thought that military action was the right answer, then they could not start off soon enough.\textsuperscript{14}

But when the military left the room, and the Prime Ministers debated the matter, President Wilson refused to bring forward the Bolshevik peace proposal; and Lloyd George had to remain silent.

After dinner that night, Sir Henry Wilson strolled round to see Lloyd George, who said that the four Prime Ministers had come to the unanimous conclusion that military action in Budapest and Vienna was not the answer to the spread of Bolshevism, but they were unable to say what was the answer. They had, however, agreed that everything should be done to continue to support both Roumania and Poland.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{London}

Arthur Ransome, meanwhile, was still in London. On the 26th, after reporting his return to the SIS, he went round to the Foreign Office to see Rex Leeper (of the Political Intelligence Department). Their ensuing conversation was both personal and political. Leeper, realising that Ransome was ‘rather timid’ about his reception in England, and that if no influence were brought to bear on him by those who knew him, he might do a ‘very great deal of harm by biased and unbalanced’ articles in the press, at once tackled him about his future attitude towards the Bolsheviks, and Allied policy in Russia. At this, Ransome ‘protested most strongly’ that he was not Bolshevik, that the last thing he wanted was a revolution in England, that he was tired of Russia, and had no desire to play a political role in England, and only wished to retire to the country to write his book on the Russian Revolution. But while in Stockholm, he had heard that Horatio Bottomley was collecting material to launch a personal attack on him in \textit{John Bull}. In fact, he feared that numerous attacks would be made on him, and if he were attacked, he would have to defend himself. Thus, there might be a
'disagreeable controversy' about past and present policy in Russia, 'which we were all anxious to avoid', wrote Leeper.14

Leeper told Ransome that if he did not wish to create 'acute feeling' in England, the best thing would be to refrain entirely from seeing people about the Russian question, and to confine himself, when writing in the Daily News, to 'actual facts' about conditions in Russia, 'without apportioning blame or discussing policy'. Leeper suggested that Ransome make a personal agreement with him to submit his articles before sending them to the Daily News, so that Leeper could point out what passages would inevitably lead to controversy, and should thus be omitted. Leeper also asked him to come to a private agreement with him to decline all interviews with people who might try and make capital out of his remarks about the Bolsheviks, so that in everyone's interest there might be no controversy about his activities in Russia. The Foreign Office did not intend to make such an agreement, Leeper claims he made clear, and he was only acting privately in making such a suggestion. This Ransome 'perfectly understood' at their first talk, as he would certainly not make a definite agreement with the Foreign Office, though he was willing to discuss matters privately with Leeper.

One other point had arisen during their first talk. Ransome said he had brought back with him complete sets of the Moscow papers from November to March, copies of which had been left with the SIS for transmission to the Foreign Office. 'I told him that of course we should use these papers as we thought fit', wrote Leeper, evidently scenting danger. 'He admitted that they contained many things which told against the Bolshevik Government, but if we used them purely for propaganda, and gave only one side of the picture, he would certainly attack us and give the other side.' Leeper decided to try some open blackmail. 'I told him that if he attacked us, he must remember that it would not tell in his favour with Labour here, if it were known that he had been acting as a secret agent of the British Government.' Ransome was not unnaturally 'very indignant' at what Leeper merely refers to as 'this veiled threat', and retorted that he could easily clear himself with the Labour Party by explaining that his 'sole motive' had been to see that the Foreign Office got correct information about the Bolsheviks, 'and not only their present one-sided and underground information'. Leeper now climbed down: Labour people might consider this a sufficient explanation, and there was 'no reason' why the British Government should publicise the fact that he had placed himself at their disposal. 'I do not know whether he was frightened or not, but it was clear that he was very indignant at the bare hint I had given', wrote Leeper.

On reflection, Leeper seems to have realised that he had gone too far, and told Ransome next day (the 27th) that he did not think any private arrangement would be of any use, that Ransome 'had better go his own way,' and try not to become involved in any controversy, which he said he wished to avoid. It was quite clear, however, that if he began making excuses for the Bolsheviks, he would certainly be publicly attacked by many people, who were 'most indignant' at the way they thought he had misrepresented the facts about Russia in the past.
Ransome retorted that he too had decided it was useless to make any private agreement, and that he wished to go his own way. After leaving Leeper the day before, he had been round to see Mrs Acland (wife of the liberal MP, F.D. Acland, former Parliamentary Private Secretary to Lord Haldane, when Secretary of State for War, and former Financial Secretary at both the War Office and then at the Treasury, when Lloyd George was Chancellor of the Exchequer). Ransome had told Mrs Acland that Leeper, ‘acting for the Foreign Office, had tried to muzzle him, because we were afraid to let the truth be known’, wrote Leeper, no doubt regretting his attempt at blackmail. Leeper claimed that he had entirely misrepresented their previous conversation, ‘and I insisted on his telling Mrs Acland that the Foreign Office was able to stand up for its own opinion, and was quite indifferent to what he wrote’, and that his sole object had been to avoid controversy. Ransome said he would so inform Mrs Acland, ‘but of course I have no guarantee that he will’, wrote Leeper. He had gone into this matter rather fully, ‘in case Ransome spreads this story further’.

The political side of their conversation was ‘much more important’, wrote Leeper. Ransome first asked (rather teasingly, one feels) if Leeper would send a sealed letter from him to Philip Kerr in Paris, ‘dealing with a very important matter, which he was not willing to make public to the Foreign Office’. Leeper, of course, refused, and said that if he wanted to contact Philip Kerr, he had better go to Downing Street. ‘He [Ransome] finally said it did not matter, that he would not send the letter at all, which merely contained information about what the Bolsheviks thought of the four American delegates, who had been sent to Moscow by Colonel House, and who had just returned to Paris. On questioning him about these American delegates, I learnt that they had, according to Ransome, told him in Moscow that they had been sent quite secretly via Sweden and Finland by Colonel House, with the knowledge of Mr Lloyd George and Mr Philip Kerr. Ransome did not say who else in Paris knew of this, but added that the object of the secrecy was that the French should know nothing about it. He further told me that Lenin had seen them, and offered them terms of peace, which they had brought back with them, and which they were in favour of accepting. He said that their opinions were the same as his own, that they favoured peace with the Bolsheviks in return for concessions and the sending of food and other supplies into Soviet Russia.

‘I told him that I personally disagreed with his views, and that the day that we concluded peace with Lenin, we might as well give up the struggle against Bolshevism in Europe. Ransome said that he had the interests of his own country at heart, that the only way to avoid revolution in England was to make peace with the Bolsheviks, and, by leaving them alone and feeding the people, let the Bolsheviks be overthrown from within. He was confident that the result of this policy would be a move towards the Right in Russia, and the disappearance of Bolshevism.

‘I told him that I believed with him that Lenin was extremely able, and had never been wrong in his calculations, that if his desire was to conclude peace, and
induce us to send food, it was because he knew that our action would give enormous moral strength to Bolshevism in Europe, and would strengthen his own position in Russia, and that Lenin was more certain to be right in his calculations than he, Ransome.’

Leeper was, of course, astonished at all this, and angry to be told of it for the first time through Ransome. This information, he concluded, was given by Ransome in confidence, but was ‘far too important’ for Leeper to keep to himself.

Lord Robert Cecil read this account of his interview with Ransome with mounting fury. The first part is tiresome, but relatively unimportant, because Mr Leeper was careful to emphasise the entirely private and personal character of his observations,’ he minuted to Lord Curzon.

‘But the second part contains information which, if true, I find it difficult to consider in language becoming to a subordinate official. It is of course the case that the information comes from Mr Ransome, a person of little reliability, and I have also little doubt that, if accurate, the conspirators will succeed in covering their tracks, but in my humble opinion, the sooner the Bolshevik Blue Book comes out, the better.’

F.D. Acland took no notice of what Leeper had subsequently told Ransome, and wrote straight to the Prime Minister in Paris.

My dear Lloyd George,

This is rather important and you should read it; and the fact that I’m a Wee Free does not make any difference to my desire to be of use. It’s about Arthur Ransome… I want you to consider whether you ought not to get him over to Paris, if only for a good talk to Philip Carr [sic] who knows him. He says the F.O. are sending over pro-interventionists [?] only who have never had a hundredth part of his chance of getting below the surface. He also says that two Americans (whom you & House know about) realise that he had far greater chances than they had of getting at the truth & very much want him to be able to get his stuff really considered.14

There was no reply.

Paris

A few weeks later, Bullitt threw up his job at the American Delegation in disgust; and that September, told all to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Washington. But this account of the Bullitt affair only came out 18 years later. In 1933, Bullitt became the first American Ambassador to the Soviet Union. Then he was Ambassador in Paris; and in spring 1937, when there was some question of Lloyd George seeing him, Lloyd George asked Philip Kerr, then Lord Lothian, to refresh his memory about the events of 1919. After Lothian did so, recounting
these details, Lloyd George’s secretary stated that he had looked through Lloyd George’s papers; and Lothian’s account ‘gives the inner history of the episode’.

What is interesting here is that both Lloyd George and Philip Kerr apparently thought that this was all the ‘inner history’ of the episode. In fact, it was Colonel House’s son-in-law, Gordon Auchinclos (a junior American delegate in Paris, who disliked Bullitt and his ideas, had never been informed of his mission until about a week before he returned to Paris, and who now perhaps resented the whole thing turning into a British mission, carried out by an American delegate), who leaked the news to Wickham Stead (editor of The Times) on the afternoon of the 26th—by when it must have been known that Bullitt was going to see Lloyd George before President Wilson—that a deal with the Bolsheviks was in the air. Wickham Stead, who had done much to scotch the Prinkipo proposal, now wrote a fiery editorial in the Daily Mail, which Bullitt found the Prime Minister waving around in anger and despair over the breakfast table next morning.¹⁴

On the 28th, Clemenceau replied sharply to Lloyd George’s paper of March 25 that French policy was to strengthen the border states, not to appease Germany at their expense. If ‘inacceptable frontiers’ imposed by the Allies made them fall, the only barrier between Russian and German Bolshevism would fall also; and the result would be a central European confederation under Bolshevik or imperialist Germany. ‘In both cases, the Allies will have lost the war’, he stressed. Nor could Germany be appeased at the expense of France, who had borne the major weight of the war. At present, England and America, both maritime nations, had had definite guarantees from Germany through German naval, colonial and commercial losses; but were only offering France a temporary guarantee against future German aggression. It was primarily the Allies who must feel assured of a just peace; if they did not, it was ‘not alone in Central Europe that Bolshevism is to be feared’. To this, Lloyd George at once sent a withering reply that if France really attached no importance to heavy German reparations and the British military guarantee, he would withdraw it, as many English people disliked ‘entangling alliances’. Thus, the dispute over the German Treaty continued unabated.¹⁵

**London**

In London, Churchill was not only appalled at the decision to evacuate Odessa, but most apprehensive of the effect which Foch’s diatribe against Denikin might have had on Lloyd George. On the 28th, therefore, Churchill wrote to Foch that he was ‘distressed’ to learn from the DMI that at a recent meeting with Lloyd George, Foch had expressed ‘very unfavourable’ opinions about Denikin’s army. The War Office were ‘definitely’ committed to the support of the Volunteer Army, within certain specified limits. A very careful study had been made of the conditions of the Volunteer Army, to which a considerable British Mission was
attached. ‘The facts at our disposal do not confirm the adverse views you have formed.’

Churchill reminded Foch that, three weeks ago in Paris, he had warned him that on the Black Sea coast, things were going ‘from bad to worse’, that the Greek troops under French Command were rapidly deteriorating, and that the local population was being alienated. ‘Events have only too painfully proved the truth of this forecast, which I made on very full and accurate information.’

Sir Henry Wilson wired back to Churchill that he would speak to the Prime Minister about Foch’s attack on Denikin, as Churchill asked him. ‘But I think the P.M. has taken it at its proper value because Thwaites [the DMI] explained the situation to him at the time…’

South Russia

But Churchill’s prediction about events on the Black Sea coast were all too true. That night (the 28th), an exultant wireless message, put out by the powerful transmitter at Petrograd, was picked up in London and Paris. ‘Soviet troops have taken Nicolaiev. Colossal quantity of war and technical material. The Allies in retiring caused much alarm…telegram from Kiev pronounces the arrival of many French prisoners taken by Soviet troops near Berezovka. They declare unanimously that they have been deceived. During the passage from Salonika to Odessa they were told that [the] war was [? going to make] the German[s] masters of Russia. [? French] High Command sent out many pamphlets and tracts on Russian events which were completely false…thus when French and Greek troops were sent to the front they were told they were fighting against brigands and not against revolutionaries. Now they say their eyes are opened…the only desire of the French at Odessa is to go back as quick as possible to their own country…’

In Odessa, as General Schwartz (the new Russian Commander) and the Defence Council prepared to mobilise the new Russian Army, whose formation was the condition for continued French occupation, they began to wonder if they were not already too late. For as neither the factories, nor the workshops nor the trams were working, and the electric light only intermittently, the idle and discontented workers, many of whom were armed, were now rapidly swinging over to the Bolsheviks. And as Franchet d’Esperey had diverted all the promised reinforcements, except for a few Greek troops, to Sebastopol, the French did not now have enough troops to disarm them. If there was now an evacuation, there might be a far worse repetition of the Kherson disaster, and the Allied troops might be massacred as they withdrew. The Defence Council therefore gave funds to the Municipal Council to feed the workers, to pay the dockers to unload the ships in the harbour; and sent desperately for grain from the Kuban, oil from Batoum and coal from Mariopol, to start up the factories and make the trams work.
When the 15,000 Ukrainian troops at Birzoula finally agreed to join the new Russian Army, Schwartz published his mobilisation order, with the promise of generous pay. But it met with a bad response from both the peasants and workers, and the Russian officers, who now found themselves threatened with court-martial from both sides, when Denikin strictly forbade them to enlist.

As the Bolsheviks continued to advance on Odessa, there were wild rumours of an uprising within the city; Bolshevik agents stuck up copies of Izvestia in the streets, and Schwartz had to forbid all meetings under pain of death. On March 28, he told Consul Cooke and the American Consul that the food situation was now very serious, and asked them to wire to Constantinople for any flour available. That night, over a thousand suspects were arrested in the ‘low Jewish quarter’, and rifles and ammunition seized.

‘Authorities have the situation in hand and nothing serious is likely,’ Cooke reported firmly to the Foreign Office, which the same day was informed by the Quai d’Orsay that the Russian Political Conference had now approved the demands of the French Command in South Russia; and that Sazonov had told Denikin to comply.17

‘But when will the question of policy in Russia be decided?’ asked Sir Roland Graham, when he saw all this in the Foreign Office on March 29. ‘I am not at all sure that the appt. of a High Commr. in S.Russia would not be advantageous. There is a great lack of political guidance and co-ordination. But this might be discussed in Paris and Lt. Reilly can throw interesting light on the situation (he goes there tomorrow). I think it would be well to send Mr Selby over to represent our views. Action should be taken as soon as possible to get together the Paris Committee.’

‘I should send British Civil and Military delegates at once to Paris’, minuted Lord Curzon. ‘Let Mr Selby go for us and let W.O. appoint their man.’17

Paris

In Paris, there were further British attempts to make peace in Russia. General Smuts, who was off to try and make peace between Hungary and Roumania, urged that he be allowed to meet Russian, as well as Hungarian Bolsheviks in Budapest; he was sure that this would lead to peace in Russia, he wrote to Lloyd George on March 31, ‘unless Bullet [sic] misread the Russian situation’. Lloyd George does not seem to have replied.18

On April 1, as The Times again headlined the ‘Siberian Army’s Big Advance’, and emphasised how very ‘uninteresting’ the Bolshevik leaders really were (save for Lenin, who was ‘of noble birth, like so many other revolutionaries’, they were ‘of a very commonplace and uninteresting character’, it was stated; while the minor leaders were all Jews, ‘and they seem to be older than is usual with revolutionary chiefs’), the story went round in Paris that the Bullitt peace proposal was nothing but a business deal in return for Russian concessions; and this was supported by a ‘sinister report’ (already hinted at in the Daily Mail of
March 28) that an American bank, and two German banks, had already combined for this purpose, ‘the actual work of exploitation being entrusted to German engineers’. And this ‘news’ was passed to The Times, and to other people in London. (What part was played in all this by Reilly, who arrived in Paris on March 30, with Foreign Office knowledge and approval as a Russian expert, remains obscure. It is however known that Wickham Stead, the Times editor, who also wrote the strong Daily Mail editorial of March 27, and who was very anti-semitic, thoroughly disliked Reilly.)

The Times continued to do its best to wreck the Bullitt peace proposals. On April 2, The Times had this main headline: ‘Down with Lenin’, ‘Bolshevists turn on their Leader’. Under a second headline, ‘Strike against Bolshevists’, a full account was given of the strikes at the Putilov works and other Petrograd factories between March 10 and 15. That morning, Sir Henry Wilson found the Prime Minister ‘beginning to lose heart’ about an early settlement of the German Peace Treaty. President Wilson, he heard, was ‘boiling up against the French’, and had stated in violent terms that he would never sign a French peace, ‘and would go home rather than do so’. To add to his difficulties, President Wilson’s secretary now wired from Washington: The proposed recognition of Lenin has caused consternation here.’ The bleakness of the situation was confirmed by Hankey, who told Sir Henry Wilson that the Big Four had now held 17 meetings ‘of which no records had been kept and at which no decisions had been reached’. Foch was in despair, and thought that the Peace Conference would crash within a week.

London and North Russia

One of the provisos of Ironside’s ‘guarantee’ to link up with Kolchak was that the naval flotilla on the Dvina river should be brought up to strength. But the Admiralty knew nothing of all this. ‘Alas, what you say about the lack of instructions is absolutely true’, wrote the First Sea Lord to Admiral Green at Archangel on March 24. ‘You are not the only person who feels it. Every department that has to deal with Russia is complaining, and we find ourselves in some difficulty in contending with the situation in the Baltic for that very reason. The fact of the matter is that the Government do not know what policy to put forward.’

General Ironside, however, now had some 7,000 Russian troops in the line; but though there had been no further Russian mutinies, ‘in our hearts we all knew that we were running a great risk’, he records. When a Russian party then deserted, he realised that bad news from Siberia might make the Russian troops collapse ‘at any moment’. But there was no news from Siberia. On March 26, he wired to the War Office that if a special brigade were sent out, bomber aircraft should also be sent, and more pilots; at present, there were no pilots for the six seaplanes now en route.

At the War Office, Churchill was not only wracked with doubt about the deteriorating situation in North Russia, but quite unsure whether or not Lloyd
George would go back on the limited agreement they had reached—he had never answered Churchill’s letter of March 8, it will be recalled. Churchill was therefore much missing his usual daily advice on these crucial matters from the CIGS, who was now constantly in Paris. On March 26, however, Sir Henry Wilson was back for a brief visit. ‘I went to office 10 o’c & had a long talk with Winston, who began by being very stuffy with me for having been away so long’, he records. ‘He [Churchill] is in a very critical mood about L.G. & I am sure he is watching (for) an opportunity to knife him.’ Sir Henry Wilson then returned to Paris.21

In London, the DMO now decided that action must be taken. The military position at Archangel, now totally cut off until late May, caused ‘considerable anxiety’, he minuted on the 27th. It was thus vital to make known that fresh troops would shortly relieve all men due for release in North Russia. Fear of ‘political complications’ had up to now prevented the War Office from taking action. But if told the facts, the DMO was sure that the British spirit was not ‘so contemptible’ as not to respond at once. He thus urged that a special brigade should sail for Archangel, and Bolshevik pressure there be relieved by continued British support for Kolchak, and by a combined Finnish, Estonian and German attack on Petrograd. Whatever difficulty such action might cause, it would be nothing to the ‘storm of indignation’ aroused by a British disaster at Archangel.22

Churchill now felt he must have the CIGS back. ‘I should be very grateful if you could release HENRY WILSON as soon as possible’, he wired to Lloyd George on the 28th. ‘I have hardly seen him for the last month…if you can possibly spare him please think of me.’ Lloyd George wired back that he was ‘very sorry to keep CIGS here for I know how badly you need him. But vital questions are under discussion…Every day we require his help. I very much regret that I cannot see my way to letting him go at present.’23

The DMO’s warning was soon borne out. On the 29th, an American company on leave at Archangel refused to return to the front. The American Consul Poole warned the State Department that their morale was ‘not reassuring’; though their Colonel thought that the worst had already happened, Poole and the Military Attaché did not. American troops must be withdrawn by the end of June, preferably before, stated Poole.24

When the War Cabinet met on March 31, Bonar Law first drew attention to a report in that morning’s papers of a speech by the French Under Secretary for War (Léon Abrami) in the French Chamber, in regard to the forces both in North Russia and South Russia. Bonar Law quoted this extract: ‘The Prime Minister has authorised me to tell you that he would be false to his past attitude if he proposed sending an expedition to Russia. From today, not a man will go to Russia, and those who are serving there are being relieved.’

Curzon reminded the Cabinet that when the matter had last been before them, it had been decided to press for an ‘early evacuation’ of Murmansk and Archangel. Since then, Lindley had sent his views. First, he felt the Allies should remove, and find a sanctuary for, some 13,500 people of various nationalities,
other than the Finns, Poles, Estonians, Letts and Lithuanians, who, hopefully, could eventually return to their own countries. Second, Lindley felt Britain was bound to give the Archangel Government fair warning of the evacuation; any present intimation would have effects ‘which would react far beyond Archangel.’ Third, Britain could make terms with the Bolshevik Government, which no doubt would be glad to come to some arrangement, and see the last of the British troops. But any such action would run counter to all British policy up to now. Lindley felt the right time for the evacuation was not now, but in the autumn. He also felt that 3,000 troops should be sent out to cover the evacuation, and let the tired troops return home. He further pointed out that the evacuation would seal the fate of Estonia, while the announcement of the British decision would have a disastrous effect upon the various states who were cooperating with Britain in fighting the Bolsheviks.25

Chamberlain thought Britain should ‘come to some arrangement’ with the Bolshevik Government, if possible, over the withdrawal of British troops, who were in a serious position; but he did not think Britain had any real obligation to the thousands of men of other nationalities, ‘few of whom had ever lifted a finger in our support’.

The DCNS reminded the Cabinet that it was the demoralised French troops, 150 of whom were now under arrest, who had caused considerable trouble at Archangel. He had previously reminded the Cabinet in what a perilous position British troops would be when the ice broke. But it was equally urgent, he suggested, to decide on British policy in the Baltic.

Curzon doubted the wisdom of Chamberlain’s suggestion. ‘Any recognition of, or negotiations with, even a provincial Bolshevik Government, would give considerable impetus to Bolshevik prestige throughout Russia.’ As for the Baltic States, he had, in line with the recent War Cabinet decision, written a despatch to Balfour, which he would shortly circulate, ‘pressing very strongly’ for an Allied decision on Baltic policy.

The War Cabinet decided that Churchill should submit a paper showing what steps the War Office had taken and were taking to prepare for the evacuation of British troops and such friendly inhabitants to whom Britain had an obligation; and to resume the discussion as soon as the War Office programme had been circulated.25

Churchill entered at this point. The pronouncement of Allied policy in the French Chamber had ‘completely compromised’ the British position in North Russia, he stated angrily, and might ‘gravely endanger’ the lives of the 13,000 British soldiers there. But there was no indication whether this pronouncement had been made with the approval of the British delegates in Paris.

On April 1, the Acting Cabinet Secretary reported to the War Cabinet that the Prime Minister had sent the following message in regard to the French Under Secretary for War’s speech. ‘The Prime Minister did not approve the making of this statement, but it does in fact represent his strong opinion and the opinion of his colleagues on the Council of Four.’25
This was just what Churchill had feared. He first decided to write to Clemenceau, as one War Minister to another, about the real position of the Allied troops in North Russia. ‘I am very anxious about them’, he admitted. Their position might shortly become one of ‘extreme danger’, he wrote. ‘I thought it was very hard upon us, who have the largest number of men involved in this theatre, that Monsieur Pichon should have given the exact figures of our strength to the Chamber, and thus have let the enemy see how very weak we are, and secondly that Monsieur Abrami should have declared that not another single man would be sent by France to the aid of this small force.’ In North Russia, it was not a question of carrying out Russian policy, which had never been agreed in Paris, but of keeping British troops alive through ‘this treacherous and dangerous’ spring, and extricating them at the earliest possible moment. Even evacuation would entail reinforcements being sent out, and he was thus preparing a ‘strong body’ of volunteers.26

‘I hope you will be able to have language used by your Ministers which is not inconsistent with a firm posture in the face of an aggressive enemy.’ In the House of Commons, which was ‘very much opposed’ to Russian expeditions, even the Government’s most extreme opponents had declared that if it was a question of rescuing and extricating British troops in North Russia, ‘they would support the despatch of the necessary reinforcements there’. Churchill imagined that Clemenceau would find similar support if the operation was clearly defined. There had also been ‘considerable difficulties’ with the French troops at Archangel, who were tired out, and to a large extent had lost heart and discipline, he reminded Clemenceau. These men must be removed as soon as the ice melted; but until it was possible to bring the rest of the force safely away, Churchill trusted that Clemenceau would feel it an obligation to replace them with fresh troops, in case of an emergency.26

This letter was first sent over to Sir Henry Wilson to read and then pass on. ‘Winston is manoeuvring for position agt. L.G.’, he commented, before handing it on.26

That day (the 1st), the War Office confirmed to Ironside that as no Russian troops could be sent from France, a special British brigade was being assembled, and should arrive at Archangel, with naval and RAF reinforcements, in late May, thus enabling the most unreliable of the Allied troops to be evacuated. A personal message from Churchill about their relief would shortly be sent.

Then there was trouble at Murmansk. At 6.15 p.m. that night, Churchill telephoned to Sir Henry Wilson in Paris that General Maynard had just wired that the Finnish Legion (which was acting in alliance with British troops) was going to revolt on April 6, and join the Bolsheviks. This would cut off all Allied troops south of Kandalaksha, and entirely sever all links with Archangel. Maynard was asking for 400 more men. Churchill urged that President Wilson authorise the despatch of landing parties from the two American cruisers at Murmansk. Later that evening, Sir Henry Wilson duly asked the Prime Minister to ask the President. ‘At the same time that these events are taking place on the Murmansk
side’, he added, ‘I get serious reports from Ironside from Archangel about the conduct of the French troops there, and General Bliss reports that the American troops there are very shaky.’

On April 2, Sir Henry Wilson reported back more fully to Churchill. ‘The Prime Minister saw the President this morning, who said that he had no objection’, he wrote. ‘Bliss came to see me last night with some alarming telegrams from his people in Archangel’, he went on, ‘and he was very nervous of what the Americans up there might do, hinting that it was just possible they might even join the Bolsheviks. I asked him whether he thought a promise that these men would be relieved would steady them for the time being, and he said he could not help thinking that it would be a very wise thing to do.

‘This morning [the 2nd] in talking with the Prime Minister, I suggested to him that in view of the unsatisfactory state of the morale of the French and the Americans, we ought to let both Ironside and Maynard inform all their commands that their troops would be relieved by fresh troops as soon as the ice permitted...The Prime Minister agreed that it was probably the best course open to us at the moment, so I have asked Radcliffe [DMO] to telephone over now to Kirke [DDMO] to get your approval for telegrams in the above sense to be sent to both Maynard and Ironside.’ (The Americans were not the only troops who it was feared might join the Bolsheviks. On March 22, just before an abortive rising took place at Murmansk, Maynard recalls that British morale was so bad that Bolshevik agents were counting on the support of the young British troops when they moved.)

But Churchill was still reluctant to send out more British troops. Though he confirmed, in a private wire next day (the 2nd) to Ironside, that fresh troops would be sent out, he emphasised that the War Office did not wish to send them unless absolutely necessary; and Ironside had previously stated that they would not be needed. What was his real opinion? Ironside replied briefly that fresh troops would help. But Consul Poole that day wired the State Department that Lindley as well as Ironside were anticipating a ‘complete union’ of the Archangel and Siberian forces this summer via Kotlas and Viatka. Further British naval forces, which could reach the river port of Kotlas, were on their way; and when Ironside had stated that none of the present British troops could carry out ‘offensive action’, the War Office had suggested sending ‘fresh dependable troops’ to carry out the ‘Kotlas operation in conjunction with the [British] navy’. It was all rather different from the cautious ideas in London.

Churchill now dealt with the Prime Minister’s message of support for the French Under Secretary for War, Léon Abrami, when he had stated that no further soldiers would go to North Russia. ‘Your message to War Cabinet about Abrami’s statement is not I trust intended to veto any reinforcements wh may be necessary for the purpose of extricating our troops at Archangel & Murmansk & covering their evacuation’, he stated. A brigade was being prepared, and ships were standing by, ‘in accordance with my letter to you [of March 8th] when I was in Paris of wh you have a copy’, he underlined. It might not be necessary to send
this brigade, but if their safety and safe withdrawal required it, no doubt the Prime Minister would wish them to go out. ‘We cannot abandon our own men.’ Even the sharpest critics in Parliament had said that if it was a question of rescue, conscripts should be sent, if necessary. ‘It was shameful of the French to disclose our weakness & intention to withdraw to the enemy and might easily lead to the destruction of our whole force while it is still cut off by ice.’

The Prime Minister now had no choice but to swing round, and comply with Churchill’s request. ‘I regret Abrami’s statement as much as you do’, he telephoned on the 3rd. ‘The first I heard of the matter was when I read the speech in the papers next day. I do not wish any interference with any arrangements you may have made for making evacuation of troops and those associated with them in Northern Russia, perfectly safe.’

Churchill was delighted. He wired straight back to Lloyd George thanking him for his message (‘I was sure that would be your view’): he circulated both Lloyd George’s telephone message, and his unanswered letter to Lloyd George of March 8, to the War Cabinet; and he minuted in satisfied terms to the DCIGS and General Staff thus: ‘The telephone message I have received from the Prime Minister fully empowers me to take all necessary measures for the relief and rescue of our troops in North Russia. I am ready, therefore, to receive proposals for strong action.’ The force under formation was to be called ‘The Rescue Force’, which would ward off criticism, and gain it support. There should be a further call for volunteers, in addition to those already selected. ‘It would be interesting to see what response we got.’ He wished to know at once about the Admiralty scheme. ‘Apparently they got their 900 men almost immediately…We might quite easily find ourselves tapping a new source of re-enlisting men. Speak to me today about this.’

Siberia

On March 29, The Times gave the first news of Kolchak’s advance, since its original announcement on the 22nd; and now announced the fall of Ufâ, under the strong headline: ‘Severe Bolshevik Defeat’, ‘Red Army in Danger’, ‘Fighting in Arctic Conditions’. The Times correspondent’s report, sent from Omsk on the 14th, stated that it was the presence of the two British Regiments at Omsk and the British supplies now ‘pouring into Siberia’ that had enabled Kolchak to ‘mature his plans’ and launch this brilliant offensive. And this ‘news’ was at once taken up, and wildly exaggerated by almost the entire Allied press. The only question was—how many days to Moscow?

All this was totally false. (These accounts were indeed so inaccurate that in August 1920, they were especially investigated by Walter Lippmann in the New Republic. Bolshevik wireless reports, which The Times half grudgingly printed each day in very small type, were far better, and often very accurate; for instance, their loss of Ufâ, a very serious blow, was at once announced. But they also contained much deliberate propaganda, i.e. persistent statements throughout March that the
French were going to evacuate Odessa, to try and bring the event about—in this case, highly successful. But the *Times* reports were often pernicious; much reported as fact was often sheer wishful thinking, and sometimes wilfully false, such as the statement that Kolchak was advancing after maturing his plans.)

The War Office was delighted by the fall of Ufa. On the 29th, they wired to General Knox that a special volunteer force of officers and men would replace the two British regiments in Siberia as soon as possible. This would bring Knox’s mission up to 2,000 all ranks. It was probable that the War Office call for volunteers would produce far more officers than men; some officers, however, might be able to induce some men to come with them. The object was to give Kolchak a ‘tangible guarantee’ of British support, and a slight moral stiffening to his forces.

The War Office suggested that Knox might reform the Canadian Brigade as a Russian formation, with Russian personnel, and as many British officers and men as were necessary, using the equipment the Canadians had left behind; second, Knox might allocate parties of British officers and men to fighting units at the front, as instructors, to give encouragement and good example to the Russian troops. Knox was asked to wire his views.

General Knox, now back in Omsk, was aghast at Kolchak’s ‘offensive’. Though he now had enough British supplies to equip at least six divisions, the Russian Command had failed to call up the five divisions before moving forward, as agreed, and was now splitting up the young Russian cadets, which the British Mission had been training, and which both Admiral Kolchak and Gajda, the Northern Army Commander, had agreed should join a special Anglo-Russian *corps d’élite*, which the Hampshire Regiment were about to form in Ekaterinburg. On March 28, Knox therefore wrote a very sharp letter to the War Minister Stepanov: ‘I want these boys kept as much as possible together’, he stated. They were equipped in British uniform, and were not to be scattered throughout the Siberian Army without reference to him. He also complained that Stepanov’s ‘indecision’ was preventing proper use being made of the large quantities of British supplies now at Omsk. If Knox were to equip further divisions, there must be ‘some definite *programme* to show that these divisions will be ready *in time*’. At present, no more men could be called up, as the training barracks were ‘in a state not fit for animals’, he wrote. They had wasted time long enough. If matters were not settled at once, Knox would take the British equipment to the front himself, and form Russian units there: ‘I want an answer today.’

As there was none, he sent a copy of this letter next day to Admiral Kolchak. ‘I am afraid it is a rude letter’, he wrote, ‘but you will forgive its tone when you remember that I am not asking anything for England, but only wish to help Russia.’ He strongly urged the ‘absolute necessity of coming to some decision *at once* on a definite military programme. We have spoken often of a “spring offensive”. We now know that there can be no spring offensive, because we will have nothing ready. If we do not start work at once, there will not be a *summer* offensive either.’ The date of the general mobilisation must be fixed immediately.
If the men arrived at the training centres by April 30, the new divisions could leave for the front on June 15; and the summer offensive could begin on July 15. ‘This is the latest date which might enable us to capture the harvest in the Volga Governments, and this is essential’, he underlined. ‘It seems impossible to get anyone here to recognise the value of time’, he complained. ‘People are so occupied by talk and paper schemes that decisions are indefinitely postponed. The plain truth is that we will have to fight this year for our lives and every hour is of value.’

Trotsky, however, had spotted the danger, as he frantically reorganised the 5th Army. Kolchak’s ramshackle line now stood just east of the River Volga—before Saratov, Samara, Simbirsk and Kazan. And as General Knox went up to Glazov (mid-way between Perm and Viatka) to present General Gajda, the Northern Army Commander, with the KCB—for services about to be rendered in the direction of Archangel—Trotsky ordered a ‘special brigade’ to be sent forthwith to Viatka.

South Russia

In South Russia, despite a Cossack rising against the Bolsheviks in the Donetz basin, the Volunteer Army was still hard pressed on all sides. On March 28, General Denikin had again attacked the 8th Red Army near Lugansk to try and link up with the insurgent Cossacks, and had driven it back. But on the 30th, when the 2nd Ukrainian and 13th Red Armies launched a strong counter-attack to seize the entire right bank of the river Don, and thus release Bolshevik troops for transfer to the Eastern Front, Denikin had to call off his attack near Lugansk.

While the French disrupted his left flank in the Ukraine, the British, far from aiding Denikin, were only disrupting his rear. Soon after March 8 (when Churchill had clarified British policy to Lloyd George), the War Office had duly laid down a boundary line in the Caucasus—but in the most ham-fisted way. On March 14, General Briggs (head of the British Mission) had reported that Denikin had been informed by the Russian General Erdeli that General Thomson had just told him that the boundary line was to be from Petrovsk, on the Caspian, along the Caucasian crest to Sochi; and as there were now British troops in Petrovsk and Daghestan, there was no need for Denikin to appoint a Russian Governor there. Denikin was furious. It was a serious affront that a demarcation line had been fixed without consulting him; and by people, he added angrily, who seemed bent on splitting up Russia. By March 26, General Milne (the British Commander at Constantinople) was urging the War Office to take a stronger line with Denikin, who was refusing to withdraw from Sochi.

But on the 31st, Briggs urged caution. Though the Bolsheviks had not damaged the old Grozni oil fields, the Chechen tribesmen had destroyed the new Grozni oil fields and the railways. If the Volunteer Army now showed any weakness, the Chechens would bring the Ingushi into a religious war against the Terek Cossacks, which would probably entail the destruction of the old oil fields,
the factories and storage depots, which would cripple the Volunteer Army; and some time ago, Briggs added, Chechen delegates at Grozni were boasting that the British were backing them, and had lent them 10 million roubles. This caused concern in London; and Milne was asked to verify if any such loan had been made. None of all this involved the Foreign Office. When informed on April 5 by the War Office of the boundary line which they had dictated, Lord Curzon replied that as Britain was to evacuate the Caucasus, it did not matter what line was laid down.  

London

In London, Parliament still had no idea what Russian policy was being followed in Paris or London, nor what was happening in any of the Russian theatres. When Questions opened on March 25th, Sir Samuel Hoare asked for some statement about operations in the Ukraine. Mr Cecil Harmsworth replied that the situation there was too obscure. There is no immediate danger to Odessa, and there is no intention of evacuating the town.’

About 3.30 p.m., Colonel John Gretton (a powerful back-bench Conservative) suddenly asked Churchill, by private notice, whether Allied forces were still at Odessa, what was the result of the fighting in North Russia, and whether Bolshevik troops had invaded Hungary, as reported. As there was no reply, he stated that he would repeat the question that night, and would move the Adjournment of the House. At 11 p.m., he duly stated that the Russian question was causing ‘great anxiety’, that there was very little reliable information in the press; the Government should give the House some information, and announce their Russian policy.

Mr Churchill limited himself to a few facts. In North Russia, there had been very little fighting since the New Year. At present, while the White Sea was frozen, the War Office was preparing for ‘whatever policy is decided upon’, he stated guardedly. British policy could not be made public; and whatever was decided, false rumours would certainly be spread to mislead the enemy. In the Baltic, though British arms had been sent to Esthonia, it was the considerable German force, now moving on Riga, which—though increasing German influence—had saved the Baltic from Bolshevik conquest. ‘Therefore we are not obstructing any longer the operations of this force, which is, in fact, rendering useful service.’ He could not confirm the Bolshevik invasion of Hungary. In the Ukraine, ‘which has not yet fully experienced the joy of Bolshevik rule’, French and Greek troops faced not only considerable Bolshevik forces, but a ‘considerable movement’ among the local people, which ‘shows the danger of rash interference or meddling’. In Nicolaiev, there were about 10,000 German troops. ‘It is possible some use might have been made of these men, but…they have now finally given up their arms.’ Though two towns had been lost, Odessa was being defended; but the Bolshevik troops near Odessa, coupled with the Hungarian position, made the Roumanian problem ‘especially acute’. Then there
was the Volunteer Army, ‘the best of the Russian Armies’, which was ‘fighting desperately for the honour and integrity of their native land and for the cause of civilisation not only in Russia, but all over the world’. Britain was sending it arms and supplies through a British Mission. In Siberia, Kolchak had just retaken Ufâ. On his northern front, ‘it is not too unduly sanguine to say that the offensive just begun has opened auspiciously’, he stated guardedly. On Kolchak’s southern front, things ‘have not gone so well’. There was only a British Mission there, and a ‘handful of men’ under John Ward, who were far behind the front in Omsk, ‘where they remain as a sort of symbol and guarantee of the authority and reputation of Admiral Kolchak’s Government…they are a symbol’. There Churchill ended.34

But Parliament still remained dissatisfied. Churchill had said nothing whatever about British policy. Next day, as The Times announced that a British Mission was now in Moscow to enquire about British prisoners held by the Bolsheviks, Sir Samuel Hoare, after a lengthy answer, suddenly asked, ‘Is the report true in the papers today that the British Government is sending a Mission to Bolshevik Russia?’35

Mr Speaker: ‘That does not arise out of the question on the Paper.’

Mr S. Arnold (liberal) then moved an amendment to the Military Service Bill, by the insertion of the words: ‘provided that liability to service…does not include service in any part of the territory formerly included in the Russian Empire’. He first quoted Churchill’s pledge, and Curzon’s pledge the House of Lords, that no conscript troops would be sent to Russia. ‘Surely these very definite statements by Ministers make an unanswerable case for this amendment…there is very strong feeling against sending any more men to Russia’.

Mr C. White (liberal) supported him: ‘Is it part of the duty of the British soldier to fight Bolshevism in this or any other country?’ British workers suspected that British soldiers might be used to fight labour unrest.

Captain Guest (the Government Chief Whip) refused to give way. ‘We are committed in Russia by the events of the last four years’. Was it intended to prevent the War Office taking ‘such limited steps as may be necessary’ to extricate British troops? If reinforcements had to be sent out, they must be all subject to the same discipline. The Government’s intention was that no conscript should be sent to ‘undertake aggressive action in that country’.

Mr Hogge (liberal) thought that Churchill should answer. ‘What is the meaning of aggressive action?’ It should be made clear to British troops on the Rhine that they would not be used in Russia, and to the British public that the British Government had no quarrel with the present Russian Government, ‘whatever that Government may be’. Parliament should be properly informed about the Russian situation, for ‘the bulk of us do not really know what is happening in Russia’.35

Mr J. Devlin (Irish nationalist) found Churchill’s silence suspicious. British conscripts might be used to fight the Bolsheviks. That would be quite right if the
Russians waged war upon them, but the proper place for Russian domestic questions to be settled is in Russia.’ There had been talk of ‘our policy’ in Russia. ‘Whose policy in Russia? This House has been committed to no policy’.

Mr Churchill stuck to his pledge. Rejecting the amendment, he argued that it was ‘specific and…would absolutely prohibit us from going to the rescue of our soldiers in Archangel or on the Murman coast no matter how grievously pressed they might be’. But the Government did not intend to use ‘large conscript armies in Russia’. Russian policy, he added, rested with the Peace Conference.

Mr V. Hartshorn (labour) underlined the ‘intense feeling’ about Russia in the Trade Unions. He entirely opposed the spread of Bolshevism in England, ‘but I see a real danger of it taking root in this country’. British workers felt that British troops were being used to destroy a ‘democratic Government which is trying to find expression in another country’. No one knew enough about what was going on in Russia to pass wholesale judgment on the Bolsheviks.

Colonel Ashley: ‘We know quite enough.’

Captain S. Wilson: ‘John Ward’s letter.’

Colonel Wedgwood (liberal) stated that Churchill, by modifying his pledge, had gone a great deal further. ‘We are now told that he has no intention of sending a large conscript army into the heart of Russia. We never supposed he had.’ But British soldiers might have to protect the border states. ‘We on these Benches certainly protest against this Russian expedition on all grounds. We would immediately have all our soldiers withdrawn and leave Russia to stew in her own juice. We will protest the more if our men are being used, and the Americans are not being used…Is England fighting at the present time to re-establish the monarchy, re-establish reaction, and…the old Tsarist regime?’ He above all objected to British soldiers, who had gone through so much to destroy imperialism and militarism, being used to restore a regime ‘which might not be as bad as the Bolshevik regime, but, at any rate, was the curse of Europe and a disgrace to civilisation’.

On the 27th, the Tories counter-attacked. Lieut-Col Guinness asked pointedly if the British Government had given de facto recognition to the Esthonian National Council in May 1918, and if Admiral Kolchak’s Government could now be given similar recognition.

Mr Harmsworth simply replied that Allied policy on Russia was being considered in Paris.

Lieut-Col Guinness: ‘Is it not the fact that certain countries have recognised Finland and other countries have not, and it is entirely a matter for each country to decide for itself?’

Colonel Wedgwood: ‘Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Admiral Kolchak’s Government is a Royalist Government for the re-establishment of Tsardom in Russia?’

Lieut-Col. Guinness: ‘In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the answer, I will raise this question on the Adjournment.’
He duly did so that night. Admiral Kolchak’s Government was now the ‘paramount’ Russian Government, whose claim to recognition was ‘overwhelming’. In Parliament, there was now ‘overwhelming’ feeling against the Bolsheviks; but they should be overthrown by Russian ‘reaction’ rather than by an Allied Army. ‘The Bolsheviks have reached their present success entirely by the mistakes of the Allies.’ Now was the time to stiffen up the Peace Conference. Allied moral support was almost as important as an Allied Army in consolidating Kolchak’s Government.

Sir Montague Barlow (conservative) supported him. Kolchak was a ‘reconstructive regenerative force’ making a ‘fine struggle for a reasonable theory’ in Russia. Lieut-Col Archer-Shee (conservative) agreed; but thought that an Allied Volunteer Army of 150,000 men would be needed to turn the scale in Russia. Mr T. Inskip (conservative) deprecated the recognition of any ‘insurgent state’ without de facto power. Canning had waited twenty years before recognising the South American republics. If Britain recognised non-governments, she might establish the ‘right of insurrection’ in Europe.

Sir S. Hoare retorted that the Bolshevik Government was the only insurgent Russian Government. Kolchak had de facto power, and represented ‘all that is best’ in Russia. His supporters came from the ‘extreme Socialist parties’ and ‘every section of loyal and reasonable opinion’ in Russia. ‘To suggest that it is a Royalist Government bent upon bringing back a reactionary Tsarism is as far removed from the truth as anything can be.’ Kolchak had recently promised to summon a Constituent Assembly to decide on the form of Russian Government when the Bolsheviks were overthrown. The Allies should thus recognise him. The Peace Conference’s main difficulty over Russian policy was its lack of contact with any official Russian body.

Mr Harmsworth replied that this was an ‘extremely delicate matter’, and he had often asked members not to raise such questions. He was ‘not sufficiently skilled’ to describe Kolchak’s Government diplomatically; but it was ‘substantive’, held de facto power, and was not ‘in any sense’ a Tsarist Government. It was also true that Kolchak had guaranteed land to the peasants, promised to convene a Constituent Assembly, and was supported not only by the Siberian military, but by ‘moderate public opinion of all kinds’. He would not discuss ‘formal diplomatic recognition’, but Britain had already given Kolchak moral support, ‘and much more than moral support’. He would make the Tory view known to the British Delegation in Paris ‘with the greatest pleasure’.

Thus, the Tories seemed to have overcome the Liberals. But the Tory argument, fully supported apparently by Harmsworth, was hollow to the core. Kolchak had already overthrown the Constituent Assembly to gain power, and murdered its members, and it was they who represented both the extreme Socialists and moderate public opinion; Kolchak’s only real supporters were the military riff-raff.

Next day, Churchill wired a brief report of the debate to Lloyd George. ‘It is worth noting that the average voting strength against the Conscription Bill was
about sixty five WEE frees and Labour men, but on the proposal not to allow any troops to go to Russia, the minority vote fell to forty-eight. I am having these lists scrutinised.'

But Churchill felt Parliament needed a little more guidance on Russian affairs—along the right lines. ‘Surely the moment has come to publish the Bolshevik atrocity blue-book’, he wrote to Curzon the same day. ‘We really have no right to keep Parliament in the dark any longer.’ He also stated that, with the assent of the Prime Minister, he was publishing an account of conditions in Germany, as collected by British officers. It seems to me that publication of both these documents is necessary to a proper understanding by Parliament of the situation. In the absence of a true view about the Russian situation, I find a difficulty in supplying the necessary reinforcements for Archangel and Murmansk: public opinion is not sufficiently instructed.'

In the House of Commons on the 31st, Colonel Wedgwood asked when there could be a discussion of his motion that British troops should be withdrawn from Russia ‘at the earliest opportunity, peace be made with the de facto Governments of that country, and the blockade raised so as admit food into Russia’.

Mr Bonar Law: ‘The Government are not prepared at present to give a day for this purpose.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘In view of the action taken by the South Wales miners in urging that we should withdraw our troops from Russia, could not this House have the privilege of debating this question at an early date?’

Mr Bonar Law: ‘I think we have discussed it pretty often.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘We have had no chance at all!’

That evening, during the third reading of the Military Service Bill, Mr J.R.Clynes (labour) asked why British troops were being kept in Russia. However big an army was raised under this Bill, it would be no defence against Bolshevism, he warned Churchill. ‘Bolshevism is an ideal. It is mistaken. It would be ruinous. It is tyrannical in its effects and in its application. But it is an ideal’

Major J.G.Jameson (Tory) doubted whether Britain could afford to throw away the British Army, which had taken four years to create. ‘When we see Bolshevism, like a devastating fire, sweeping over half Europe; when we have seen in the last week one great country, Hungary, lapped over by that fire, and submerged by it; when it is even now a matter of grave doubt as to whether or not Germany will welcome Bolshevism as a means of escaping from the retribution which she so justly deserves, then I say it behoves us to look ahead.’ Bolshevism, he went on, was ‘made in Germany. It was invented by the Germans, subsidised by them…It is an ideal which comes with a bomb in one hand and a rifle in the other, and the Chinese executioner not far behind.’

Mr Churchill asked if any man could foresee Britain’s military needs. ‘From the White Sea to the Caspian at the present moment a whole broad band of Europe is smouldering or flaming, or even exploding.’ Bolshevik armies were attacking
along that whole front, and all the border states were in peril. Once the Allied
Armies were disbanded, the Allies would be powerless to influence events in
Europe. At present, Germany and Austria were in a mood of ‘half defiance, half
despair’, while Hungary had already broken the Armistice terms, and Bulgaria
was moving troops to the Roumanian border. His opponents showed little
concern for the world or for British interests; but took Wedgwood’s view that
now that the Great War was over and the Armistice signed, ‘nothing else
remains, that you can let everything rip in every quarter of the world. Russia is to
stew in her own juice, as he said the other night, or to stew us in her juice if she
chooses. As for Poland, who cares for Poland? Let her shift for herself! Austria and
Hungary have only to call themselves Bolsheviks to escape altogether from the
consequences of the War…Roumania…she should be left to her fate! As to the
little states I have mentioned…let them shift for themselves, unless, that is to say,
the Germans will go to help them!’

The Bill was then passed.

On April 2nd, at Question Time in the House of Commons, the attack on the
Bullitt Mission opened.

Sir Samuel Hoare asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs ‘whether any
Allied Mission has recently returned from Bolshevist Russia with offers of peace
from Lenin’s Government?’

Mr Cecil Harmsworth: ‘I am not aware of any Allied Mission having been recently
in Bolshevist Russia other than a small British Red Cross
Mission which has been looking after the interests of our
prisoners.’

Sir S. Hoare: ‘Is the hon. Gentleman sure that a member of the Allied
Delegation in Paris has not recently returned from
Bolshevist Russia?’

Mr Harmsworth: ‘I have no information to that effect.’

Sir S. Hoare: ‘I beg to give notice, in view of the hon. Gentleman’s
answer, that I shall raise this question on the first available
opportunity.’

Later that afternoon, Sir Samuel Hoare summarised the Bolshevik peace terms,
which Bullitt and Steffens, ‘who is a friend of Trotsky’, had brought back from
Moscow, and which were ‘meeting with a favourable reception with certain
highly placed persons in Paris’. At present, there were only two Russian
Governments: Admiral Kolchak’s Government and the Bolshevik Government,
which had ‘outraged to such an extent the law of nations that no civilised Power
with self-respect can possibly entertain friendly relations with them’. They had
repudiated the Russian debt, launched aggressive propaganda in Europe, and
murdered Captain Cromie in the British Embassy in Petrograd. ‘Only this
evening I saw a telegram from Russia stating that on the Siberian front Admiral
Kolchak was making a most brilliant advance and that the Bolsheviks were flying
so fast that he could not maintain contact with them. At the same time there is
news from Petrograd that serious risings have taken place there against the Lenin Government.’ It would thus be the ‘height of folly’ to negotiate with Lenin, and he hoped that the Leader of the House could confirm that the Peace Conference would not do so. He also asked Bonar Law if the British Delegation in Paris, the Foreign Office in London, and the French Government were aware of this American Mission.39

Mr Bonar Law: ‘When I heard of this I personally, like the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, knew nothing of it—the idea that some Embassy had been received from the Bolshevik Government, and that terms were to be made with them. I did not think there was a shadow of foundation for it or I should have heard of it’ The alleged proposals about the debt made the story sound improbable, since the previous Bolshevik offer to repay the Russian debt was meant to convince the workers that the Allies were simply after money. But, he added, ‘I have today telephoned to the Prime Minister, and he also knows nothing about it (cheers), therefore I do not think it is necessary for me to say more.’

In the House of Commons next afternoon, Lt. Col. Sir F.Hall asked the Foreign Secretary if the Allies had received ‘proposals for an honourable understanding with the present rulers of Russia; and, if so, if he is able to give an outline of such proposals?’

Mr C.Harmsworth: ‘As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said last night, the Allied Governments have received no proposals.’40

But in answer to a further question (asking him to acknowledge that the Bolshevik repudiation of the decree nationalising women in Saratov was false), Harmsworth stated—in some desperation—that a White Paper on Bolshevism would be distributed to Parliament that night; and in this were to be found all the Bolshevik atrocity stories, quoted at great length, to divert attention from Bullitt and Steffens.

On April 3, as the White Paper on Bolshevism was published, The Times stepped up its anti-Bolshevik fervour, under the main headline: ‘The Bolshevist Poison’, ‘Four Continents Affected’. That day, their Paris correspondent, under the headline, ‘Playing with Bolshevism—Dangerous paris Indecision—Blindness and Obstinacy—Money Influences at Work’, wrote that the idea ‘of a shameful “deal” with the Bolsheviks on the basis of some form of Allied and American recognition of the Lenin–Trotsky “Government”, in return for economic, commercial, and financial concessions…was fortunately scotched in the nick of time’, he stated, ‘but it is by no means killed and is at present lurking underground’, he warned.

The same day, the New York Times quoted a report from the Morning Post correspondent in Warsaw that Lenin and Trotsky ‘have come to a definite break…The situation in Moscow and Petrograd has become so serious that there is promise of a popular uprising against the entire Bolshevik regime’.
While President Wilson’s attention was concentrated on Germany, the American Delegation in Paris was casting around for some other action to take over Russia now that Bullitt’s peace proposals seemed to have been rejected. Robert Lansing had told Frank Polk (the Acting Secretary of State in Washington) on the 24th that, having studied Consul Imbrie’s report, they felt that no one Red Cross alone could undertake the relief of Petrograd and other Russian cities. They were therefore asking Herbert Hoover what to do. As they could neither destroy nor recognise Bolshevism, Hoover informed the President on the 28th, the Allies should send food into Russia to help the Russian people to ‘swing back to moderation and themselves bankrupt these ideas’. A Russian Relief Commission should be set up, with support from the Scandinavian countries, to ship in the food, provided the Bolsheviks respected certain boundaries, stopped Bolshevik propaganda abroad, and distributed the food fairly. Such an initiative, Hoover urged, would enable the President to reassert his ‘spiritual leadership’ of democracy, and speak out on Bolshevism.41

The President told Hoover to find out what the British thought. Hoover came to see Lord Robert Cecil, who emphasised the need for setting up boundaries. Hoover said he thought he could induce the eminent Norwegian Doctor, Fridtjof Nansen, to head the Relief Commission. The proposal for the President to denounce Bolshevism, he added, was for political reasons. Cecil reported all this to the Prime Minister, but made no recommendation, apart from summarising Hoover’s ‘elaborate disquisitions’ on Bolshevism.41

At Hoover’s request, the American Delegation on April 3 drafted a letter for Nansen to send to President Wilson, urging that a neutral Commission, like the Belgian Relief Commission, should be sent to Russia; and they asked if America could provide shipping, food and medical supplies, and finance. Though large political issues were involved, such a Commission, they thought, would ‘raise no question of political recognition or negotiations’, and would probably be accepted by the ‘existing authorities’ in Russia. Colonel House asked both Bullitt and his rival Gordon Auchinclos to draft replies.42

Auchinclos’ draft stated that the Allies could provide supplies and shipping, provided there was a prior cease-fire; and that transport within Russia was wholly managed by the Relief Commission itself, and free from any governmental control, and that distribution be supervised by the Commission. But President Wilson that day fell seriously ill; and the matter was held over.

On the 4th, as Bullitt saw his olive branch withering from day to day, he drafted another reply to Nansen, which amounted to using his relief Commission as additional bait to induce all Russian groups to accept the Bolshevik peace proposals. The armistice, he wrote, should begin on April 20, and all the Russian delegates should meet the Allies in Norway on April 25.

Colonel House then asked Auchinclos to check Bullitt’s draft before passing it on to the President. As the two drafts were so dissimilar, and the two men so
hostile to each other, Bullitt was furious; and complained in angry terms about his colleague’s draft, which he said would be totally unacceptable to the Bolshevik Government. Again there was no further time for Russia—the dispute over the German Treaty was still increasing in venom—and *The Times* now openly supported Clemenceau against Lloyd George and President Wilson. (Their Paris correspondent, in a singularly unpleasant blend of sentimentality and viciousness, that day (the 4th) described a visit to Clemenceau, ‘whose face wore an expression of sadness such as I have never noticed before…[and] which I can only describe as tragic’. For Clemenceau, the only man in the Council of Four who ‘cannot by any flight of imagination be accused of political self-seeking’, felt that his colleagues were going astray. The French had accused him, if anything, of yielding too much to them. ‘A deep and touching “carita di patria” has inspired him—but, were he once to say that he can go no further and cannot seek further compromise either with an intractable ideology or with a short-sighted opportunism that would sacrifice the future for the sake of momentary escape from embarrassment, all France would believe him, and, with France, most men of good will and good faith.’ During the Peace Conference, Clemenceau had undoubtedly made mistakes, ‘but they have not been mistakes of cowardice or of pedantry’, he wrote.) But when King Albert of Belgium, whom the French had summoned the same day as a last resort, refused to support the French proposal for a separate Rhineland state, the French finally had to abandon the idea. At the Quai d’Orsay, Selby and the DMO. were that day talking to Kammerer, the head of the Russia Department, about Anglo-French differences in South Russia. After a show of elaborate politeness on both sides, Kammerer denied that the French had come to any agreement with the Ukraine, which was ‘essentially a part of Russia and the interest of the Allies was to maintain it as such’. They only therefore had to agree on instructions to the French Command in South Russia—to make sure that they did not do so again. This, to the satisfaction of Selby and the DMO., was done.

But that afternoon, news reached Paris that the French were evacuating Odessa.

**South Russia**

On the 30th, when it became known in Odessa that Ochakov (half-way between Odessa and Nicolaiev) had been abandoned two days before, notices that had been stuck up calling on the people to preserve order, and stating that bread would be provided, were all torn down, reported Bagge, ‘presumably by the French’. On March 31, Franchet d’Esperey’s Chief of Staff called on Mr Heinz, the American supply envoy at Constantinople, and told him that the food situation at Odessa was acute; could the Americans send some food? Heinz replied that he could not undertake relief as Odessa was under French command, but he would sell them some flour belonging to the United States Grain Corporation. ‘The
French officer said there were 700 tons of French Army stocks at Odessa, and he would purchase flour to replace this, but this flour must be shipped to Galatz in Roumania (on the Danube). He eventually purchased 1,000 tons. Mr Heinz asked why the flour was being sent to Galatz and whether this meant that the evacuation of Odessa had been decided upon. The French officer replied that there was to be a council that evening at which a decision would be taken. ‘A most valuable piece of evidence of the date of the French decision to evacuate Odessa’, minuted Gregory under this report when it reached the Foreign Office in London.

At Odessa later that day, Consul Cooke told General d’Anselme that he had had no answer to his wire for supplies for the town. General d’Anselme had heard nothing either. By now it was obvious that his nerves were entirely giving way. ‘Il faut évacuer les bouches inutiles’, he muttered. Cooke does not seem to have thought that d’Anselme really meant this. ‘Meanwhile all is quiet here though general feeling is fatalistic’, he wired. On April 1, the Odessa press stated that the front was quiet, that Bolshevik forces were smaller than imagined, and that the guns of the French warships could anyhow keep them from the town—and several French officers were sent on leave. But at the last moment, they were recalled. Later that day, Bagge wired desperately both to Constantinople and to the DOT in London that if flour were not sent at once, Odessa would definitely be evacuated.

April 2 was a Wednesday, the day that Madame Xydias received her weekly quests; and until 7 p.m., the house was full of people, including various French officers. People in Odessa were suddenly more optimistic; journalists from the well-known Moscow paper Rousskoie Slovo had acquired funds, paper and permission from Jean Xydias (the local newspaper owner) to use his printing press. That morning, their first edition had appeared, and was soon sold out. Jean Xydias however could not receive his guests that afternoon. He had caught Spanish ‘flu, of which there was then an epidemic at Odessa; and he was lying upstairs in bed with a violent fever, when at 9 pm young Berthelot and a friend burst into his bedroom. ‘Clemenceau has just fallen…A Socialist Government has been set up…We have just received the order to evacuate Odessa.’

(It is difficult to make out what order was sent to d’Anselme, or whether any real order was ever sent. It was claimed that two wireless messages had been received. The first from the French High Command ordered the evacuation. The second stated that Clemenceau had fallen after the National Assembly had refused to vote credits for intervention in Russia. On April 11, Sir Henry Wilson records that ‘Foch told me that it was the four Frocks who gave the order for Odessa to be evacuated, that he [Foch] had refused to send it, and that it had been sent by Clemenceau.’ But his order may well have been imprecise, allowing Franchet d’Esperey a good deal of latitude. From what his Chief of Staff told Heinz at Constantinople on March 31, it appears that Franchet d’Esperey had already decided to pull out. Why did he not issue a firm order to d’Anselme? Was the second ‘message’ about the alleged fall of Clemenceau designed to protect
Franchet d’Esperey himself? It is also unclear whether the Bolsheviks attacked on April 2 to precipitate the evacuation, or whether they had already somehow been informed of the wireless messages. General d’Anselme seems to have tried to cover himself by stating that the critical position forced him to evacuate. But by now, the cause had become the effect. Whatever the truth, some of the blame, it seems, must fall on Franchet d’Esperey.)

The news had reached the British community earlier. At 5.30 p.m., the Captain of HMS *Skirmisher* told Consul Cooke that he had just heard the news from the French Admiral Amet. Lowdon, one of Cooke’s colleagues, then went with the Captain to see d’Anselme, who said that he had had orders from Paris to evacuate Odessa unless he could find food. He had been quite unable to find anything; the evacuation would take three days.  

General d’Anselme then sent for General Schwartz (the Russian Commander), and told him that Odessa was being evacuated ‘by order of the English command’. Schwartz protested to d’Anselme that he should postpone it for at least a week; by then he could organise a strong enough force, independent of the French, to hold Odessa against Gregoriev, who had no more than 2,000 troops; and in another month, he hoped to have sufficient troops to drive the Bolsheviks back to the river Bug, and thus obtain some grain. The food situation was serious, he admitted, but not hopeless; and on April 1, he had arranged for the Kuban Government to send 5,000 tons of grain per month in return for sugar.*

But the French would not listen. The evacuation of Odessa, they said, was part of the general Allied policy to evacuate Russia. Schwartz, depressed, then informed his Russian Generals, who said the local military position had suddenly deteriorated. The Volunteer Army had been partly surrounded by Bolsheviks; and unless there was an immediate retreat, the remainder would simply be exterminated. For that evening, French and Greek troops had rapidly withdrawn from the line with their stores, though they ‘threw a good deal of ammunition into the sea’.

Next morning, the Odessa press printed this brief statement signed by d’Anselme: ‘The Allied Powers have made it known that it is impossible for them, during the coming days, to ensure supplies for Odessa. This is why, in order to reduce the number of mouths to feed, it has been decided to evacuate the town.’ But this was not printed very prominently, and was taken only to infer a partial evacuation; even Jean Xydias thought it was ‘conçu dans des termes assez vagues’. The clandestine Bolshevik Soviet now issued a proclamation that all cargo on board merchant ships in the harbour was to be seized. The French Command at once sent armed parties to protect the ships. The famished workers contacted the Bolshevik Soviet. It was decided to prevent the evacuation and

* It is impossible to verify this vital claim. But like so many other agreements of this time, it probably only existed on paper. Where was the sugar?
seize the Volunteer Army’s stocks of supplies; and the workers’ leaders came to see Freidenburg and demanded that all stocks at Odessa, including all Russian ships, should at once be handed over, and political prisoners freed; if not, there would be an uprising.\textsuperscript{44} Freidenburg refused to hand over the supplies, but agreed to return the Russian ships—after they had taken Russian troops to Novorossisk or Constantinople. He also agreed to hand over the political prisoners. The town, he stated, would be handed over to the Municipal Council, and the workmen must keep calm; if there was any violence, or if Allied troops were fired on as they withdrew, Odessa would be bombarded by the French warships in the harbour.

The workers stormed out, furious. By now, everyone knew that a Bolshevik Soviet had been set up. The French Command told the Ukrainian troops at Birzoula to make for the Roumanian frontier, and sent some French and Greek troops off in the same direction. Freidenburg, who seems to have unlocked the prisons and let everyone out, then sent for Cooke and asked what steps were being taken to evacuate British subjects. Cooke, who had that morning told all British subjects individually to leave, and had reserved accommodation for them on a British transport, replied that the Royal Navy were in charge.

About noon, Picton Bagge was handed two letters from d’Anselme. The first, dated April 1, stated that ‘les bouches inutiles’ might have to be evacuated at any moment, and in the next sentence, that this was to start at once; the second, dated the 2nd, that all Allied subjects would be sent back to their own countries. This seems to have been the first thing that Bagge had heard; startled, he scanned the morning papers, and could only find a very brief notice that a partial evacuation would be carried out; and that, thanks to the continual arrival of fresh Allied troops, the position at the front was still quite firm. By now, rumours were going around the town that Clemenceau had not fallen; these were attributed to the British.

That afternoon, the workers sent another delegation to see d’Anselme. ‘Mr General’, their spokesman stated, ‘you probably know that we number a hundred thousand, are all armed, and, however little we may wish it, no French soldier will leave Odessa alive.’

‘That’s good’, replied d’Anselme, ‘go on.’

‘We intend to take power from this moment’, went on their spokesman. ‘We are taking over the defence of the town, which does not at the moment exist. We will help you to carry out the evacuation and are ready to put all our transport at your disposal, our railways and ships, but on two conditions: first, that you undertake to return all the transport which belongs to the Russian people; next, that you will not take any Russian with you. The property of the bourgeoisie, that is the sweat of the people, and we do not want our country’s riches taken abroad. As for the Volunteers, they are our enemies, and we are going to…’

‘What?’ interrupted d’Anselme. ‘Massacre them?’
‘No’, replied their spokesman, ‘disarm them. If you do not accept our conditions, there will be a revolt, and then, we repeat, no French soldier will leave the town alive.’

General d’Anselme replied that the French Command wished to avoid bloodshed on leaving Odessa. But he was going to evacuate those who wished to leave. The workers could take over. But if they touched a single Allied soldier, the French warships, which had 500 guns, would reduce the town to ruin, beginning with the workmen’s quarter. He told the delegates to go and tell the workmen this, and then come back at once with an answer. As the delegates left, their leader cried out. ‘Mr General, you will be responsible before history!’

The French Command was now convinced that an insurrection was inevitable, and that there would be frightful butchery. Though the French kept this meeting secret, news soon spread through the town—and people began to panic. (Jean Xydias states that he obtained an account of this interview from d’Anselme’s ADC, who took it down in shorthand. But Xydias admits that he only quotes it in part. And it is obvious why. For the reply which d’Anselme is made to give to the workmen, given by Xydias in indirect speech, is strong and forceful. It is painfully clear that d’Anselme, in an overwrought state himself, and in a steadily weakening situation, was in no position to give a strong reply.)

The Municipal Council also decided to take over control of the town and its supplies. They formed a Militia, mainly from the criminals let out of prison, to ‘protect’ the inhabitants, and sent off a delegation to the Bolshevik Commander marching on Odessa, to ask for a cease-fire.

At midnight, the workers’ delegation came back and told d’Anselme that the Russian troops and bourgeoisie could leave, and that there would be no hostility shown to the Allied troops. The Odessa workmen themselves undertook to maintain order. Owing to the danger of roving criminals causing ‘des incidents regrettables’, which might provoke reprisals, d’Anselme himself gave the delegates signed passes. Thus, the French Command ended by recognising the Bolshevik Soviet in Odessa.

On April 4, d’Anselme had this statement, headed simply, ‘Evacuation Communiqué’, posted up in the streets and printed in the Odessa press:

‘By order of the Allied Governments, Odessa is going to be evacuated. I warn all the inhabitants of the town that the evacuation of all those who wish to leave Odessa must be carried out calmly and without bloodshed. I declare that up to the departure of the last soldier of the Allied contingents (French, Russian, Greek, Roumanian, Polish), authority in the town rests in my hands, and any infraction of good order will be put down by arms. If serious trouble arises, the warships will be ordered to bombard the town.’

It was also stated that the French Command had been informed by wireless on April 2 that the National Assembly had overthrown Clemenceau, who had been
replaced by Viviani (the French Prime Minister in 1914–15), whose first order via General Franchet d’Esperey was for the evacuation of all French forces in Russia.

This caused pandemonium. There was a frantic rush on the banks, many of which had no further money and were closed, since the State Bank did not provide further funds after the evening of the 3rd. Few could thus obtain any money. But the French charged 180 francs per head for the passage to Constantinople, and even made the owners pay to go on board their own ships, which the French had seized. They also insisted that no one could leave without a visa. But as no plan had been made until the evacuation was actually under way, there was chaos; and both the French Passport Bureau and Andro’s office in the Hotel de Londres were ‘exceedingly corrupt’ and ‘large sums’ were demanded for visas. The exchange rate rocketed. Money was being changed at every street corner. Then the speculators moved to the port itself, as an immense crowd, to the sound of the booming of the guns, surged down to the ships.

In the harbour, French warships were at action stations. As the Bolshevik Soviet had proclaimed a general strike, French sailors had to be sent, unwilling though they were, to replace the dockers, ships’ crews and railway workers. The crowd grew in volume. In the fever of departure, and in sight of the ships, people paid any rate for foreign currency; and it was soon 100 per cent higher than in the town. The dealers and speculators went backwards and forwards between the town and the harbour, making fortunes.

As the refugees crowded round the gangways, the British cruiser Caradoc and the sloop Skirmisher entered the port. But though accommodation had been reserved for the British party on the Imperator Nikolai, pending the arrival of a British ship, Captain Kerr of the Caradoc found that French sentries on the wharf were stopping them from embarking. He sent an officer down, but they would not listen to him. When the Captain of the Skirmisher went down, the French sentries stopped him with fixed bayonets. Nearby on the jetty, Greek troops were destroying lines of brand new cars, smashing them with hatchets, and then tipping them into the water.

Only when the ships were crammed full of passengers and baggage was it discovered that, before abandoning their vessels, the crews had damaged some of the engines. Then it was rumoured that they had put bombs in the holds. The passengers panicked. Some of the ships had to be towed out. But the evacuation could not be slowed down. Though the Bolshevik Soviet had agreed not to hinder it, their attitude might quickly change.

At 5 pm, the Captain of the Skirmisher went with Bagge to see d’Anselme about the evacuation of the Volunteer Army. D’Anselme stated sharply that the Volunteer Army could not be brought through the town, and was to be embarked elsewhere. But Freidenburg then burst in ‘and airily dismissed the subject by saying that there was no Volunteer Army’.

On April 5, Captain Kerr asked d’Anselme if British transports could help evacuate the Volunteer Army. General d’Anselme replied that they had already gone overland to the Dniester. But when Captain Kerr offered to send ships to
the Dniester mouth, d’Anselme refused; it was too shallow, and they could be brought out by small craft. He asked if the British transports could take off the Russian and Greek troops, who had been cooperating with the French. Captain Kerr agreed. General d’Anselme undertook to have them assembled on the wharf in the morning.

Down at the harbour, there was by now an immense host of refugees; they included the former Shah of Persia and his suite, who had a pass for a French ship; they were only allowed on board after the vigorous intervention of a British officer. Bagge and Cooke bundled the last of the 123 British people on board (83 had decided to remain in the town), and went up the gangplank behind them. General d’Anselme, now in a panic, agreed that full power should pass to the Bolshevik Soviet at 12 midnight, provided the evacuation remained unmolested. By now, shops, banks and offices were closed. That evening, Odessa was effectively in the hands of the Bolshevik Soviet, and the Red Flag was flying.

From the Skirmisher, Bagge and Cooke watched the French soldiers, ‘many of them drunk, evacuating stores and material…[which] they looted…with the approval of their officers’. They also saw the unfortunate Russian Governor of Kherson and his party, who had been dumped on a Russian ship, with no crew, no water, no light, nothing but two French guards ‘who were drunk and spent the day in firing at bottles in the water’. Towards evening, the little Russian party bribed a French motor launch to take them off to another ship; but only half the party got off—the French crew was too drunk to go back for the rest.44

That night, Jerram, the British Commercial Attaché, was sent back into the port on a British destroyer to try to contact the remainder of the Volunteer Army units. But he had no success. And when Captain Kerr returned in the morning to embark the other Russian and Greek troops, he found that the French themselves had left during the night. There was no one there, save for a few French soldiers on guard. He tried to contact d’Anselme, but he also had gone; and it was obvious that he had done nothing. A few Russian refugees were still coming down to the quay. But the French sentries were stopping them from embarking. Captain Kerr sent an officer to remonstrate with a French officer; but all he did was to send down a French sergeant and twelve men, who also stopped the refugees. Jerram, who was also on the quay, spoke to the Bolshevik Commissar in charge of the port, who was giving out visas for the refugees to board the British ships; all Russians to whom he gave visas could pass freely, he said, and he sent a guard to protect Jerram, which stayed with him all day. But the Commissar added that he ‘did not entertain at all favourably the entry into the town of Gregoriev and of his troops, since there were “too many officers” with him’.

That afternoon, the fog which hung over the city ‘suddenly lifted’, reported a Times correspondent* on board the Italian warship Roma in the harbour, ‘and the sunlight sparkled on the mist-wet domes and minarets of Russia’s ancient faiths, against which floated here and there the red flag of her new religion’. Flares went up along the coast; and the Bolshevik Soviet warned that they could no longer guarantee to keep order as Gregoriev and his troops were now just outside the
city. Just before the last British transport left, Captain Kerr took a last look around to make sure that no one had been left behind, and saw two drunken Senegalese soldiers on the quayside grab hold of a pair of young Russian girls, and push them screaming into a shed. He turned them all out, and put the girls on board. As he went up the gang plank behind them, one of the Senegalese ran up alongside waving his rifle, and then fired at Captain Kerr. However, he was too drunk to aim steadily and so he missed.44

Crowds of people watched the last Allied ships pull out of the harbour. As Gregoriev’s troops entered Odessa, many fled towards the Dniester in the wake of the French and Russian troops. But few escaped. Allied warships stood off the coast for some days to try and pick up the fugitives; and there were ‘shots and cries…from the shore from time to time’. But that was all.

The treatment meted out to the fortunate Russians who did find a berth on the French ships going to Constantinople was ‘almost inhuman’, reported Bagge. ‘The filth on board was indescribable and nothing could be obtained except by payment. A glass of water, for instance, cost 5 roubles. The men had to wash by drawing up buckets from the sea, whilst the women had to pay 25 roubles each to go into a cabin where they could wash.’ French officers would listen to no complaints. In fact, Bagge reported, ‘the French went out of their way to ill-treat and insult them, and the ill-feeling which had been growing during the French occupation of Odessa has now become one of intense hatred. All feeling of shame that patriotic Russians had felt because their country had gone out of the war, has now passed away as regards the French.’44

On April 9, Admiral Calthorpe reported that Bagge and Cooke had arrived at Constantinople; and Bagge requested that Jaroszynski should at once be given permission to come to England.

All news of this appalling debacle was for some time rigorously suppressed. On April 10, The Times merely printed a very brief Reuter report, sent from Paris on the 8th, which appeared a long way down the page, and simply stated: ‘The evacuation of Odessa by the Allies is confirmed.’ But after a careful post-mortem, Clemenceau instructed Franchet d’Esperey to ‘deal severely with the officers responsible’.

Nothing much, of course, was done. It would have been impossible to court-martial General d’Anselme and Colonel Freidenburg without court-martialling Berthelot and Franchet d’Esperey as well. The exhausted d’Anselme was simply sent home on leave. Several weeks later, he took command of an infantry division in Germany. Freidenburg’s personal file is missing from the French military records, so the Service Historique de l’Armée at Vincennes informs me; but in 1938, it is known that he was a Major-General, in command of all colonial troops in metropolitan France.

* Printed in The Times on May 5.
General Briggs describes how news of the Odessa debacle broke at Denikin’s headquarters: ‘Early in April’, he reported, ‘I found my office one morning besieged by hundreds of people, women and Generals, etc, [sic] clamouring for news of what was happening in the Ukraine as news had reached Ekaterinodar that the French had turned Bolsheviks, were handing over all Russian arms, equipment, supplies etc. to the Bolsheviks, clearing away from the country and leaving their friends, wives, and relations to be massacred. As I had heard no news of any idea of a French evacuation from Russia, I was totally unable to enlighten them.’

Next day, a ship loaded with refugees reached Novorossisk, and told ‘appalling tales’ of French treatment: how they had been given 24 hours’ notice to leave Odessa, had to pay ‘huge sums’ for a passage on their own ships which the French had seized, and how those without money were left on the quayside. Briggs was besieged by anxious relatives. Was it true that the French were all Bolsheviks? Would they kill their friends and relations? Would England send ships to take them off, or simply allow ‘such barbarities’ to continue? Denikin sent for Briggs and asked for an explanation. Would the French in the Crimea behave as they had done in the Ukraine? Did Briggs realise that the Bolsheviks could now turn their full attention to him? And would Briggs kindly send a British ship to take off the Dowager Queen Empress from the Crimea. ‘A very anxious time for poor General Denikin’, reported Briggs. ‘At the end of the conversation, he finished with his usual smile and said, “General Briggs, never mind, I have had worse days, and believe me, if the worst comes to the worst, I and my followers will fight to the bitter end”.’ Briggs begged the War Office not to exasperate Denikin any further at the moment.

His most powerful comment was quite simple. ‘French Mission now wearing plain clothes.’

Thus March had produced a showdown on Russian policy quite different from what Churchill had expected. It had seen procrastination and evasion degenerate into a pathetic debacle at Odessa, which was a ‘colossal blunder’, reported Consul Cooke to Curzon. ‘The French name indeed stank’, and the ‘trail of the scent was pursued even to the evacuation itself, which prominent Russian refugees here [i.e. at Constantinople] ascribe to motives not usually associated with a gallant and chivalrous race. It is characteristic, indeed, if nothing more that painful rumours of the kind were current in Odessa even before the evacuation order, the Judas and the price, no mere Scriptural mite, being named…Allied prestige has suffered deplorably in consequence and it is difficult to see how it can be restored.’

‘The French have certainly let us down horribly over all this’, minuted Gregory. ‘The result of it all is that all the Allies, including ourselves, are cordially detested by all classes of Russians, Bolshevikist and non-Bolshevist alike.’

‘This throws interesting light on the situation’, wrote Sir Ronald Graham; and he went on to comment on an attached report on the Caucasus. ‘An unfavourable account is given of the Georgian Govt.’
1 Colonel John Neilson

2 Trotsky with a young Red Army soldier
3 Red Army soldiers behind the lines
Two RAF officers at Archangel
5 A British naval vessel at Lyavlya, on the upper Dvina
A British C.M.B. at Troitsa on the Dvina river
Russian peasants come alongside a British vessel at Troitsa to barter.
8 Russian soldiers of the Slavo-British Legion, with their British officers
9 A British officer at Archangel
10 The arrival of the British Relief Brigade at Archangel in May 1919, with British officers carrying the traditional bread and salt. Russian troops line the route.
11 British CMB crews at Troitsa, with the River Dvina already beginning to fall

12 HMS *Iron Duke* (Admiral Calthorpe's flagship), firing a 5-gun salvo with her 13.5 inch guns at Bolshevik positions at Vladilavoska, on the Sea of Azov
13 French tanks, together with French and Russian troops, at Odessa
14 The first British tanks to arrive in South Russia
15 General Denikin at Kharkov
The hard road to Tsaritsin; White troops manhandling supplies and shells along the railway line
17 General Denikin 'at a table'. The bottle beside him contains mineral water
18 Lloyd George as the pilot who weathers the storm. ‘The wind grew stronger.’ (A rare early Soviet cartoon of Lloyd George, who was considered, during the intervention period, to be the leader of the Western Alliance)
‘And a still more unfavourable one of the pitiable irresolution of the Allies’, added Lord Curzon.⁴⁶
The Odessa debacle, coupled with the volte-face which Churchill had forced the Prime Minister to make over reinforcements for North Russia, as a result of Lloyd George’s initial rash support of the French Under Secretary for War’s announcement in the French Chamber, had given Churchill just what he needed—not only full authority to send fresh troops to extricate the tired British troops from North Russia, but virtual carte blanche to prevent the evacuation of Archangel turning into a second Odessa.

Churchill first turned for support to The Times. On April 4 (as rumours of the evacuation of Odessa began to spread in London) the main Times headline stated: ‘Our Danger in N.Russia’, ‘Urgent Help Needed’. A second headline was more precise: ‘Archangel Danger’, ‘Tired and Isolated Forces’, ‘Reinforcements Wanted’. On the Archangel front, ‘the enemy continues his menacing preparations’, it was stated, ‘and all the signs are that he proposes to make an attempt to drive us into the sea’. On the River Dvina, it was underlined, ‘the thaw has already begun’. The main leader, headed ‘The Military Situation in Russia’, developed the interesting argument that as the vaguely menacing situation at Archangel was—apparently—a direct military threat to India, Britain should consider an immediate march on Petrograd and Moscow!

On the 5th, as the Odessa debacle became known to the selected few, The Times increased the pressure; and under the main headline; ‘Archangel Campaign—The Opening Attack’, it was claimed that the Bolsheviks had attacked on the Vologda railway front. Further attacks were expected, ‘and in a week or 10 days, when the Dvina is open for navigation, a river offensive by the Bolsheviks is also anticipated’.

But the accompanying report from the Times correspondent at Murmansk, dated the 3rd, was mild, even discursive. ‘Murmansk may be likened to the left luggage office of Noah’s Ark; every breed is found within its limits’, he wrote, ‘including Chinese, whose compatriots on the Bolshevik side act as executioners for Lenin.’ But Maynard was well served by ‘lynx-eyed’ agents, who warned him of Bolshevik trouble. People at home need not be too worried about the
British troops at Murmansk, for ‘there is no greater discomfort here than at Farnborough—good food, entertainments and sport, with a spice of adventure in the form of a brush with the Bolsheviks’. (Such an attitude was not untypical. The Bolshevik was in fact a figure both of horror and of fun, not to be taken too seriously; which of course concealed the deeper conviction that he was really too dangerous to be taken seriously.)

That day, Churchill sent Ironside a rather curious message. Though cut off by the ice, it informed the British troops, they were not forgotten; and ‘whatever may be the plan of action towards Russia decided upon by the League of Nations’, the War Office would relieve them by fresh troops as soon as the ice allowed. But until then, they would have to go on facing ‘this ferocious enemy’ on their own, and their lives would thus ‘depend absolutely’ upon their good discipline, which should be an example to the troops ‘of every other country’. Churchill trusted that they would make an ‘honourable return’. Ironside, who commanded an Allied force, promptly suppressed this ‘unfortunate telegram’.1

The Times kept up the pressure. On the 7th, under the main headline: ‘Archangel Danger—The Question of Reinforcements’, it was confirmed that the War Office were sending a Relief Force to Archangel. A second headline ran: ‘North Russian Campaign’ ‘British Relief Force’ ‘Will it Arrive in Time?’ The Bolsheviks, it was stated, had again attacked on the Archangel front. But though half the Relief Force would sail in early May, and the remainder a fortnight later, the ‘critical time is between the breaking of the ice on the Dvina, from April 12 to April 16, when the Bolsheviks’ heavily armed monitors will be free to advance against the Allied forces, and the beginning of May, when Archangel will be approachable from the sea’. The Times added, ‘What the public will be concerned to know is whether the reinforcements will be present to help the Archangel Army during this critical period, and, if not, why they have been delayed.’

But The Times had more alarming news that day. ‘Bavaria follows Hungary’, ‘Soviet Republic’. This caused much general alarm. Churchill wired anxiously to Lloyd George that all his military advisers, ‘without exception’, agreed that Germany was ‘approaching catastrophe’ through lack of food, raw materials and settled conditions, i.e. through delay in the Peace Treaty. He especially recommended General Haking’s report to the Prime Minister.2

‘Fully alive to situation in Germany’, replied Lloyd George. He had not seen Haking’s report, but had read others. Had Churchill any further suggestions for improving matters in Germany? ‘Who issued extraordinary communiqué to Press about Archangel?’ he added sharply. ‘Seemed to me direct incentive to Bolsheviks to attack and thus added to peril in which our troops are placed.’

Churchill seemed to sense that this might mean that Lloyd George was going to go back on his undertaking over Archangel. ‘Winston says he will seriously consider resignation before submitting to ignominious withdrawal from Russia’, noted H.A.L. Fisher after a private talk with Churchill that day.3

But The Times had printed some flagrant untruths about the Archangel position. The port of Archangel opened not in early May, but late May; and the
Relief Force’s despatch (part in early May, part a fortnight later) had been arranged accordingly. Ironside, writing in late March, confirms that they were then ‘within a month of the thaw, and it would be another month from that before the port would be open for ships’. In fact, at this time, there was little activity on the Archangel front at all.

But The Times was not solely, perhaps not even partly, to blame for these untruths. The previous day (the 6th), the Assistant DMO, with full knowledge of the Bolshevik outbreak in Bavaria, had given the press a lecture about North Russia, with the intention of creating an atmosphere favourable to the despatch of the Relief Force. What he said was ‘very sensible’, Churchill later claimed, and had it appeared textually, would have done no harm. However, in view of the Times headlines of the last few days, and the recent arrival in England of Sir Ernest Shackleton, the Arctic explorer (who had been attached to Maynard’s staff at Murmansk), who was ‘somewhat alarmist’, the press jumped to conclusions far in advance of anything justified by the Assistant DMO’s words, and gave an unduly pessimistic impression. ‘However, it was a good thing that people should be woken up’, claimed Churchill. So The Times can perhaps be exonerated for claiming that Archangel was open to ships in early May, and the other alarmist statements.

In Paris, meanwhile, the Bolshevik peace offer given to Bullitt in Moscow was due to expire on April 10. On the 5th (with just five days still to go), Bullitt caught his colleague and rival Auchincloss just as the latter was taking his draft reply to Nansen’s letter (urging the despatch of relief supplies to Bolshevik Russia) to the sick President; and Bullitt managed to persuade Colonel House that the Bolshevik Government would never accept it. House therefore asked Bullitt to revise the Auchincloss draft; which, after Bullitt’s alterations, now stated that, provided there was a prior ceasefire, the distribution of Allied supplies within Russia could be handled by the ‘existing authorities’, assisted by the Relief Commission. ‘Subject to such supervision’, it was underlined, ‘the problem of distribution should be solely under the control of the people of Russia themselves.’ This, of course, meant that the supplies would now be handed over to the Bolsheviks. The President accepted the draft.

For two crucial days, the peace proposals hung fire—and nothing was done to get Arthur Ransome over to Paris, as first William Buckler, and then both Bullitt and Steffens had urged, so as to go carefully into the present position as the Bolsheviks saw it. The letter from the liberal MP, F.D.Acland, to Lloyd George, also urging this, is simply marked in pencil at the top: ‘7/4/19. Hold over for the present’ No answer was made.

Then John Pollock, the Times correspondent in Helsinki, wired angrily to his cousin, Sir Ernest Pollock, the Solicitor General. ‘Informed Arthur Ransome… arrived London. Ransome openly recognised Bolshevik agent… Ransome written
pamphlet with preface by Radek to persuade British public of the truth Bolshevism…Ransome’s character should be known London. Undoubtedly capable dangerous agent’.  

(It seems that this wire did reach the Solicitor General. Whether he passed on its contents to the British Delegation in Paris is not known. But the British censor also saw a copy, and at once passed it to the War Office, who passed it to the Foreign Office, who later replied that Ransome was not a Bolshevik agent, but a paid British SIS agent in both Russia and Scandinavia; he had, however, on return to England, written a book called Six Weeks in Russia, which was markedly pro-Bolshevik. As John Pollock was also an important SIS agent, it is difficult to know who or what inspired this wire. It may simply have been due to personal animosity, since Ransome apparently had an irritating manner.)

But whatever the real reason, Ransome was not summoned to Paris.

London

At Question Time on the afternoon of April 7, Colonel Wedgwood asked if Bullitt’s report had been made available to the British Government; and if so, whether Parliament could see a copy. Mr Harmsworth replied curtly in the negative; but would ‘make enquiries’ about obtaining a copy.

Colonel Wedgwood then asked Bonar Law whether the British Government were sending more British troops to Russia; ‘and, if so, whether they are doing so without first trying to come to an accommodation with the Russian Government?’

Mr Bonar Law: ‘I can add nothing to what has already been said on this subject’

Colonel Wedgwood: ‘I beg to give notice that, at the end of Questions, I shall move the Adjournment of the House.’ This he duly did, on the ‘critical situation’ of British troops in Russia, ‘and the urgent importance of either relieving them or of entering into negotiations with the Russian Government’

Hon. Members: ‘Which Government?’

There then ensued a procedural wrangle, as the Speaker claimed that this point was covered both by a Motion put down by Hoare, and by another by Wedgwood himself. Wedgwood claimed that his present Motion was different; unless the critical situation in North Russia was discussed at once, ‘we may be committed either to a disaster…similar to the disaster at Kut, or to an indefinite expedition’.

Mr Speaker: ‘Maius in se, minus continet’ If both Wedgwood and Hoare withdrew their Motions, Wedgwood’s new Motion could be put.

Sir S. Hoare: agreed.
Col Wedgwood: ‘I beg to give notice that I will move the Adjournment of the House tomorrow.’

Lieut-Col. C. Lowther: ‘Is it not a fact that our troops are being relieved and that the expeditionary relief force is starting on Wednesday?’

Mr Speaker: ‘I have not the faintest idea.’

Mr Pemberton Billing: ‘Might it not be possible for the Leader of the House to make a statement to relieve the anxiety of people in this country and obviate the necessity for a Debate?’

Mr Bonar Law: ‘There is no statement which I can make today of any kind which would be of any value to the House.’

But Bonar Law was so concerned about how to answer further questions on Bullitt’s mission and the Archangel situation, that he flew straight to Paris to consult Lloyd George.

On April 9 (as The Times announced that the Relief Force advance guard was sailing that day for North Russia), Captain F.E. Guest (Lloyd George’s chief whip) sent the Prime Minister some notes on Parliamentary business during the last ten days. ‘There is a very real anxiety and desire to hear the “Allied Russian Policy”,’ he wrote. ‘I think you should announce this—if possible—before the House rises on Tuesday or Wednesday next (i.e. April 15th or 16th). Wedgwood’s motion is postponed until then.’

But that afternoon (the day before the Bolshevik peace offer to Bullitt expired), Wedgwood’s opponents forestalled him.

Mr A. Clement Edwards (leader of the National Democratic Party) asked if ‘certain American financiers’ had delivered Bolshevik peace terms to the Peace Conference, which had ‘favourably impressed’ certain delegates in Paris, but caused ‘profound consternation’ in England; and if the Prime Minister could give an assurance that the British delegates would ‘under no circumstances extend any recognition to the Bolshevik regime in Russia’.

Mr C. Harmsworth: ‘I regret that I can add nothing to my replies on this subject… and to the statement made by the Leader of the House in the course of Debate on the 2nd of April.’

Mr Clement Edwards: ‘In view of the unsatisfactory character of the reply, I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House.’ Leave was obtained. Though Bonar Law had denied the reports from Paris, he stated, it was now ‘perfectly clear’ that his statement was wrong. Under these peace terms, all the White Russians, who had the ‘actual or the implied guarantee’ of the Allies, would be handed over ‘body and soul’ to the Bolsheviks, since the terms entailed recognition of the whole* Russian people as Bolshevik subjects. If the British delegates in Paris agreed to this, Parliament would repudiate it. He referred to the ‘wicked
cruelty’ of the Bolsheviks, as detailed in the recent White Paper. ‘Take the report from Odessa—a report by the British chaplain…Here is a case where there was an actual undertaking given by the emissaries of Lenin.’

(Before entering Odessa, the Bolsheviks allegedly agreed to spare all lives. But they took all the ‘true loyalist’ Russian officers down to a warship in the harbour, stripped them of their clothes, and burnt some alive by binding them to planks which were slowly pushed into the ship’s furnaces; others had steam jets from the boilers turned on to their naked bodies, were scalded all over, then exposed to bitter frost, finally thrown overboard with stones tied to their feet. One of the families sent a diver down to try and recover the body. ‘The diver returned horror stricken.’ All these 400 officers were standing upright on the harbour bottom ‘like a battalion of men, just swaying backwards and forwards.’ This is partly confirmed from other sources.)

Clement Edwards then quoted another report from a document that, he underlined, was published by the British Government. ‘It is not a question of any stories which might be discredited outside.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘Is not that anonymous?’

Mr Edwards: ‘The Government vouch for it’

Col Wedgwood: ‘Anonymous tittle tattle!’

Hon. Members: ‘Shame!’

*Clement Edwards* insisted that the British Government had thus given ‘definite official acceptance’ of the ‘pestilential evil’ of Bolshevism. He then cited an even more lurid horror story. (Bolshevik troops, on entering a town, allegedly went into the high school. ‘Six or seven days afterwards, loyalist Russians went in, and when they went into the schoolroom they found on first appearance that the boys and girls there were sitting at their desks in the ordinary way, but, on closer examination, it was found that the hands and feet of those children were nailed to the desks and to the floor respectively, and there they had died of starvation.’ This story is not, so far as I can discover, confirmed from any other source.)

Though it was practically impossible to make a proper peace without Russia, Clement Edwards went on, it would be better to delay matters than recognise the Bolshevik regime. If Bolshevism in Russia was recognised, ‘what are you going to say if it lifts its ugly head in this country?’

An Hon. Member: ‘It is doing it now!’

Mr Clement Edwards: ‘I agree it is doing it…Think of it—anarchy, Bolshevism frankly and unblushingly admitted will be the creation and the triumph of German diplomacy.’ Through the vast

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* This was quite incorrect, perhaps deliberately so. It entailed the recognition of separate Russian states.
numbers of ‘Chinese cut throats’ in the Red Army, Germany would eventually control China as well. ‘This disease in Russia must be stamped out at all costs.’ But as British policy up to now had proved so futile, the British delegates might adopt this policy of ‘despair’. Reliable White Russians and the ‘solid heavyweight Britisher’ back from Russia all thought that Bolshevism should not be recognised, and could be crushed. If Britain guaranteed to supply Petrograd and Moscow, the White Russians could take Petrograd, the centre of the Bolshevik movement. ‘In other words, that we might save our people for certain who are threatened at Archangel.’

Mr Deputy Speaker: ‘The question of Archangel is quite outside the Motion.’

Brigadier-General H.P. Croft (National Democratic Party) stressed simply that Bolshevism was evil, that it had reduced the Russian workers to ‘mere chattels’, and that the only way to stop Russia and Germany from uniting was to have ‘no truck’ with evil, ‘and to discriminate between right and wrong’. A strong message from the House of Commons would strengthen the Prime Minister’s hands.

Colonel Wedgwood compared the last two speakers to those in 1795 who had urged the House to declare war on France to put down atrocities there; General Croft, in fact, was standing tonight in Edmund Burke’s shoes. But fortunately the Prime Minister had a ‘good deal more common sense than the armchair warriors opposite’.

Lieut-Col Guinness did not believe the rumours about Bolshevik peace terms, in view of the Prime Minister’s ‘specific pledges’ not to negotiate with the Bolsheviks. But the present debate would enable him to see that the House felt even more strongly than before that we must have ‘no truck’ with Bolshevik Russia. There was no reason for us to force Bolshevism on Russia, since the countless peasant insurrections showed that she did not want it. ‘Burning Bolshevism out is a slow policy, it is a cruel policy, but in the end I believe it will be an effective policy…It is Bolshevism alone which has made Russia hungry, and it is this hunger in Russia, a natural economic force, which is now reacting and threatening Bolshevism at its roots.’ Owing to starvation, the Bolsheviks were at their ‘wits’ end’, and were thus offering ‘all kinds of commercial advantages’ to America in return for food. There was no objection to feeding Russia, provided Allied troops distributed the food; otherwise, ‘you will simply fatten up the Bolsheviks and the Chinese executioners’. Even though the White Russians in Paris had agreed to a Constituent Assembly, Wedgwood was still calling the anti-Bolshevik governments monarchist. How then could Britain bolster up the ‘absolutely unconstitutional’ Bolshevik Government? Britain must remember that her Russian Allies were living in an ‘absolute inferno, an inferno of slavery, torment, and starvation. It is for us to knock down the gates. It is certainly not for us to succour or to feed or in any way to help the devils who hold the keys.’
Mr J.H. Thomas (labour) regretted that there was no responsible Labour leader who could make it clear that even the German Government was better than the Bolshevik Government. He trusted that nothing would happen in Paris to weaken Anglo-American friendship. The House had continued confidence in the British Delegates in Paris. ‘Surely we are entitled to say that they in Paris must be the best judges of the world’s situation?’ He thus hoped that ‘instead of implying motives to the representatives of this country, without any foundation of evidence—’

Mr Clement Edwards: ‘On a point of Order. May I submit that there is no hon. Member in this House who has hurled charges at, or who doubts the sincerity of, our representatives in Paris.’

There followed some noisy exchanges in which Clement Edwards managed to imply that the Prime Minister had sent him some personal SOS for support, to which Thomas retorted that the Prime Minister must be weakening.

Sir S. Hoare (conservative) emphasised that the House must express its views, as they were ‘kept very much in the dark’ about events in Paris. He trusted that the Home Secretary could give them some details of the Bullitt mission, of which the Prime Minister had denied knowledge a week ago. Had the Bolshevik peace proposals been circulated to the Peace Conference? It would be the ‘height of folly’ to negotiate with Lenin now, as Kolchak was advancing, and the Bolsheviks were a declining power.

Mr E. Shortt (the Home Secretary) thought the House was quite entitled to discuss the matter. There was no reason to doubt that two American delegates had returned from Russia, but no ‘actual definite proposals’ were before the British Delegation. ‘Of course, when you only heard of the matter a few hours ago, you cannot get the definite information and knowledge that is required to make a definite statement.’ But, he added, ‘I do not believe for a moment, from the information I have, that there is really any Lenin negotiation or suggestion brought to Paris at all. I believe the whole story is of German manufacture.’

Mr Clement Edwards: ‘Does the right hon. Gentleman mean to imply that the statements that two American citizens have come from Russia after interviewing Lenin, and have given an interview to certain delegates to the Peace Conference, are not true, and are of German manufacture?’

Mr Shortt: ‘I do not mean to suggest anything of the sort. I never said anything of the sort.’ But it was a very difficult question to answer without ‘definite knowledge’, and it would be ‘very dangerous for me to repeat something said over the telephone* between Paris and London, which might not be quite accurate’. He would convey the ‘unanimous’ feeling of the House on this matter to the Prime Minister, who was not weakening, and had not sent out any SOS, and who would
himself give them ‘more definite’ information before the Adjournment.  

Mr Jack Jones (labour), with admitted ignorance but astonishing foresight, ended the debate in uproar. ‘What is the proposition before the House? It is purely a negative that the Government must not do certain things…If you are going to interfere in the internal affairs of another country—’

Hon.Members: ‘No, no!’ and ‘Yes!’
Mr Jones: ‘—I venture to suggest gentlemen—’
Hon.Members: ‘Order.’
Mr Jones: ‘—hon. Members at least, that when we are dealing with Russia we are not dealing with Ireland, and the same arguments that apply to the reign of Lenin and Trotsky by the rule of the bullet and the bayonet, also apply in other connections…Lenin and Trotsky—we know them…All I know about Russia is that it is a place I do not want to go to…We have heard nothing from our friends upon the other side which gives us any reason to hope that they have any ideas about Russia, except that they are very anxious to get into it and do not know the way to get out of it…You have sent plenipotentiaries to Paris and now you want to tie their hands behind their backs.’

Hon.Members: ‘No, no!’
Mr Jones: ‘But you may be compelled by necessity within a fortnight’s time to accept the very things which tonight you say you will not’

Hon.Members: ‘No, no!’ and ‘Never’.
Mr Jones: ‘Not again my dear friends.’
Hon. Members: ‘Tulpit’ and ‘Order’.

Mr Jones urged the Government supporters to propose a resolution that they would negotiate with the Russian Constituent Assembly, when restored. ‘Why do you not declare a policy?’ The best way to defeat Bolshevism was to feed Eastern & Central Europe. But members who cried out for their pound of flesh, ‘like so many Shylocks’, would not get peace in Europe, but simply make Bolshevism spread. The longer a just peace was delayed, the more sneers there were at America, and the ‘hell’s broth of the future’ was being prepared. ‘We shall have America becoming a great military power, and we shall have Eastern Europe allying itself with the Bolsheviks.’ He would rather let the Russians manage their own affairs than support a Tsarist restoration. Admiral Kolchak had

* Presumably William Sutherland, or someone else in the Prime Minister’s entourage, had simply shouted down the telephone to the agitated Home Secretary, ‘Tell them it’s just a Boche story’, or something like that.
‘declared publicly that he was in favour of the restoration of monarchical government in Russia’.

Hon. Members: ‘No!’

Mr Jones: ‘Hon. Members may not agree with me, and my knowledge of Russia may not be as extensive as theirs, but I am glad to say that my ignorance is as profound, at least. What they know would fill a book, but what they do not know would fill a library.’

Just after midnight, Harmsworth wired the Prime Minister that the debate had disclosed ‘very strong’ feeling against negotiations with the Bolsheviks, but ‘some uncertainty’ on the Labour benches. Clement Edwards, however, had obtained the signatures of 200 members to this statement: ‘We, the undersigned, learn with grave concern that there is a proposal before the Peace Conference to recognise Bolshevik Government of Moscow involving also recognition of all Russians as subjects of that Government and urge British plenipotentiaries to decline to agree to any such recognition (ends)’.

On April 10, as The Times headlined ‘[Peace] Conference Setbacks—Lenin’s Influence in Hungary—Odessa Evacuated—Waiting Attack at Archangel’, Churchill wrote in sharp terms to Lloyd George. ‘I am sending you Haking’s memo & a few other papers of interest. No communiqué was issued about Archangel, but newspapers took an alarmist view of the forthright lecture to the Press given by the Assistant DMO reinforced by Sir Ernest Shackleton’s independent statements. Bolsheviks of course are accurately informed about situation in North Russia as our forces are living among Russian population partly Bolshevik. Therefore I do not consider any harm has been done & indeed it was high time the public woke up to the dangers wh wd follow the neglect of our forces in N.Russia & gave the Government the necessary support.’

‘Declarations like Abrami’s indicating that not a single man more wd be sent to their aid are very bad’, he reminded Lloyd George pointedly. ‘General Staff are satisfied with the measures we are taking to relieve the force & so long as they are carried out, I do not think you need feel unduly anxious’, he added with some sarcasm.

‘Secondly, the debate last night showed a practical unanimity against any negotiations with the Bolsheviks, or any recognition of Lenin and Trotsky. Your own Labour group [i.e. the National Democratic Party] has the most Anti-Bolshevik element. I do trust President Wilson will not be allowed to weaken our policy against them in any way. His negotiations have become widely known and are much resented’.

But the Bolshevik peace offer had that day expired.
London and North Russia

At Archangel, everyone was waiting for news. On April 9, the American Consul Poole had wired the State Department for their views. Did they support the Archangel Government? Would the American railway troops remain after the American infantry left? ‘Would you object to the railway troops being used while they are here to prepare an anti-Bolshevik offensive by the Allies or Russians?’ There was no reply. Churchill was very cautious. There was to be no exchange of prisoners, he instructed Ironside on the 10th, that could possibly be ‘construed’ as recognition of the Bolshevik Government.12

On the 11th, Churchill made a major speech, strongly attacking Bolshevism, and emphasising Bolshevik tyranny, Bolshevik atrocities, and the Bolsheviks’ treacherous desertion of the Allies in the last year of the war. He then openly advocated German help. ‘A way of atonement is open to Germany. By combating Bolshevism, by being the bulwark against it, Germany may take the first step toward ultimate reunion with the civilised world.’ This speech alarmed Lloyd George. ‘In certain moods he [Churchill] is dangerous’, Lloyd George told Riddell that day. ‘He has Bolshevism on the brain. Now he wants to make a treaty with the Germans to fight the Bolsheviks. He wants to employ German troops, and he is mad for operations in Russia.’13

The same day (the 11th) Churchill wrote to Sir Henry Wilson. ‘I am very much in the dark about what is going on [in Paris], and cannot help feeling that things are getting worse and worse.’ By the time the Allies reached some paper agreement, the whole situation might have got out of hand—and even then they had to persuade the Germans. He had just made a speech of ‘some importance’ at the Aldwych Club, ‘in which I exposed some of those truths we have been looking at together’, about which the press seemed so unconcerned. He ended on a brighter note. ‘The volunteers are coming in well for Murmansk and Archangel. We had on the Horse Guards Parade today a scene which recalled the early days of the war, when a compact body of about 100 magnificent men marched from the recruiting office to the depot. The Adjutant General seems quite confident that he will get all he is asking for and more.’14

Next day, as The Times headlined ‘Sharp Archangel Fighting’, Churchill minuted to the DMI that he was considering seeing the press soon himself to explain the ‘actual position’ in North Russia, ‘what we are doing and what line they should take’.15 The time for press alarms was over. Now they could at least be told the truth.

Siberia

On the 11th, the DMO put a paper before Churchill urging the recognition of Kolchak. In early 1919, he wrote, the bad outlook on the Siberian and Orenburg fronts had gravely threatened the Omsk Government. But the situation was now much improved; the results achieved in the March attack had amply justified the
confidence placed in Kolchak, and today the future looked bright. In the north, 
good progress continued towards Viatka, and small Siberian and Archangel patrols 
had already linked up. There had also been progress in the centre and south; and 
since the Orenburg-Tashkent railway was still cut, the Bolsheviks could not use 
the resources of Turkestan. On April 5, Sir Charles Eliot, the British High 
Commissioner in Siberia, had recommended that the Omsk Government should 
be recognised as the Provisional Government of Siberia. The DMO now 
supported Eliot’s proposal, since it would bring Ataman Semenov and his Cossack 
colleagues firmly over to Kolchak, and consolidate the military situation at 
Archangel, and thus help link the Siberian and Archangel troops, who could then 
stand on their own after the Allied withdrawal.¹⁶

Churchill, who was now anticipating a major counter-attack on intervention 
by Lloyd George on his return to London, was suitably impressed; but he did not 
think that this paper took sufficient account of the debacle at Odessa. He 
therefore instructed the General Staff to prepare forthwith a major paper, based 
on Ironside’s guarantee to link up with Kolchak, showing how British troops in, 
or proceeding to North Russia, could both further the DMO’s proposal for the 
recognition of Kolchak, and also prevent a similar debacle at Archangel.

But the DMO’s enthusiasm for Kolchak was based on the absence of bad news 
more than anything else; reports from the Siberian front were much delayed. (A 
Times report from Omsk, dated the 8th, and still en route, claimed that there had 
been a Bolshevik rising all along the Siberian railway, but that it had been put 
down. ‘The Bolshevik organisations were captured at Tomsk and Tiumen, tried 
by a drumhead court-martial, and shot. The execution was carried out by young 
troops publicly amid cries of: “That’s the way to do it. Serve them right!” wired 
the Times correspondent),

The American Ambassador Morris at Tokyo was far less sanguine about 
Kolchak. He had conferred with Consul Harris from Omsk, he wired on the 
12th, and could recommend neither defacto recognition nor even a loan to 
Kolchak. ‘I still entertain serious doubts as to the permanency of the Kolchak 
regime’, he stated. Instead, he urged an Allied loan to help run the Siberian 
railway. But the strict neutrality of General Graves (the American Commander in 
Siberia) made its proper operation—of vital importance to Kolchak’s success— 
quite impossible; for later that month, he issued a general proclamation that 
American troops would simply guard certain stretches of the railway, which 
would be open to all—and the Bolsheviks soon claimed that this also applied to 
them.¹⁷

It then transpired that the British High Commissioner, Sir Charles Eliot, was 
not really much in favour of Kolchak, and inclined to the view of the American 
Ambassador. Writing to Lord Curzon from aboard ship off Shanghai on April 10 
(he was proceeding on short leave to Hong Kong), he confirmed that he had 
wired just before leaving Vladivostok that the moment might be opportune for the 
recognition of Kolchak, ‘hoping that the telegram might arrive about the time 
when the people at Paris were discussing Russian affairs. As you know, I have
never been a great admirer of Kolchak. His deficiencies as a statesman seem to me glaring and his military genius has yet to be proved. But it now seems to be clear that he has no competition in Siberia, and even in European Russia the personalities are not remarkable. Also there seems to be no organised party against him. In January, I thought he might be overthrown either by a coalition of Social Revolutionaries and Bolsheviks, or more probably by reactionaries fearing such a coalition. Such dangers have not assumed a definite shape, but there is a good deal of discontent & disorder with which a reorganised Government could deal more effectively than the present irregular administration. The talk of Americans in Siberia and the telegrams repeated from Washington both make me think that the US are not averse to recognising a Governament in Siberia. They continually say or imply that it is not just to suppress irregular opposition to irregular authority, but that it would be right to stop opposition to any defacto Government which should try to preserve order without committing atrocities.  

‘I seem to have noticed in the last few weeks a distinct growth of feeling among Americans and others in favour of intervention, especially in financial matters. The situation is chaotic beyond description, and there is no Russian of even moderate financial capacity in any official position. Now that the Powers have taken charge of the Railway, they will be brought face to face with difficulties of currency which will probably force them to establish some form of advisory control or supervision.’

The time limit for Allied control of the Siberian railway seemed curious, for it was to be managed as long as foreign troops continued to occupy Siberia. But most of the Allies were withdrawing their troops, and it would probably take a year to put the railway in working order, and certainly a year to make it pay. ‘Hence it seems that if we are not to lose a great deal of money on the railway, we must continue our military occupation, which is in itself a great expense.’

Eliot went on to make some timely comments on the general situation in the Far East. ‘I must admit that the policy of the Powers towards Bolshevism does not find many admirers in Siberia, but I seem to read between the lines something that the statesmen of Europe hardly dare to say. Bolshevism is not democracy but the substitution of the working class for the old aristocracy. It deliberately disfranchises and penalises all persons of education and leisure, that is it wishes to destroy civilisation as we understand it. But if it comes to fighting, there is no one to fight the working man except the soldier, who belongs more or less to the same social class, and will the soldier do it? I expect that all politicians in England, France & U.S.A. have their doubts about that & the future looks to me black & ominous.

‘The Bolsheviks are believed to be making great efforts to spread their teachings in India & China. Do you think they will succeed? I have more hope on that point than about Europe. The population of both India & China are in the main peasants, not working men in the special sense of the word & the peasant in Russia is said to be against Bolshevism when once he knows what it means. Also they say the native races of Turkestan do not like the Bolsheviks, though
they have not sufficient vigour to resist them. But in China there is a large class of brigands & rowdies who would readily listen to any revolutionary propaganda.’

The large part played by Jews in Russian Bolshevism was remarkable, Eliot thought, ‘for the exaltation of manual labour cannot really be to their taste’. But their participation was undoubted, and he had had several talks with educated Jews, including English Jews, about it. They tried to minimise the Jewish share in Bolshevik atrocities, but all admitted that most Jews in Siberia would be on the Bolshevik side, if there was another revolution, ‘simply because under the present [Siberian] Government they suffer from as many disabilities as in the old imperial times’.  

In Moscow, Lenin wired Trotsky on the 10th that they were considering emergency measures to relieve the ‘extremely grave’ position created by Kolchak’s advance. Trotsky should remain on the Eastern Front. Trotsky agreed, but—for the benefit of his opponents on the Central Committee—complained strongly of ‘leftwing-Communist demagogic agitation’ in the Third Army against the Military Commissars and the ‘supposed introduction of saluting etc.’. He also wanted ‘resolute centralist’ Party workers to strengthen Simbirsk. That day, in view of Kolchak’s rout of the Fifth Army, Trotsky approved the division of the Eastern Front into two Army groups on either side of the Kama river. The northern group (the 2nd and 3rd Armies), which would have to prevent Kolchak linking up with Archangel, would be under Shorin, a former Tsarist Colonel; the southern group (the 1st, 4th, 5th and Turkestan Armies) under Frunze, an old Bolshevik. At Kazan on the Volga, Trotsky himself supervised preparations for the Bolshevik counter-attack against Kolchak. Speed and continuity of attack were vital, he warned Lenin; horses, carts and trucks must be sent to the Eastern Front from all over Russia. ‘Only on this condition will the attack be pressed right home’, he stated firmly.

**Paris**

Bonar Law, meanwhile, had become considerably perturbed both about the Archangel position and the Bolshevik peace offer. On April 8, he flew to Paris to see Lloyd George, who was still totally embroiled in the furore over the German Treaty, which was now reaching its climax.

The French, defeated on their proposal for a separate Rhineland state, had had to fall back on an Anglo-American military guarantee against future German aggression, which they insisted must be linked with a limited Allied occupation of the Rhine; and as they knew that both President Wilson and the Prime Minister were equally opposed to this, a violent French press campaign (which even Lloyd George thought an ‘outrage on international decencies’) was opened to wear down the already ailing President. The Prime Minister had muttered some mild platitudes about Anglo-French solidarity. But The Times joined in eagerly against him; it would need more than this, it warned on April 5, to ‘cancel the
impression of Mr Lloyd George’s Germanphil attitudes and of his pro-Bolshevik activities’.  

While President Wilson lay ill, Allied disunity over Germany worsened. From Washington, his secretary Tumulty strongly advised him to make a ‘bold stroke’ of a dramatic kind to clear the air; and the first thing the President did on his recovery on the 7th was to send for the American warship George Washington to take him home.  

That day (the 8th), Lloyd George’s secretary, J.T. Davies, sent both Nansen’s letter, and Bullitt’s second draft reply, which Colonel House had passed on to Lloyd George for his immediate comments, to Lord Robert Cecil, who stated that Britain was quite unable to provide finance or shipping. ‘I believe the same is true of all the Associated Governments, except America’, he wrote. (Cecil had here crossed out: ‘and I venture to hope that even with them it is very doubtful whether they would be wise in undertaking fresh serious responsibilities.’ The words, ‘except America’, were added in ink.) Nor, Cecil went on, was it worth sending food to Russia at all unless the Allies could somehow reorganise the Russian economy and political situation. Even if the Bolsheviks agreed to a prior cease-fire, how would it bind their opponents? But if provisional frontiers were laid down, something like the Nansen plan might be of use, if it was decided to apply economic pressure to obtain a general Russian cease-fire. Before Nansen’s proposal was agreed, the Allies had first to estimate the finance and shipping needed and available, and make it a condition that the Russian groups retire behind definite frontiers, which the Allies had to fix; they must also decide whether or not to make the cessation of propaganda a condition as well. Cecil, it seems, turned down Bullitt’s second draft.  

After dinner, Sir Henry Wilson strolled round to Lloyd George’s flat to hear what Bonar Law had to say. ‘Bonar was ultra pessimist’, he found. ‘Ireland was going into revolution, labour was once more hostile…Winston very difficult, the House of Commons hostile to Lloyd George, and so on.’ It was agreed that the Prime Minister should return to London to face his critics.  

On April 9, the Council of Four discussed the Nansen relief plan. To Clemenceau’s assertion that it would in fact give Lenin power to distribute the supplies within Russia, both President Wilson and Lloyd George retorted that distribution would be controlled by the Relief Commission. This was hardly true; and Clemenceau refused to sign Bullitt’s second draft reply to Nansen. Matters then again hung fire. But on the 14th (by which time the Bolshevik peace offer had expired), the Council of Four finally came to hurried agreement on the German Peace Treaty on the basis of Lloyd George’s paper of March 25. Clemenceau had a private talk with Colonel House; if he could induce the ailing President Wilson to approve temporary Allied occupation of the Rhine bridgeheads, Clemenceau would sign the American draft reply to Nansen, and would see, inter alia, that the French press called off their relentless attacks on the President. But as Lloyd George was about to leave Paris, speed was essential. House was successful; and when Lloyd George reluctantly agreed, the crisis over
the German Treaty finally ended. On the evening of the 14th, Lloyd George returned to London.23

London

On the evening of April 15, Churchill and the Prime Minister met in London. Some of the arguments which Churchill put forward, knowing that the Prime Minister was to make a major speech on Russian policy the next day, can be deduced from a long letter which Churchill had written to him on April 9, but never sent. On Russian policy, Churchill had written, he was proceeding in ‘strict accordance’ with his letter of March 8, of which Lloyd George had a copy, ‘in no way’ diverging from what Lloyd George had then approved. He had organised one brigade of the Relief Force for North Russia, and was calling for volunteers for a second, which might or might not have to go out. But all the talk about reinforcements, and the call for volunteers, would make clear that Britain would not allow her men to be abandoned, and would discourage the Bolsheviks from launching an overwhelming attack on them. For fighting from a central position, against armies completely detached from each other, the Bolsheviks were able to concentrate against any one of their enemies. Nothing, however, would encourage the Bolsheviks more to do just this than statements like that of Abrami. Churchill had chosen the name ‘Relief Force’, because it left it unclear whether the troops were to be rescued or replaced. This was very necessary, because once it was apparent that Britain was going to evacuate, the Russian people, among whom British troops were living, and the Russian troops, who had been organised to help British troops, would be ‘honeycombed’ with treachery, knowing that they would soon have to reckon with the vengeance of their present enemies, after being deserted by their present friends. Churchill did not see the slightest difficulty in justifying these measures to the press, Parliament or the public.24

Churchill then complained at the Prime Minister holding him responsible for newspaper articles, advocating an attack on Petrograd. He had done nothing of the kind. ‘My advisers are very doubtful about the Petrograd plan’, he had written.

He then turned to Germany. All the soldiers were agreed that the most important military action required by the Allies was to feed Germany, and raise the blockade. Germany, they thought, was on the verge of a complete collapse; and there was no doubt that it would pay her to try to escape the consequences of the war by taking refuge in Bolshevism. Churchill thus thought the German Government would be ‘mad’ to accept the first peace terms offered. Even if they held out until the Allies were jointly agreed on the terms, it seemed ‘almost certain’ that they would reject them, disclaiming further responsibility. But there seemed a ‘very fair chance’ that they would be overthrown before the end of April.

Meanwhile, the Russian Revolution was undergoing certain changes, and had reached the stage of the Directory as in the French Revolution. All civil society
was now destroyed, and could only be re-created by the military hierarchy. ‘It seems to me very likely that the purely military phase will soon be reached.’ (In this presumption, of course, Churchill was quite wrong.) Churchill had heard that there were now good Bolshevik generals and disciplined troops on the Southern Front, atrocities had diminished, and the military attack became ever more formidable. But Denikin was at any rate still alive, though he had been little helped, and his forces were still a real factor. Kolchak had done very well, mainly because the forces opposing him had been largely switched to the Southern Front. Some of the new divisions Kolchak was raising would soon be ready for battle. ‘His right hand is gradually stretching out towards the Archangel region,’ wrote Churchill.24

In the future, Churchill foresaw a purely military Russia coming to the aid of a Bolshevised Germany, Austria and Hungary, and thus in a few years, confronting England and France with a formidable situation. Japan would certainly join Germany and Russia. ‘So you may have two Leagues of Nations instead of one, and the beaten ones re-arming while the victorious ones are disarming’, he warned. He had only one course of action to suggest, which an ‘enormous body’ of educated opinion, and especially military opinion, would support. “‘Feed Germany; Fight Bolshevism; make Germany fight Bolshevism”. It may well be that it is too late for this’, he feared.24

These were some of the main points which Churchill probably developed before the Prime Minister on the evening of April 15. Lloyd George also—probably—had to consider a statement by the Russian Political Conference that they had no ‘secret intention of restoration’. As soon as the Bolsheviks were crushed, there would be free elections for a Constituent Assembly, to which the present White Russian Governments would hand over their power. They were thus morally entitled to Allied aid, so that Bolshevism could be ‘struck to the heart at Petrograd and Moscow’.25

This was very persuasive. But no one knew whether Kolchak or Denikin would really abdicate to a Constituent Assembly. It was now exactly five months since the War Cabinet had approved British recognition of the Omsk Directorate, which had been nullified by a military coup d’etat, and Admiral Kolchak, the benefactor of the coup, had at once dispersed and murdered the remaining members of the Constituent Assembly. Lloyd George also knew who was behind the recent Times press scare about the alleged Allied danger at Archangel, towards which Kolchak’s ‘right hand is gradually stretching out’. For on the 13th, Lord Rothermere (Northcliffe’s brother) told Frances Stevenson, Lloyd George’s private secretary, ‘that Churchill was in touch with Wickham Stead [editor of The Times], which is just what one would expect, knowing how disloyal & ambitious Churchill is & always will be,’ she commented, no doubt partly reflecting Lloyd George’s own views.25

After due consideration of all these various factors, Lloyd George then read out to Churchill a speech, the ‘very wording of which he had carefully discussed with Mr Bonar Law’, which he was to make in the House of Commons the next
day. Although Churchill did not feel that it went nearly far enough, it was, after some discussion, approved.

On April 16, the Prime Minister faced a largely hostile House of Commons. The first difficulty, he stated, was that there was no de facto Russian Government for the whole of Russia. ‘Boundaries advance and boundaries recede…It is just like a volcano; it is still in fierce eruption, and the best you can do is to provide security for those who are dwelling on its remotest and most accessible slopes, and arrest the devastating flow of larva, so that it shall not scorch other lands.’ There was thus no question of recognition. What was the alternative? ‘Does anyone propose military intervention?’ The fundamental principle of British foreign policy was not to interfere in the internal affairs of another country, however badly governed. Though every Member disagreed fundamentally with Bolshevik principles, Britain could thus not launch a ‘gigantic military enterprise’ in Russia, a country ‘very easy to invade, but very difficult to conquer’. How many Allied troops would be needed, where were they to be found, how much would it cost? And what Russian Government should they set up? ‘I share the horror of all the Bolshevik teachings, but I would rather leave Russia Bolshevik until she sees her way out of it than see Britain bankrupt’

Why then was Britain supporting the White Russians? Unless she had ‘improvised’ these Russian forces after the Brest Treaty, the Germans would have broken the blockade. She would thus be ‘thoroughly unworthy’ to abandon them to the Bolsheviks once they had ‘served our purpose’. As long as they had the ‘evident support’ of the Russian people, Britain must ‘stand by our friends’. But Russia ‘must be redeemed by her own sons’. Britain was thus simply sending supplies to enable them to protect the anti-Bolshevik areas. It was thus quite consistent with fundamental British policy to ‘support General Denikin, Admiral Kolchak, and General Kharkov’.

Mr Clement Edwards: ‘Are you supplying them with food?’

The Prime Minister: ‘I do not think so. They are not asking for it…The Don is a very rich country.’ It was also British policy to ‘arrest the flow of larva—that is, to prevent the forcible eruption of Bolshevism into Allied lands’. Britain was thus enabling the border states to ‘set up a real barrier against…any attempt to overrun Europe by force. That is our policy. But we want peace in Russia…We made one effort. I make no apology for

* This quotation comes from the Prime Minister’s retrospective statement on July 29, during War Cabinet 601.
† Lloyd George’s various references to ‘General Kharkov’ are perhaps an indication that his speech was not to be taken too seriously. In his previous references to this officer, General Krasnov was still in the field; and it was generally taken to refer to him. But Krasnov, who had of course been an ardent supporter of the Germans, had long since been dismissed by the Don Cossacks.
that.’ But all Russian groups refused a prior cease-fire. It was thus not yet possible for ‘outside pressure’ to secure peace in Russia. ‘I do not despair of a solution being found.’ There was ‘reliable information’ that while the Red Army was apparently growing in strength, ‘Bolshevism itself is rapidly on the wane. It is breaking down before the relentless pressure of economic facts. This process must inevitably continue…When Bolshevism, as we know it and as Russia to her sorrow has known it, disappears, then the time will come for another effort at re-establishing peace in Russia. But that time is not yet.’

Mr Clynes: ‘Before the right hon. Gentleman passes to his next point, may I ask him whether he can make any statement on the approaches or the representations alleged to have been made to his Government by persons acting on behalf of such Government as there is in Central Russia?’

The Prime Minister: ‘There were no approaches at all, except what has appeared in the papers.’

Mr Clynes: ‘I put the question because it has been alleged that you have had them.’

The Prime Minister: ‘No, we have had no approaches at all.’ There were always men coming back from Russia with their stories. ‘But we have had nothing authentic. We have had no approaches of any sort or kind.’ Others may have had authentic proposals; but they had not been considered. ‘I think I know to what the right hon. Gentleman refers. There was a suggestion that there was some young American who had come back.’ It was not for him to judge the value of his proposals. ‘But if the President of the United States had attached any value to them, he would have brought them before the [Peace] Conference, and he certainly did not do so.‘

Mr W. Adamson (leader of the Labour Party) stressed that the British people had an ‘intense dislike’ to British troops remaining in North Russia. Once relieved by fresh troops, the Prime Minister would prevent serious trouble ‘if he immediately withdraws both the rescuers and the rescued’.

Mr Clement Edwards (leader of the National Democratic Party) welcomed the Prime Minister’s rejection of Bolshevik recognition, and continued support for the White Russians. But he hoped that the question of food supplies would be clarified, as the recovery of Petrograd simply depended on an Allied guarantee to supply food.

Lord Robert Cecil stressed the need for the earliest possible raising of the blockade.
Colonel Wedgwood (liberal) praised the Prime Minister for supporting President Wilson’s liberal ideas. ‘I am glad he has come back, because I think we need him here more than in Paris.’ The ‘reactionary’ Foreign Office, under that ‘eighteenth century Tory’ Lord Curzon, was ‘going from bad to worse’. He went on, ‘The papers one day are suddenly filled with news of the critical situation of our force at Archangel, where we are told we may expect another Kut unless something is done at once…The public gets into a panic. The result is that the War Office gets carte blanche to send troops to Archangel, and we are committed without the consultation of the Prime Minister by the Foreign Office and War Office combined to an enlarged expedition to Archangel.’ There might be real danger at Archangel; but the chief danger seemed to be the ‘fatal habit’ of Britain’s Russian allies of ‘deserting to the other side whenever they get a chance’. They needed an assurance from both the Foreign Office and the War Office that this cry for relief for Archangel was not ‘merely a mask’ for assembling a force to make a ‘further advance, and, indeed, make a dash, upon Petrograd and so by a sudden dramatic coup end the present Russian Government…We know quite well how these things begin. The military on the spot take matters into their own hands…and the country is dragged in behind the military element in order to rescue people who appear to be in peril…Our fears in this matter are based on the attitude of the Foreign Office towards Russia’. They had engineered the ‘Lockhart Plot’, which started the Terror, just as in France in 1793; they were supporting Tsarist agents in England; they would use any method to overthrow the ‘dreaded idea’ of revolution, and every time they failed. ‘Russia is a communistic socialist state and there we must leave it.’ The ‘dished-up’ atrocity stories in the recent White Paper on Bolshevism were ‘thoroughly typical’ of the Foreign Office. Most were anonymous, but this parson, ‘who actually signs his name’, was still dishing out this story about the Bolshevik nationalisation of women. Originally started by Wickham Stead’s ‘New Europe’, it was now admitted to be untrue; yet here was this parson coming up with it again, ‘carrying out his traditional role of stirring up hatred and dissension among men’.

HonMembers: ‘Oh, Oh!’

Col. Wedgwood complained that there was nothing objective in it, but mainly ‘long accounts by an anonymous “Mr D.”’ The Foreign Office had made mistakes ‘over and over again’ on Russian policy, ‘because they dislike, not murder, but socialism’. What was happening in Hungary? ‘I suppose the next thing we shall hear of will be an expedition to Budapest to succour the landlords of Hungary.’ Where would all this end? As soon as Allied troops left the border states, they would all follow the Russian pattern. Britain should act on parallel lines with America on Russian policy.

Mr L.Lyon (conservative): ‘May we share the railway concessions which Americans are now getting into Russia?’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘I should certainly hope so.’ The main thing was for Parliament to support the Prime Minister’s cooperation
with President Wilson, raise the blockade, make terms with the Bolshevik Government, and ‘drop military expeditions in this most unpromising country’.  

Sir S. Hoare (conservative) did not believe that half the Bolshevik horrors had yet been revealed. But even after the Odessa ‘calamity’, an Allied decision on Russian policy was still being delayed; events would never have drifted if the Allies had definitely recognised Admiral Kolchak. There could be no peace without a settlement of the Russian problem; and for this, ‘Bolshevism must be destroyed’.

Lieut-Commander Kenworthy (liberal), in his maiden speech, stated firmly that Soviet Government was very suitable for an illiterate nation like Russia. ‘We have backed the wrong horse on several occasions in Russia already.’ The best cure for Bolshevism was food, work and proper conditions. ‘Might that not be tried in Russia?’

Lieut-Col. Guinness (conservative) commented ironically that he was glad to hear the Prime Minister saying that Bolshevism was on the wane, and that there had never been any question of Bolshevik recognition. He quoted the French rejection of the original British proposal to invite all Russian groups to Paris. What was that if not recognition? He was afraid that things were simply drifting. It was in British interests to see a Great Russia. ‘We do not want to have a repetition of the troubles in the Balkans.’ Why could Britain not recognise this ‘growing orderly’ Russian Government under Kolchak? ‘We must have some policy in Russia, some alternative to acknowledging the Bolsheviks, or military intervention, and we are entitled to know what that alternative is.’ Was Britain going to send food to Russia; and if so, how would she stop it passing into Bolshevik hands?

Mr J.R. Clynes (labour) stated that labour members could not understand what Britain was trying to achieve with her military enterprises, since intervention on a large scale was impossible, and on a small scale futile. ‘I think the Prime Minister has failed to justify the policy of the Government…and it is little use hon. Members here continuing academic discussions.’ It would be better to try and kill Bolshevism with food.

Mr Harmsworth emphasised that only the Peace Conference could recognise Kolchak, though the Foreign Office would gladly see the last of the blockade. But it was not the blockade that was causing starvation in Russia; there was enough food there, if it was properly distributed. Thus, so long as the Bolsheviks used starvation as an instrument, ‘they cannot expect other people to go out of their way to assist them with food supplies’. The Foreign Office was not reactionary, he added, ‘does not exercise this overwhelming control over the

* This is possibly a reference to reports by Paul Dukes, the head British secret agent in Petrograd.
destinies of the universe’, and Lord Curzon was as liberal as any other Foreign Secretary.

Major J.G. Jameson (conservative), who had the last word, did not foresee the Prime Minister setting out on a new crusade to uphold the European landlords and aristocrats; there would be no ‘palinode of Limehouse’ written in ‘letters of blood all over Europe’. Most British people were ‘fed up with Russia and Russians altogether’, but the British Government would have to make up its mind. ‘I do not think the ring-fence policy will do. Your ringfence has broken down...You can keep sheep in a ringed fence but not ravenous wolves, like the Bolsheviks. Sooner or later you will have to fight the Bolsheviks’.26

Lloyd George then explained to the House the other difficulties facing the Peace Conference, and delivered a broadside at Lord Northcliffe (a broadside indeed, since Northcliffe was already showing signs of insanity, due to tertiary syphilis, from which he died a few years later. ‘When diseased vanity’, said Lloyd George, tapping his head, ‘is carried to the point of sowing dissension between great Allies whose unity is essential to the peace of the world, not even that kind of disease is an excuse.’).

Paris

The Prime Minister, backed by a strong vote of confidence, returned to Paris that night. Lloyd George had, in fact, capitulated to the Conservative right wing. There would be no further ‘outside pressure’ to secure peace in Russia until ‘Bolshevism, as we know it and as Russia to her sorrow has known it, disappears’.

To hasten this happy event, the British Government would continue to stoke the fires of the Russian Civil War by backing ‘our friends’, General Denikin, Admiral Kolchak and ‘General Kharkov’. Russia, in fact, was to be further weakened.

Next day, the Times main leader, entitled ‘The Prime Minister’s Apologia’, was fairly mild. ‘What sort of thrill will his colleagues in Paris feel when they read his performance of yesterday, with its half-truths and palliations, its suppressio veri and suggestio falsi, its false analogies and cheap rhetorical effects?’

Bullitt, however, had to be got rid of quickly. That day, as the Council of Four’s approval of Bullitt’s second draft reply to Nansen was released—which allowed the ‘people of Russia themselves’ (i.e. the Bolsheviks) to control the distribution of food, provided they ceased fire (which, of course, they would not)—Lloyd George sent various members of his entourage round to the Hotel Crillon to apologise to Bullitt, who was furious, but could do nothing—for the moment.27

But as both the French Government and Lloyd George himself flatly refused to transmit Nansen’s exchange of letters with the Council of Four to Moscow, the despatch, owing to the fighting on the Finnish frontier, did not finally reach the Bolshevik Government for over two weeks.
South Russia

In South Russia, the French debacle at Odessa had had an immediate and near catastrophic effect on Denikin. In fact, the Volunteer Army detachments in the Donetz basin, supported by the Kuban Cossacks, had only held off the Bolsheviks with great difficulty. For, elated by their success at Odessa, they had swept down the Dnieper; and while small groups had broken into the Crimea, and were advancing on Sebastopol, others had turned east and taken Melitopol, and then Berdiansk on the sea of Azov. The Volunteer Army left flank had thus been pulled back to Mariopol; and their weak detachments in the Crimea were retreating towards the Kertsch peninsular, supported by the British Fleet. Denikin’s right flank was also being threatened by the 10th Red Army, who were pushing towards the Manytsch river, the north-east boundary of the Kuban, to secure the right bank of the Don, so that Bolshevik troops could then be transferred from their Southern to their Eastern Front.28

But the French débâcle in South Russia was by no means over. On April 20, General Franchet d’Esperey invited Picton Bagge (the former British Consul in Odessa) to come and see him at Constantinople, and asked him whether all Russians who wished had been able to leave Odessa. Bagge thought they had, and said he had done all he could to get them away on British ships. Franchet d’Esperey said that the evacuation had been ordered from Paris as the Allies could not provide enough food. Bagge thought there was just enough, and more might have filtered in; also, the evacuation had been carried out too quickly for the refugees to get money from the banks. Franchet d’Esperey, by way of excuse, said that he had only been given command about March 18, and that three months of inactivity had made the situation hopeless. One regiment of Algerian Tirailleurs, however, had beaten back three Bolshevik regiments at Sebastopol; and the Bolsheviks had asked for an armistice, saying that they had no quarrel with the Allies, whose troops could remain in Sebastopol alongside them. Though told that this was impossible, the ‘armistice which they asked for to cover Easter festivities was I understood granted’, reported Bagge.29

‘A very lame excuse on Gen. d’Esperey’s part’, minuted the Russia Department. This was simply a lie. On April 17, Admiral Calthorpe (the British Naval Commander) had found, on arrival at Sebastopol, that the Bolsheviks had surrounded the town on all sides. ‘I found all the British ships anchored outside the harbour’, he reported a few days later, ‘and Calypso reported she was about to bombard...I had an interview with Admiral Amet [the French Naval Commander] on board Jean Bart and he explained the position.’ At 1.30 pm on April 15, ‘M.17’ [a British Monitor] reported firing, and at 4.30 pm there were 40 Bolshevik cavalry in sight. Captain Thesiger went up to ‘M.17’ and found that the Bolshevik cavalry had come down to the shore with a white flag and after considerable discussion, three delegates agreed to go on board Jean Bart to meet Admiral Amet, who said that the terms of the armistice were for the military to
decide; but the Bolsheviks demanded that Sebastopol be evacuated by the Allies within seven days, and that the Red Army should be allowed to appoint a Bolshevik Soviet in the town. ‘The French reply was to the effect that they would allow the Red Army to appoint a Soviet Municipal Government, but that no Red Army troops were to be allowed into the town.’

The Bolsheviks would not accept this, so British ships had then moved outside the harbour, and at 4 pm all Allied ships opened a heavy bombardment on the Bolshevik positions. ‘It is much regretted that the enemy made their headquarters in the English cemetery* and the French found themselves compelled to bombard this.’ After brisk fighting during the night between Bolshevik and Senegalese troops, together with a further naval bombardment, which had a ‘great moral effect’, the Bolsheviks asked for a ‘conference’, which took place late on April 17, and hostilities were suspended until midnight the 25th. Admiral Calthorpe did not think the armistice would be prolonged beyond this. ‘The task of destroying the ammunition and mines is so great that they [the French] do not propose to attempt it. I do not agree and think that some effort should be made. I hope to be able to persuade Admiral Amet in this sense.’

But the French Fleet then mutinied. On April 19, a meeting of sailors was held on the deck of the battleship France. They sang the ‘Internationale’, and declared that they would remain there no longer; the French Government had no right to send them to fight in a war not approved by the French Chamber. Next day, the Red flag was hoisted side by side with the Tricolor. The Captain of the Jean Bart told his sailors that if they did not lower the flag themselves, he would do so; and they could kill him if they wished. They thereupon lowered and tore up the flag, and offered scraps of it to the Captain as a sign of their wish to restore order and of their good faith. After four days of negotiations between the officers and representatives of the sailors, one of the officers finally succeeded in bringing the incidents to a close by promising in Admiral Amet’s name and in his presence that no sailors would be punished; a similar undertaking was given on the Waldeck Rousseau. The only sailors killed were some seen fraternising with some Bolsheviks on shore, on whom a young French officer had fired with a machine gun.

As the Bolsheviks had now completely surrounded Sebastopol on the northern shore, British naval parties were sent to blow up ammunition dumps, to sabotage the engines of the Russian battleships and cruisers, and to sink the Russian submarines.

Admiral Calthorpe’s reports about the armistice reached the Foreign Office by April 23. ‘The French policy seems to me perfectly disastrous’, minuted Gregory, ‘and I would suggest that we should not only concur in the views of the British C-in-C, but should also make strong representations in the same sense to the French Government.’

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* From the Crimean war.

Admiral Calthorpe sent two further wires on April 23. The situation at Sebastopol was steadily growing worse. The French Fleet was in full mutiny, and the French Admiral appeared determined to surrender both the town and the arsenal without attempting to destroy the Russian warships and the stores. A little later, Calthorpe wired again that the mutiny had extended to all French ships, whose crews would not fight the Bolsheviks, demanded to be sent back to France, and declined to do any work until the date of sailing was fixed. Complete evacuation of the French Fleet, stated Calthorpe, was due to start that day, and would probably take a week. French and Greek troops were disgusted with it all. Amet declined to sink any Russian ships, but said the British could take the submarines outside the harbour and sink them, and he would tell the Bolsheviks that the British had insisted on this. There were too many explosives and stocks of munitions to be removed in time: and if exploded, they might damage the ships, and would probably wreck the town; but mines and detonators were being removed and torpedoes destroyed.

Admiral Calthorpe had sent a formal letter to Admiral Amet stating that if French and Greek troops would remain, the British Fleet would help defend Sebastopol, assisted by Greek ships only—thus allowing the French Fleet to sail.29

Calthorpe’s firm stand afforded ‘a great deal of satisfaction’, Churchill wrote to Walter Long, the First Lord, on April 26. ‘It reflects great credit on Admiral Calthorpe that he should have such a firm grip of the rights and wrongs of this question. Wherever the Bolsheviks have been stood up to, as in North Russia, Siberia and on Denikin’s front, they have shown much weakness, and the loyal troops have maintained their spirit. Wherever anything in the nature of a truce or parley has been arranged, Bolshevik propaganda has undermined all the troops against them and has proved far more effective than Bolshevik force. The French behaviour in South Russia and the Crimea has been from every point of view deplorable and has led to disastrous results quite gratuitously courted.’29

On the 25th, in possession of some of the facts, Lord Derby (the British Ambassador) went to the Quai d’Orsay to see Pichon. ‘The information I gave him seemed to come as a complete surprise’, Derby reported to Curzon, ‘not only to him but to the Political Director, M.Berthelot, whom he sent for. The only information apparently they had was that the Bolshevist Government had asked for an armistice during the Easter celebrations which had been accorded them. They had no information which would have led them to suppose that the armistice was only preparatory to evacuation.’ Pichon, stated Lord Derby, approved Admiral Calthorpe’s offer, and told Berthelot to send a wire to Admiral Amet that the British offer should be accepted if the French ships had to withdraw. Pichon and Berthelot, Lord Derby pointed out, both strongly favoured

† This account of the French mutiny at Sebastopol is taken from that later given in the National Assembly.
holding on to Sebastopol, ‘unless absolutely forced to evacuate, a contingency that they had not seemed to have contemplated’.

When Lord Derby returned to the British Embassy, he found a wire giving full details of the mutiny in the French Fleet. ‘Nothing of this was mentioned to me by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I am certain that he is in complete ignorance of the situation’, he added.²⁹

South-east of the Crimea, part of the British Fleet was steaming east to support the Volunteer Army units retreating across the Kertsch peninsular into the Kuban, and to prevent the Bolsheviks following them up. Off Theodosia, British naval officers watched as some 1,500 Cossacks rode up, and at a steady canter began to turn the Bolsheviks across the bay. British warships then went to action stations, and the battleships *Emperor of India* and *Iron Duke* bombarded the local Bolshevik base at the railway junction of Vladilavoska (just north of Theodosia) with their enormous 13.5-inch guns.*

On May 1, Admiral Calthorpe reported on the situation at Sebastopol up to April 29. French and Greek troops had embarked the day before, and the Bolshevik leaders had given Admiral Amet a ‘signed agreement’. The last French ships would sail on May 3; and when *Calypso* also left, there would be no further Allied ships at Sebastopol. British ships, however, had sunk all submarines in the port, wrecked beyond repair all engines of all Russian warships, and sent the only Russian minelayer to Novorossisk; they had also sunk all mines and some ammunition in deep water, and either wrecked or removed the torpedoes.²⁹

In spite of Admiral Amet’s orders to sink or destroy everything afloat, he strongly objected to Calthorpe’s proposal to hold the town with British ships, as this would compromise his agreement with the Bolsheviks, and antagonise the Crimea population. He was intending to allow the Bolsheviks to engage in coastal trade, and asked for Calthorpe’s concurrence; he was obviously hampered by the need to withdraw his ships, and by the very bad morale of his sailors. ‘I do not propose to acquiesce in those of his suggestions which involve compromises with Bolsheviks including coast trade’, stated Calthorpe firmly.

‘A shameful compact’, minuted the Russia Department.

A few days later, Calthorpe reported that the French High Commissioner had asked him for his views on the Crimean situation. Owing to the ‘regrettable complacency with which the French here appear to accept their reverse’, stated

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*I am indebted to Commander Kenneth Cohen, CB, CMG, Commander H.M.Simpson RN and Commander C.T.R.Searle RN, all of whom served in the Black Sea in 1919, for some supporting information (from log books and diaries) on these events. Commander Cohen underlines the utter incoherence of everything in the Black Sea at that time; no one understood what was really happening, or what was meant to happen. One day, they were sent to bombard the Taman peninsular; next day, there was a cease-fire. The wildest rumours—and jokes—went around. One day, a British destroyer sent a signal to HMS *Marlborough* that King George V had abdicated, through whether to a Belgravia junta or a Pimlico Soviet was not stated. *Marlborough* replied with a single rude Biblical verse.
Calthorpe, he had replied quite frankly that the evacuation of the Crimea was both ‘deplorable and unnecessary’. As it was in the French zone, he had not only offered Admiral Amet every assistance, but had actually made an offer in writing to replace the French ships and hold the town. ‘The Admiral requested 24 hours to consider this offer and then refused it.’

The Russia Department thoroughly approved. ‘Some excellent plain speaking by Admiral Calthorpe.’

Another wire then arrived about the disgraceful behaviour of the French towards the Russian refugees, who had had to take any ships they could, Admiral Calthorpe stated, and ‘many complaints reached me of the intolerable conditions to which they were being subjected by the French authorities on board the vessels under French control, and requesting that they might be allowed to land’. This the French had absolutely refused. The treatment of Russian refugees at Constantinople, many of whom are well-known to be among the most loyal to the cause of the Allies, was nothing less than a public scandal, and British officials of all grades have been inundated with requests for protection from the French authorities and removal from their control in any shape or form’, reported Admiral Calthorpe.

‘More evidence of the scandalous behaviour of the French’, minuted the Russia Department, ‘a ghastly and scandalous account’.

Lord Curzon was deeply impressed. ‘A horrible story’, he wrote.

The main Bolshevik objective was to occupy the right bank of the Don to hem Denikin in before transferring troops from their Southern to their Eastern Front to throw back Kolchak. But by mid-April, the Cossack rising in the Donetz basin had reached such serious proportions that the 9th Red Army had to be detailed to suppress it, thus prematurely weakening the Southern Front before it could even attack Denikin. On April 18, the Central Committee took action to stabilise the Eastern Front. As Trotsky stated that Frunze had too little experience to command the southern group on the Eastern Front, the C-in-C Vatsetis was asked to go to the Eastern Front and take over command, so that the Military Commander Kamenev himself could take over the southern group, which was to counter-attack Kolchak. Lenin and Trotsky then wired to Kiev that it was ‘absolutely essential’ that Ukrainian troops be sent both to the Donetz to eliminate the Cossack rising, and to Chernovitz (in the Bukovina) to assist the Hungarian Bolsheviks. ‘It is the duty of the Ukrainian comrades to exert every effort for the above twofold task’, they wired, ‘in the same way as we are concentrating all our forces for the Eastern Front.’

This was the military position in South Russia on April 19 when Sir Henry Wilson sent a personal wire to General Briggs, head of the British Mission with Denikin. Though the South Russian military situation was now critical, the CIGS was hopeful, for the position in Siberia in early 1919 had been even worse, and there had been ‘almost incredible’ changes for the better there in the last three months; in fact, Kolchak’s offensive had had such an ‘outstanding success’ that there was now pressure for the Omsk Government to be recognised as the
Siberian Provisional Government. Bolshevik reverses in Siberia, Sir Henry Wilson pointed out, would give Denikin time to reorganise, and make good use of British supplies now arriving. But it was ‘greatly to be regretted’ that Denikin had been led (i.e. by General Poole) to expect Allied troops; British public opinion was absolutely against this, while Russia might not be able to stand alone if foreign troops defeated the Bolsheviks. Nor could the War Office finance Denikin; but Sir Henry Wilson hoped that the American ‘paper money’, which he had ordered, would relieve the situation.

It was also ‘most unfortunate’ that Denikin thought that the Allies favoured splitting up Russia. But Denikin, as one of the Allies, must know that they were pledged to self-determination; which did not of course mean that all the border states would be recognised, while it was ‘highly probable’ that the whole Russian problem would be settled first. Meanwhile, as power over the embryo states was not vital to Denikin during his anti-Bolshevik campaign, he should concentrate against the Bolsheviks, which would not prejudice, but ‘tend to strengthen Russia’s case’. But Sir Henry Wilson made no strategic recommendation. Nothing was said about the coming British withdrawal from the Caspian and Caucasus, which would entirely rule out a link with Kolchak. Denikin, it was evident, was the puppet-leader of a promising White Russian force to be used as the War Office thought fit, no more.

From Moscow, Lenin now wired to the Ukraine in urgent terms for reinforcements both for the Donetz basin and the Eastern Front. He was ‘extremely disturbed’, he wired on the 20th, that operations in the Donetz basin and against Rostov had slackened off. The Central Committee would back any requests for support from the Ukraine. ‘It is the height of infamy that the suppression of the Cossacks’ uprising has dragged on.’ One hundred captured lorries and artillery batteries should also be sent to the Eastern Front, as Kolchak had three times as much artillery. But the French debacle had in fact left a vacuum in the Ukraine, and the Military Commander, Antonov-Ovseenko, could not send troops right, left and centre—to the Donetz, to Hungary, and to the Eastern Front: Ataman Gregoriev, on the lower Dnieper, was mainly engaged in robbery, pogroms and general banditry; while Nestor Makhno, the young peasant leader near Mariopol, was more interested in Ukrainian anarchy than Russian Bolshevism.

On the 21st, the C-in-C Vatsetis wired Lenin that Ukrainian troops had now occupied Gusiatin in Galicia; how far should they advance, and with whom were they to cooperate ‘in the event of advancing on Budapest?’ Lenin replied that they were simply to link up with the Hungarian Bolsheviks, not occupy territory. ‘This task must be settled swiftly and surely’, so that they could then reinforce the Donetz. Lenin had by now been told that the delay in suppressing the Cossack rising in the Donetz was due to the 9th Army’s disorganisation, Makhno’s weakness, and Denikin’s fresh troops; the 9th Army must be reorganised, and the Donetz front recognised as the most important. Lenin wired in this sense to Kiev on the 22nd. The Ukraine must reinforce the Donetz, as directed by Vatsetis;
there was a mass of military equipment in the Ukraine, ‘without even counting Odessa’, to equip new units to retake Taganrog and Rostov.\textsuperscript{32}

Lenin simply did not appreciate the chaos in the Ukraine. By now, the entire Bolshevik military structure was coming under strain. On the 23rd, Vatsetis warned Lenin that the Russian Civil War was ‘reaching its peak of intensity’. While their ‘numerous opponents’ had closed their ranks and set up a joint command, Bolshevik Russia had split into two halves, the Eastern and the Western. ‘The result is what we see.’ The Estonian, Latvian and other ‘Red Armies’ were ‘not even worth speaking of’, and the Ukraine was totally disorganised. In fact, the western half of Bolshevik Russia had simply split off. But less than half the Russian people, who lived in the eastern half, had to cope with the ‘two major and decisive theatres’, Kolchak in the east, and Denikin in the south. ‘I am extremely worried by the question of when we shall succeed in again recovering the former cohesion of our military camp’, he wrote. But as the ‘further fate of the Revolution depends on the outcome of the battles on the Southern and Eastern Fronts’, they must be reinforced from other theatres. ‘At the present time the civil war has crystallised and taken on a decisive character. It is the extreme tendencies which have remained on the field of combat: the Communist and the monarchist ones’, he wrote authoritatively. Vatsetis also complained that military training absorbed far too many Military Commanders—some 24,000. There were only some 5,000 commanders in their reserve units. He thus urged, in conclusion, that Bolshevik republics on the Western Front should be turned into military districts, subordinate to the Bolshevik General Staff, which should transfer Military Commanders and Party workers from military training to reserve units, which should be increased in strength.\textsuperscript{33}

Lenin agreed, and minuted to Sklyansky, Trotsky’s Chief of Staff. ‘This seems to relate precisely to what was decided yesterday.’ The Central Committee must act. ‘Work it out: 24,000 officer personnel. By taking 1 for every 10, this means it is possible to create an army of 240,000.’ But Lenin kept up his spate of telegrams. On the 24th, he wired the 9th Army again that if they were still short of troops, could they not disarm the Cossack insurgents by promising them an amnesty? Two more groups of young cadets were being sent. He then again wired to Kiev that they must reinforce the Donetz, even at the expense of the Hungarian link up, ‘for otherwise disaster threatens’.\textsuperscript{34}

From the Eastern Front, Trotsky informed the Central Committee that a ‘decisive and resolute turn of the wheel’ was required in the Ukraine. For the spontaneous successes there to date, ‘direct victories of the Revolution’, made it impossible to form proper units. There is nothing that is new in all this’, he wrote. ‘The October Revolution proceeded along the same path.’ But though the Red Guards thought themselves invincible, clashes with regular troops showed their ‘total ineffectiveness’; and they soon went from ‘arrogance to total prostration and moral collapse’, the inevitable result of their violence and marauding. The Bolshevik revolution had no further use for improvised insurgent detachments. The Ukrainian troops now had to face regular enemy troops. But though
Makhno was totally ineffective and ‘keeps recoiling’, Antonov-Ovseenko argued that the Southern Front did not know how to use his detachment, since ‘special commanders, special methods of approach and so forth are needed’. But with other Makhno-type groups on the Southern Front, with their ‘heroic elements… self-seekers, marauders and scoundrels’, experience taught the opposite. A successful offensive had been launched after they had been formed into proper units. In fact, the Southern Front could convert Makhno’s detachment into a proper unit by cutting its strength by a half or two-thirds. The psychological difficulty lay in realising that units ‘crowned with a halo of brilliant victories’ had to be gripped with an iron hand. Antonov’s opportunism was highly dangerous; for if resolute measures were needed now, soon they would need drastic measures, ‘and then, in the event of further neglect, for measures of ruthless severity’. There was no time to lose. Military Commissars must be purged, swollen detachments relieved of their ‘parasitical and marauder’ elements, ‘and there must be no stopping short at the most savage measures—shooting… imprisonment in the concentration camps’. There must also be a struggle against ‘meeting-prone’ commanders. The best method was to filter each ‘infected division’ through a reserve battalion. This should be done in the next two months in the Ukraine, without ‘waiting for the Makhno problem somehow to sort itself out’.35

Lenin was also much concerned about oil supplies. ‘It is extremely odd that you send only boastful telegrams about future victories’, he wired to Astrakhan on April 24. They were to seize the Caspian ports of Petrovsk and Guriev and the Ural river estuary, and bring out the oil from Grozni. The Bolshevik wireless then announced that two British ships had just reached Guriev to make contact with the Uralsk Cossacks. Lenin was furious. This should never have been allowed, he wired again angrily to Astrakhan on the 26th. ‘This is outrageous…’ It was hastily decided at Astrakhan to launch a strong naval attack on Petrovsk on May 1.36 British supplies were now flowing in a steady stream into Novorossisk. The most urgent need was for tanks and aircraft. On March 25, Colonel Fuller (a tank expert) had reminded the General Staff at the War Office that if tanks were to be used in Russia, the present machines would be of little use for guerrilla warfare, and must be manned and fought by British crews, who took four months to train. But as there were now very few instructors left, it would take at least a year to form—say—nine tank regiments; while production was now almost nil. But little notice was taken of this. On April 13, the first twelve British tanks arrived at Novorossisk, together with No. 47 Squadron of the RAF. But when the first flight were unloaded from their railway wagons at a nearby aerodrome, they were found to be in a very rickety state; and three were forced down with engine trouble during their first sortie. Relations between the RAF and the Russian Air Force were bad from the start. A General Maund (an RAF officer who had been at Ekaterinodar since March 20) had already openly criticised the faulty original instructions, ‘over-confidence and casual character’ of the Russian pilots, and thus quarrelled with the Russian Commander, whose extreme jealousy—so Maund reported—
made him place many obstacles in the way of the British instructors, ‘and encouraged his own officers to ignore their advice’. The seeds of discord were thus sown very early on.37

General Briggs, who was now instructed to make tentative enquiries about Denikin’s political views, then simply asked Denikin point-blank whether he was a reactionary. According to Briggs, the following conversation then took place.

‘General Briggs, you have seen me, you have heard me and watched me’, replied Denikin evidently with some exasperation, ‘and you know perfectly well there is no truth in it. Have you read my speeches, which I have made at public meetings, at Parliaments, and in public gatherings?’

‘Yes’, said Briggs.

‘Well, what more do you want to know?’

‘The world and the Allies do not know what your policy is and what your feelings are, because you have made no proclamation’.

‘General Briggs, you can enlighten the Allies and tell them there is no truth in the statement that I am a reactionary’.

‘I am a mere soldier’, admitted Briggs, ‘and the world might think I was misguided and misinformed. You must remember the world does not read your small papers—in fact, a great many Europeans do not even know where the Kuban province is.’

Briggs asked Denikin tentatively if he could not draw up a proclamation to satisfy both his own people and the Allies.

‘Whatever proclamation I publish to my people, they will pick holes in it and cavil at it’, Denikin replied. ‘Right-thinking people and true Russians trust me and believe in me. It is only my enemies who say that I am reactionary, and whatever declaration I put my pen to, they would still adhere to their opinions in order to baulk me and prevent me from gaining my object, which is a free and united Russia…My principles are that the people of Russia shall decide their own fate—whether they have local self-government, autonomy of states, federation of states, or whatever they like—that is their business and not mine—I am a soldier.’

Briggs then consulted the French and American Missions, and what he called ‘certain large-minded Russians’, and induced them to draw up a proclamation which would ‘satisfy their people’. Then, stated Briggs, ‘with the aid of a lawyer, I combined the whole into a final declaration which I placed before Denikin and asked him to sign’. Briggs’ proclamation stated that Denikin was fighting to restore an united Russia, whereupon the Russian people would convocate a National Assembly, which would grant local self-government, guarantee full civil and religious freedom, and carry out immediate land reform and legislation to protect the workers. This hollow declaration was then duly signed by Denikin and his Council, ‘and the original copy presented to me as a memento’, reported Briggs.38

Just after this, General Wrangel (the Volunteer Army Commander, who had been down with typhus) returned to Ekaterinodar to find the ‘rankest intolerance’ towards all who did not blindly endorse Denikin’s motto of ‘Russia,
one and indivisible’; all others were ‘separatists’, while the many Russian officers now in the Volunteer Army, who had served under the pro-German Skoropadsky in the Ukraine, were regarded ‘almost as traitors’. Reilly’s advice to the War Office urging an amnesty thus received strong endorsement. Though the Volunteer Army in the Donetz—despite the Cossack rising—was still under strong pressure, Denikin hoped that Wrangel would put matters right on his return. But Wrangel still violently disagreed with Denikin’s strategy. The ‘crying need’ to join forces with Kolchak ‘simply stared us in the face’, he said. As the Bolshevik forces were much stronger, they should not fight on several fronts at once, but concentrate against Tsaritsin, the weakest Bolshevik point, and thus link up with Kolchak; operations in the Donetz should be abandoned, and their Don front shortened by some ninety miles. This was all that their present forces could manage. Otherwise, the initiative would fall to the Bolsheviks, who could threaten their base. Both sides in the Russian Civil War thus wildly overestimated each other’s strength.  

General Briggs, however, was still more concerned about the Caucasus. On April 10, the War Office had replied to General Milne that they thought that the British troops in the Bzyb area had already settled the dispute over the Russian occupation of Sochi; but as Britain did not wish to force Denikin to retire, pending a final decision on the frontier, British troops must continue to keep the peace. Briggs wired back the same day that Denikin wished to thank the British Government for the supplies now received, but found such help difficult to reconcile with British orders to evacuate Baku and Petrovsk within 24 hours, and with British encouragement to the Caucasus tribesmen. Denikin pointed out that the Terek and Daghestan, now under Russian governors, were both friendly to him, and had promised him recruits long before the British had decided to support them. The British were also preventing the Ural Cossacks from joining him. Briggs pointed out that the Chechens were preventing some twenty-five miles of the Petrovsk railway from being repaired, and were hiding and arming Bolshevik fugitives; and Denikin had reminded him, concluded Briggs, that large forces were needed to maintain order amongst the hill tribes before the war. The British should consequently send larger forces if they proposed to guard Grosni and the railway, and generally maintain order.  

On April 11, Denikin and Briggs went to Grozni to meet some fifty Chechen elders, who accepted Denikin’s terms for tribal self-government, and promised to give up their arms and expel Bolshevik agents; the (pro-Turkish) Mountain Government, they explained, had told them that the British were against Denikin. Briggs quickly said that the British were both supporting Denikin and the local leaders in the Caucasus—simply to keep order. Denikin and Briggs then met the Ingushi, who begged Denikin for protection from the Ossetins and the Terek Cossacks. They also conferred with the Ossetins, who had already accepted Denikin’s terms, as had the Circassians and the Kabardins. Denikin’s cavalry then drove the members of the Mountain Government off into the hills, and he appointed General Erdeli as Russian Governor of Daghestan, in place of the
unpopular Liakhov. But though the Caucasus tribesmen formed a new little
government in Dagestan, under Russian auspices, the various Bolshevik,
German and Turkish agents went on stirring up trouble; and this, added to the
Russian occupation of the Derbent-Petrovsk railway, continued to cause alarm in
Azerbaijan to the south. Trouble in the Caucasus, in fact, went on.\textsuperscript{40} (On the
20th, the Central Committee approved Trotsky’s proposal that one Military
Revolutionary Council should control the whole Caucasus and Caspian area,
‘with the proviso, however, that the exercise of the utmost caution is essential in
respect of all those mountain peoples, such as the Ingushi, Chechens and
Dagestanis etc, who have already declared for the Soviet regime’).\textsuperscript{41}

On the Black Sea coast, the Georgians had now occupied Gagri. General Milne
wanted the local British troops to throw them out. But on Churchill’s orders, he
got to Ekaterinodar on April 25, and next day reported that his visit had
improved the difficult situation brought about by the French withdrawal, and the
friction with the Caucasian States. At first stubborn and difficult, Denikin had
gradually thawed and impressed Milne favourably as a calm and determined man
standing out amidst ‘mediocre and rather reactionary’ followers of small capacity.
The British, he said, were at least doing what they could to help him, though he
‘candidly stated that the French were not’. A united Russia was his main aim;
though leaving most political problems for the moment, he had to deal with those
affecting his military position and prestige. Though he would not recognise the
Caucasian States, some autonomy was necessary; and he would temporarily ‘admit
them’.* Armenia, Batoum and other regions wanted to stay with Russia, Denikin
claimed. Milne disagreed. Denikin then spoke with much bitterness about the
Georgians, who were fomenting Bolshevik disturbances and in touch with the
Bolshevik Government. The Black Sea Province must be Russian, he stated
firmly, and the Georgians must evacuate Sukhum, which would act as a buffer; if
necessary, he would fight. Milne induced him not to go south of the Bzyb river
for the present. On the Caspian, Denikin would not recognise that ‘self-
nominated band of adventurers’, the Mountain Government; force was all that
those ‘wild mountaineers’ understood, and the subjection both of them and of the
Georgians was vital for the Volunteer Army. His present policy was to neutralise
the Caucasian tribes by negotiation, and then use Petrovsk\textsuperscript{†} as a base for
operations north of the Caspian: British troops should occupy it.\textsuperscript{42}

Milne cautiously reported that Denikin needed Petrovsk as a naval base to
coordinate his advance on Tsaritsin with operations from Guriev. Some
demarcation line was necessary in the Caucasus, but Denikin would hardly agree
to the War Office line. As the Volunteer Army could not spare their fighting
troops for training, the scattered British instructors should be replaced by British

\* Presumably admit their existence.
\*\textsuperscript{†}‘i.e. instead of Baku?’ queried the General Staff at the War Office on the wire here.
technical units, and 16 more Whippets and 16 more Mark V tanks should be sent out; more aircraft were also needed. But Russian administration both in the rear and on the railways was ‘beneath contempt’; British supplies, though urgently needed, were still mostly sitting at the base; and the British Mission, owing to Russian ‘false pride’, could not help. There was a general shortage of food, much worsened by the recent arrival of some 30,000 starving refugees from Odessa, some of whom Milne would try to repatriate. Milne urged much better links between Constantinople and Denikin and Kolchak; and close British naval support for Denikin on the Black Sea and the Caspian, off the Kertsch peninsula, and in the Sea of Azov, loss of which would badly affect Volunteer Army morale.  

Milne was however much struck by the determined spirit and ‘extraordinarily soldierly attitude’ of Russian officers, whose great difficulties were partly due to their own lethargy, pride and general reluctance to accept advice, and the lack of able administrators. British prestige was now at its height, and his reception had at times been ‘even cordial’. On departure, Denikin handed him Briggs’ declaration, which Milne duly forwarded to London, underlining how it had been drawn up.  

Milne’s visit, however, prompted Churchill to look into the question of supplying Denikin with more equipment. ‘150,000 equipments were diverted from Denikin to Roumania, and since then Denikin has declared his ability to take them’, Churchill minuted to Sir Henry Wilson on April 30. ‘We cannot fail to fall short of our original undertaking to Denikin to supply him with up to 250,000 sets as and when he can effectively use them. Therefore the 150,000 sets to Roumania are a new drain on our resources not foreseen at the time when the Kolchak and Denikin undertakings were given.’  

These were a first charge on all British resources, ‘and next to that comes Roumania. Until I know how far we are in a position to discharge these obligations, I find great difficulty in taking a new country on our hands. It is much better that the French should do their share, and should be responsible for some one definite country in which, if there is a failure, they can be made to bear the discredit. If they can get us to go in with them in each of the three or four different theatres, they do not do their share in any one of them.’  

He asked for all British resources in surplus equipments to be set out, and would be quite prepared for some of the Russian Armies to have mixed equipment.  

But on the 26th, the Bolsheviks struck on the Manytsch front, and there was nearly a disaster. Romanovsky, Denikin’s Chief of Staff, came to Wrangel’s bedside during the night; the Bolsheviks were moving up towards the Vladikavkaz-Rostov railway, and the Volunteer Army were now in full retreat. He asked Wrangel to take all available troops to the Manytsch line at once. Wrangel refused. The forces offered him were quite inadequate, and his own staff were at Rostov; more troops must be provided—from the Donetz. Romanovsky disagreed; if troops were moved around now, there would be a panic at Rostov. Wrangel offered to return at once to Rostov, ill as he still was, and supervise the
moves himself. Romanovsky still disagreed; Wrangel’s refusal would force Denikin himself to take over the Manytsch command. Wrangel thought this all to the good; he would have had to make do with what was given him, but Denikin could transfer whatever troops he wished, and would in fact have to use those which Wrangel had suggested. Wrangel and Romanovsky parted on very bad terms. Next day, Denikin asked him if he had changed his mind. Wrangel had not; and, with Denikin’s permission, left that evening to resume his command at Rostov. At Milne’s suggestion, Briggs now toured all the South Russian fronts. At Novocherkask, the Russian Commander and his staff ‘poured out their woes’. Their original 150,000 men had been reduced to 25,000 through typhus and Bolshevik propaganda to the effect that the Allies were backing the Bolsheviks, whom they had invited to Prinkipo, and not Denikin, who was a reactionary. ‘How they promised the Don Cossacks that if they would only come over and join them, they would have their land, their cattle, their sheep, freedom and peace and no more fighting…how their remaining 25,000 men were weary, tired and losing heart, how they never had any rest behind the lines as obtained in France.’ They begged Briggs for help. Bolshevik propaganda had been so successful that their troops simply thought that he and his entourage were Russians dressed in English uniforms. ‘They asked me, when I visited the front’, Briggs later reported, ‘and saw their troops, not to speak Russian, and when I said I could not speak Russian, they said, “Well, if you have any officers who speak Russian, will you ask them not to do so, because if the troops or the inhabitants hear any English officers speaking Russian, they will immediately turn around and say. ‘There you are, they are Russians disguised as English.’” At each front, they asked Briggs for tanks—even just ‘one tank so that their soldiers would be able to see some feasible sign of English support’. They also badly wanted shells. At their urgent request, he sent two British officers to live amongst them to visit the troops in the trenches to ‘convince them that England was behind them’. On no account was he to send officers who could speak Russian.

Wrangel was now back at Rostov, where he received urgent requests for support both from the Donetz, and—as Wrangel had foreseen—from Denikin on the Manytsch front. While the various transfers were carried out, he took the most drastic measures to keep down the Bolshevik underground at Rostov, where, he told Briggs, German influence was ‘very strong’, and the many Germans who lived there thought Germany was ‘their only hope of rescue from the Bolsheviks’. There were also more than 100 German agents hard at work on the Don trying to restore German influence.

By far the greatest danger was on the Manytsch front, where the Bolsheviks were across the river and threatening the Vladikavkaz–Rostov railway, and thus the whole Volunteer Army rear. By May 3, however, Denikin had three Army Corps along the Bataisk–Torgovaya–Divnoe line; and by a massive cavalry counter-attack, forced the Bolsheviks back. Briggs went up to see Denikin ‘a few days after the tide had turned and found him 1,000 yards from the Bolshevik
firing line—shells were passing over his head, shrapnel was bursting close by, the
ground behind was pitted with shell holes...yet he was as merry as a sand boy...
[and] really enjoying himself away from the cares of office and worries of politics
and government. I pointed out how naughty he was being in such an exposed
and dangerous position, as he must remember that he was not only the head of a
big country, but the Commander-in-Chief of a 400 mile front, and that his life
was very valuable to his country. I made him promise not to be so rash in the
future.⁴⁵

This was the moment chosen by the War Office to send a circular wire—no
doubt on Reilly’s advice—to Generals Knox, Ironside, Milne and Briggs
instructing them to inform their local Russian commanders that many Russian
officers, who were now forced to serve in the Red Army, were only being
stopped from coming over to the White Russians by fear of degradation or
condemnation to death. With the approval of the Foreign Office, therefore, they
urged Kolchak, Denikin and Miller to announce that they would receive these
former officers into the Russian White Armies, and show clemency wherever
possible.

A postscript was added for Milne and Briggs. Public opinion in England had
been grossly misled about Denikin’s operations, and even the inaccurate reports
which had reached London were nearly always out of date. Much better reports
were expected in future.⁴⁶

But Churchill, and above all the Admiralty, were about to deprive Denikin of
the crucial British military and naval support in the Caucasus, and on the Caspian
and Black Sea, upon which General Milne had just insisted. ‘Pray examine the
following’, Churchill minuted to Sir Henry Wilson on April 30. ‘We have 6
brigades in the Caucasus, two-thirds of which are non-retainable men. We
cannot keep these men waiting about till the Italians take over. We should
therefore at once begin to evacuate the Caucasus, sending home all the non-
retainable men and forming the retainables into, say, 2 good brigades.

‘In order to make up to Denikin for the loss of this indirect support in his rear,
these 2 brigades should be used in support of his left flank against the Bolshevik
attacks from the Crimea, notably on the Kertsch peninsula.’⁴⁷

The DMO replied that the CIGS had already urged evacuation, and that three
brigades would be better than two. But the Admiralty would first have to
withdraw from the Caspian; and the ships and stores be destroyed, since Denikin
had no trustworthy sailors to take them over. But once a general British withdrawal
was agreed, this smaller British force could not be pledged to support Denikin, as
it would continue to tie British troops down there. And only British volunteers
could serve with Denikin anyhow, the DMO reminded Churchill. The Eastern
Committee’s decision of March 6 to remain on the Caspian and in the Caucasus
until Denikin had taken Astrakhan now seemed to have been abandoned.⁴⁷

On May 1, however, a strong Bolshevik flotilla of thirty seven ships, which
came down from Astrakhan to attack Petrovsk, was dispelled by the British flotilla.
Fearing a later attack with a different result, the War Office informed the
Admiralty on the 3rd that they approved Milne’s suggestion that a British Naval Mission should assist Denikin to restart a Russian Flotilla. But the Admiralty replied that Admiral Calthorpe thought that Russian ships manned and controlled by Denikin would be of little value. At the moment, Denikin had a few merchant ships in the Black Sea, and Calthorpe might also give him those on the Caspian; but no British Naval Mission was needed. The Admiralty concurred. For when Britain withdrew, the Caspian would soon be in Bolshevik hands, and no British Mission could stop this. Britain must therefore control the Caspian until she left, and Denikin must not interfere. Nor, while Britain supported Denikin, could any Russian warship not under British command ever be trusted on the Black Sea. Thus no action should be taken to reform the Russian Flotilla, although a British Naval Officer might liaise between the British Flotilla and the Volunteer Army. The War Office agreed, and so informed Milne; but Denikin was still not told of the impending British withdrawal.  

All in all, the Bolsheviks were still masters of their Southern Front, despite the Cossack rising in the Donetz, and thus had Denikin hemmed in after the French debacle in the Ukraine; and the support which he was receiving in the way of British supplies might soon be cancelled out when the British withdrew from the Caucasus.
On April 15, the General Staff completed a major paper on British policy in North Russia. The British Government, it was assumed, wished the Allied withdrawal to be carried out ‘with as little loss of prestige as may be, and to avoid a repetition of the pitiable exhibition recently afforded by the sauve-qui-peut at Kherson and Odessa’. By then, therefore, both the Archangel Government and the North Russian troops must be able to stand alone. But to make ‘quite certain’ of this, it would first be necessary to strike a ‘sharp and succesful’ blow at the Bolshevik forces, to secure a ‘real and permanent’ link with the Siberian Army, and to provide British officers and NCOs to ‘organise, instruct and lead’ the North Russian troops. If the first and second conditions were fulfilled, the desired result would ‘almost certainly’ be achieved; if only the first and third, it ‘may possibly’; if neither, the ‘fall of the Archangel Government and the disintegration of the anti-Bolshevik forces may be reckoned on as certain’, warned the General Staff.

A ‘real and permanent’ link between the Archangel and Siberian forces depended upon good communications and efficient action. In North Russia, it would be necessary to occupy Viatka, and hold the Viatka-Kotlas railway, the Dvina river line, and part of the Archangel-Vologda railway; and to send out a strong British Mission, enough Russian troops to replace Allied troops, and enough supplies for Russian troops still to be mobilised. In Siberia, Britain had to secure the ‘speedy recognition’ of Admiral Kolchak, the effective operation of the Siberian railway, retain Allied troops to ‘hearten’ the Siberian Army, and continue to supply material. To compensate for withdrawal of the two British regiments, the British Mission should thus be increased from 400 to 2,000 men; but no further large amount of supplies would be required, as much ‘has been and probably will be captured by the Siberian forces’. (Something rather different happened in practice. General Graves, the American Commander in Siberia, later claimed that by December 1919, no less than 100,000 men, ‘clothed, armed, and equipped by the British’, had joined the Bolsheviks, who allegedly wired General Knox ‘thanking him for supplying clothing and equipment’.)

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General Ironside, the General Staff went on, reported that he could have 23,000 ‘efficient’ Russian troops by late summer, provided that supplies were sent direct to the Mezen and Pechora river mouths (one on, the other well above the Arctic circle); that sufficient good Russian officers were at once sent out; and that he maintained his present positions. Ironside also wished to call for British volunteers mainly to expand the Slavo-British Legion, which would ‘form a backbone’ for the North Russian forces. (The War Office were, in fact, making exactly the same proposal for which they had so severely condemned the French for making and trying to carry out at Odessa with their mixed brigades.)

If ‘purely British’ forces could be used to link up with the Siberian forces, stated the General Staff carefully, Ironside would guarantee to take Kotlas—provided:

1. The British flotilla on the Dvina river was ‘adequate’.
2. 5,000 ‘good fighting men’ came out from England.
3. There were enough British staff and 2,000 British troops for supply services.
4. There was a ‘certainty’ of successful cooperation by the Siberian forces.
5. Bolshevik forces elsewhere in Russia were ‘thoroughly employed’.

Britain could satisfy the first three conditions; the naval reinforcements, plus the river gunboats at Archangel, were ‘probably more than adequate’, while the Ministry of Shipping was also sending out ‘suitable river transport’; and the Relief Force itself could provide for Ironside’s other conditions. There could, of course, be ‘no positive guarantee’ about the Siberian Army, but there was ‘every hope’. But while Denikin’s operations, and their fear of losing the Ukraine and Donetz, would tie strong Bolshevik forces down in South Russia, the Polish Army, with the Germans on one side and the Ukrainians on the other, could bring no effective pressure to bear on the Red Army; and lack of Allied policy in the Baltic ‘precludes the timely, effective (and perhaps decisive) action which might otherwise have been undertaken against Petrograd’. Allied Missions should therefore be sent to the Baltic States, as even news of this would tie Bolshevik forces down there.

Thus, argued the General Staff, there was a ‘considerable’ chance that the Archangel Government and the North Russian Army could stand on their own, provided ‘British units are allowed to undertake an advance on Kotlas’, and that British volunteers could enlist in the Slavo-British Legion. Though the use of British troops which were then being sent out, they went on, ‘may lay us open to the accusation of breaking faith, on the grounds that these troops were provided and despatched to rescue our beleaguered garrison, and not to undertake offensive operations against the Bolsheviks’, it would ‘most certainly be necessary to act offensively to a certain extent in order to enable the delicate and difficult operation of withdrawal to be carried out successfully, quite apart from any political considerations’. It was thus ‘impossible’ to tie Ironside down, ‘or to forbid him to advance beyond a certain line’. For, the General Staff argued, ‘all
military experience, and in particular the history of our present operations in North Russia, teaches the impossibility of setting a definite limit to operations once they have been undertaken’. Ironside should thus be left a ‘free hand to achieve his object in the most effective manner possible’.

The General Staff requested permission to instruct Ironside to prepare to ‘strike as effective a blow as possible’ at the Bolshevik forces, ‘with the object of facilitating the ultimate withdrawal of the Allied forces under such conditions as will enable the Northern Russian Army to keep the field and maintain the stability of the Archangel Government’; second, to call for British volunteers to expand the Slavo-British Legion. Though policy in North Russia was technically an Allied responsibility, concluded the General Staff, ‘Great Britain will never be absolved in the event of failure or disaster’. But if the above recommendations were ‘energetically pushed forward’, there would be ‘good reason to anticipate a satisfactory conclusion to the North Russian campaign’.

This, in fact, was a very rickety edifice which the General Staff were erecting on the basis of Ironside’s ill-considered ‘guarantee’ of March 22. If the British Government wished to prevent an ‘Odessa’ type debacle at Archangel, they were arguing, British troops, sent out specifically for relief, would have to be launched across the Arctic in the general direction of Siberia in the hope of linking up with other forces who might or might not be there. This paper also gave rise, and only partly due to gross exaggeration of Russian numbers and morale, to a completely false impression: that Ironside was waiting like some greyhound in the slips; and if one or two trifling needs were met, he could be unleashed, and would at once bound down to Kotlas. For it took no account of distance, terrain or climate. Attached to this paper was an equally mendacious map (see map 7), with phantom Russian Armies carefully pencilled in, which existed solely in the imagination of the General Staff.

But though General Ironside had clearly stated that ‘adequate’ naval cooperation was vital for a successful advance to Kotlas, which the General Staff had emphasised in their paper of April 15, Churchill had never officially informed the Admiralty of this; they were simply preparing to cover the withdrawal of British forces from their present positions on the Dvina river.

On April 17, the Deputy Director of the Operations Division (Home), Captain Bernard St. G.Collard, had minuted that Captain Edward Altham had been appointed to command the Archangel river expeditionary force; and would sail in Fox on April 27 for Murmansk. ‘Captain Altham will command all vessels employed up river, and be responsible for the operations against the Bolshevik river gunboats in cooperation with the military forces.’ It was submitted that he be promoted to Commodore.3

‘Concur with D.D.O.D (H)’, minuted the DCNS on the 19th, ‘in view of the certain difficult nature of the coming operations & the forces employed.’ But the First Sea Lord rejected this.

On April 27, the day that Captain Altham sailed for Murmansk, the SNO Archangel wired the Admiralty. ‘Have charts been printed and despatched please.’
Map 7 General Staff map of European Russia, showing the phantom Russian armies, dated 15 April 1919
Collard replied next day that charts of the Dvina river, from Archangel to the junction with the Vaga river, were being sent in *Fox*; charts from the Vaga up to Kotlas would, it was hoped, be sent in a week’s time.

On April 29, Captain Collard submitted an appreciation of the naval situation in North Russia. ‘Practically all the reasons which led to Allied intervention in Russia ceased to exist from the moment the Germans were beaten on the Western Front’, he wrote. The only reason for remaining in North Russia was to prevent the Germans overrunning the Russian Empire, and thus making good their wartime losses; and to help the loyal Russian elements, ‘who, but for this Allied assistance, would have been overwhelmed by the Bolsheviks.* It is this latter reason which holds the Allied forces in North Russia today’, he stated.³

‘The naval policy in North Russia is simply cooperation with the military forces and should it be decided that the military forces are to be withdrawn from North Russia, there will be no object in maintaining naval forces in the Arctic providing that, in the almost certain contingency of the whole of Arctic Russia falling into the hands of the Bolsheviks, all shipping is either withdrawn or destroyed.’ (‘This is pessimistic’, minuted the DCNS in the margin here, from the asterisk above, down to this last sentence, ‘as we hope to establish KOLCHAK before withdrawing.’)

Collard went on that the War Office were sending out two volunteer Brigades; that a naval expedition to reinforce the British gunboats at Archangel was being prepared in England; and a party had already been sent out to Archangel to mine the river above our advanced military positions, ‘as soon as the ice runs’.

Collard concluded sharply, ‘It cannot be too clearly pointed out that the preparations made by the Admiralty for naval cooperation on the rivers Dvina and Vaga with the military forces have been made on the assumption that there will be no material advance from the present positions occupied by our military forces on these rivers. It may later be considered essential that Kolchak’s Siberian forces should join up with the Russian anti-Bolshevik forces now fighting with our forces in North Russia before our forces are withdrawn from North Russia. To do this effectively’, he warned, ‘it would undoubtedly be necessary to make a very considerable advance south on the River Dvina to Kotlas whence the railway runs to Viatka and so to the Siberian railway. Before such an advance was authorised, it would be for the serious consideration of the Naval Staff whether the River forces already provided could undertake these operations, and if not whether we were in a position to provide any additional forces.

‘So much depends on the strength of the Bolshevik river forces likely to be met with, on the depth of the water in the river Dvina when the operations are required, and on the military protection that could be afforded to the naval forces.’³

At that time, the forces selected for use up-river were: 12 Monitors (some of which drew 7 and a half to 8 feet, others 5 feet 9 inches to 6 feet 6 inches); 4 China gunboats (which drew 4 feet); 4 minesweepers (which could also serve as minelayers or tugs, and which drew 3 feet 6 inches); and various barges and lighters.
On April 30, an Admiralty letter was sent to all C-in-Cs in Scotland, Portsmouth and elsewhere, urging that every effort be made to get the ships to be used in the River Dvina operations ‘away to Murmansk as soon as possible’. It was pointed out that the Bolsheviks had a large number of gunboats on the river this year, ‘and it is of the utmost importance that our vessels should sail at the first possible moment’. The same day, Captain Collard telephoned to the Admiralty Air Division, stressing that the Admiralty was making every effort to avoid delay to ships. ‘It is requested that the Air Ministry will do their utmost to hustle the R.A.F. side of the Expedition, bearing in mind the Admiralty are quite clear that if delay should occur, it will be the fault of the R.A.F.’ Collard’s strong message was passed instantly to the Air Ministry.\(^3\)

Another of the provisos of Ironside’s guarantee was that Bolshevik forces elsewhere in Russia should be ‘thoroughly employed’. But while Denikin’s operations, and the Bolsheviks’ fear of losing the Ukraine and the Donetz, would tie strong Bolshevik forces down in South Russia, the Polish Army, with the Germans on one side, and the Ukrainians on the other, could bring no effective pressure to bear on the Red Army, stated the General Staff in their paper of April 15; and lack of Allied policy in the Baltic ‘precludes the timely, effective (and perhaps decisive) action which might otherwise have been undertaken against Petrograd’. Allied Missions should therefore be sent to the Baltic States, they urged, as even news of this would tie Bolshevik forces down there.

It is thus necessary to examine the military position on the Polish front, and especially in the Baltic.

The Baltic

In London, the Admiralty had by now rejected all idea of capturing Kronstadt by large-scale naval assault.

On March 25, the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff submitted an appreciation of the Baltic situation, and urged the despatch of a British naval force, consisting of 4 battleships, a light cruiser squadron, a destroyer flotilla, etc.\(^4\) At present, there were only 2 light cruisers and 5 destroyers, based on Copenhagen. The DCNS considered whether to base this new force at Port Baltic or Helsinki. The latter, however, could quite easily be blocked by the enemy, according to the latest Admiralty survey of the harbour (dated 1837). Port Baltic (in Esthonia) was thus preferable; but a resurvey of this harbour was necessary first, as the last Admiralty survey there had been carried out in 1822.\(^4\)

The DCNS offered no comment on whether Kronstadt should be reduced by long range bombardment, or attacked from the air. Because of the minefields, he appeared to think that attack by Coastal Motor Boats offered the best chance of success. But he added, ‘CMBs, by reason of their shallow draught and fast speed, are probably not subject to the same disadvantages as submarines or destroyers [i.e. in the minefields]. Their lightly built hulls are, however, very liable to severe damage if, while travelling at any speed, they strike any floating object’ In fact,
the presence of floating ice, after the ice had broken up, was considered to be a "grave drawback" to the use of CMBs.

But the DCNS pressed for "urgent consideration" of the problem, as Petrograd was ice-free by mid-April, whereupon Esthonia would be in danger from Bolshevik ships; and the present small British naval force could not be sent to Reval without support. Esthonia would soon ask for naval protection, "and I have done everything possible to obtain a policy from the War Cabinet without success." No more than a study of the question could be made at present. "The War Cabinet is cognisant of the Admiralty views, and the responsibility rests with them."

On the 26th, the First Sea Lord minuted, "Plans are to be worked out for establishing a base for such a force as is outlined at Port Baltic. When this has been done, we can await events, for a decision will probably be forced on the Government before May. The operation contemplated should be of an offensive nature", he wrote. "This the greater, will include the defensive, the less."

Next day, therefore, the Admiralty informed the C-in-C, Grand Fleet, that although no decision on Allied policy for Russia had yet been reached, he was to earmark 4 battleships, 3 Monitors, cruisers and destroyers—in fact, a vast force—for assembly at Port Baltic; though no action was to be taken yet.

Admiral Madden (Beatty's second in command) replied swiftly on the 31st, detailing the vessels he had selected, which should assemble at Scapa on April 30. "It is submitted that the intentions of Their Lordships can be disguised by announcing that Squadrons of the Atlantic Fleet will assemble at Scapa for Gunnery and Torpedo exercises as soon as leave is completed", he suggested.

This haste alarmed the Admiralty; and Admiral Madden was informed curtly on April 6 that the naval force mentioned was the maximum force. "It is highly improbable that the whole of this force will be sent to the Baltic, and Their Lordships do not consider the probability sufficient to warrant the assembly of the force at Scapa…Their Lordships have no intention, under existing circumstances, of commissioning the Monitors, nor do they desire that any active preparations whatever for these operations shall be made'.

On April 15, Admiral Madden wrote again to the Admiralty, forwarding Admiral Phillimore's rather wild plan of March 6 for the capture of Kronstadt (based on the supposed inability of the Kronstadt fortresses to repel attack, which was quite wrong). The large experience gained by Rear Admiral Sir Richard Phillimore of the Russian character and the proposed area of operations, give additional weight to his opinions", added Admiral Madden mistakenly, "and they are worthy of careful consideration." He also enclosed a further note from Phillimore, dated April 14, stating that CMBs, which had now been so improved, would 'greatly simplify' the operation; and that two-seater aircraft, which could reach 10,000 feet, would be too high for the anti-aircraft guns.

The Admiralty were rightly unimpressed with the main plan; but took due note of his further observations. Their Lordships had "read with interest these proposals, which will be carefully considered should it be decided to carry out
operations against the Bolsheviks in the Baltic’, Admiral Phillimore was informed on April 24. ‘Naval operations in the Baltic must conform to the general Allied Policy as regards Russia. This policy appears to be definitely shaping towards lending material support to those forces in Russia which are fighting the Bolsheviks. In view of this, the possibility of the Navy being called upon to carry out any operations such as those proposed appears unlikely. From the latest information, there is reason to believe that a proportion at least of the guns at Kronstadt and on the mainland are capable of being used. It would appear that a considerable military force would be required to ensure holding Kronstadt once it had been captured, as any withdrawal in face of Bolshevik pressure would have a deplorable effect.’

The British naval presence in the Baltic was thus confined to a small force of light cruisers and destroyers, under the command of Admiral Sir Walter Cowan. He had good connections in London at this time, as he had known Admiral Beatty since they had both served together on the Nile in the late 1890s, while Sir Henry Wilson was an old friend from Boer War days. But Cowan, a fiery little man, who thought only of foxhunting when on dry land, was ill-suited to cope with the intricacies of the Baltic, where he was to play a major role during 1919.

Born in 1871, he saw early service in various punitive expeditions off the African coast (including the capture of Benin) in the 1890s. Command of the gunboat Sultan on the upper Nile followed. After Kitchener took Khartoum, Cowan went up the White Nile to forestall the French Captain Marchand at Fashoda, who was trying to annex the Sudan; and before the settlement of the Fashoda crisis, which nearly led to war between England and France, Cowan won the DSO. He spent the Boer War as Kitchener’s Naval ADC., galloping about on the veldt. At the battle of Jutland, he commanded a battlecruiser with distinction; and in 1917, was given command of the First Light Cruiser Squadron.

But his highly-strung nerves and very quick temper made him a difficult man to serve, and there was often mutiny on the ships he commanded; some officers held that he was responsible for more mutinies than anyone else in the Royal Navy. His Flag Captain Cunningham (later First Sea Lord) described him as ‘pretty difficult and irritable’. With a good Flag Captain to temper his severe orders, all was well; but during the latter half of his time in the Baltic, and then aboard Hood in command of the Battlecruiser Squadron in the Atlantic Fleet, the combination of Cowan and an indifferent officer (whom Cowan liked simply because he could ride well) led to ‘most unfortunate results’. There was mutiny aboard his flagship Delhi in the Baltic later in 1919; while Hood was a ‘very unhappy ship’, and this combination was still an ‘evil legend’ in the Atlantic Fleet five years after Cowan’s departure.

In old age, Cowan admitted his failings. ‘When I commanded a squadron, I made the mistake of expecting too high a standard of discipline’, he stated. In fact, he had a strong death wish, tempered only by a belief in redemption through fire. His wife left him. Cowan’s whole life, in fact, was one long punitive
expedition against those essentially subversive persons and influences, whose lifestyle was not inspired by what he called ‘definiteness’—and in 1919 this included all Russians.

In the Second World War, he rejoined the colours when over 70, fighting with an Indian armoured regiment at Bir Hakim in the Western Desert, where he was taken prisoner, brought to Italy, and then repatriated because of his advanced age as being ‘of no further use’ to the British war effort. Furious at this slight, he got himself appointed naval liaison officer to the Commandos, and became a brother officer of the novelist Evelyn Waugh in the Middle East. Waugh describes him as a ‘very old, minute hero’, who was a sort of battalion mascot. Teetotal, non-smoking, he was ‘exquisitely polite, almost spinster-like’, but with a violent loathing of naval signalmen and Italian prisoners, and fairly intolerant of all sailors. He accompanied the Commando on their raids on the Italian coast, and on the islands of the Adriatic, much enjoying the bombing. They ought to have got us’, he is alleged to have said with marked regret after one such raid.\footnote{4} In 1944, he was awarded a bar to his DSO (47 years after the first award) in suitably portentous terms. On his retirement, he became secretary of the Warwickshire Hunt, and died in 1956.

In the Baltic, and especially in Latvia, the Allies had largely abdicated to the Germans (who were required under the Armistice terms not to withdraw until so ordered). But though the Latvian Government was managing, with British supplies, to raise troops to defend Latvia against the Bolsheviks after the German withdrawal, German troops were disarming the Latvian soldiers. Then Admiral Cowan wired that the Bolsheviks were conducting a reign of terror in Riga, the Latvian capital, but the Germans could not turn them out as the Allies had cut off their supplies. On April 13, therefore, Balfour wired Cowan that the Allies would ‘provisionally and until further notice’ allow the German Army in Latvia to be supplied by sea, provided the Germans left the young Latvian Army alone. As the Allies could not make the German troops obey, and would in fact use any means to stop any further Bolshevik advance, German control in the Baltic was thus further consolidated.\footnote{4}

But on April 16, German troops at the port of Libau arrested all Latvian officers and the Latvian Government (at which Polish troops, fearing a German advance east into Russia, at once seized the Lithuanian capital, Vilna). General von der Goltz (the German Commander) explained that the Latvian Government was Bolshevik, and a dangerous element in the area which he was administering by Allied order. This was too much. The Council of Four in Paris now moved quickly. Balfour admitted the anomalous position of using German troops ‘more or less as Allies’ while still at war with Germany; which, ‘under our very noses and partly with our help’, was restoring German influence in the Baltic. It was agreed to set up a Baltic Commission to make the Germans leave.

The DMO pounced on this at once; there was no time to be lost, he wrote. But Sir Henry Wilson felt that this would only ‘give us the certain gain of loss of valuable time! I am in favour of supporting Germans in the Baltic States’, he
minuted to Churchill, ‘because this is certain to bring them [the Germans] into collision with a regenerated Russia under Kolchak or some such person.’

‘I agree with C.I.G.S.,’ replied Churchill.

Thus, both the Germans and the Poles were bringing pressure on the Bolsheviks in Latvia and Lithuania.

Allied muddle and disunity were quite misunderstood in Moscow. On Lenin’s explicit orders, Trotsky’s Chief of Staff Sklyansky despatched a ‘biting telegram’ on the 24th to the Western Front. ‘Since the loss of Vilna, the Entente has become even more insolent’, he wired. Vilna must be retaken at once to prevent the enemy consolidating. ‘Speed up the advance…and act more energetically’.

Nothing whatever happened.

Allied interest in the small Russian Northern Corps in Estonia remained lukewarm. The Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) had by now set up a British bank in Helsinki, in which General Yudenitch’s Russian Committee had been given an interest; and a British agent (in fact Hugh Leech) had returned to London with Jules Hessen, a member of the Russian Committee, to raise £1 million, and send a shipload of arms and supplies to Yudenitch. The support of Clement Edwards (leader of the National Democratic Party) had been obtained, and the Treasury was being asked to approve the transfer of this credit, backed by Russian bankers in London and Helsinki, to the Russian Committee. But German pressure on the Russian bankers in Helsinki had now brought matters to a halt.

On March 28, Leech called at the Foreign Office both to try and make his peace with them, and to give some account of the Russian position in the Baltic. He saw Sir George Clerk, whom he quite impressed, and to whom he first gave a general account of events in Russia as he had seen them in 1918. ‘Ultimately, he [Leech] escaped to Finland, where he has been residing for some time’, wrote Clerk in an account of this interview.

‘In Finland itself, what we lack is a representative. There is no representative of the Foreign Office there whatever except Mr Bell, the Consul. He seems to have had no diplomatic training, being a man of business, and having been no more than Acting Consul. According to Mr Leech, he is a man of no force, and no special position. Moreover, what is fatal under the circumstances, he has no knowledge of Russians whatever. He is (naturally) accredited to the Finnish Government, and what little service he can render, is devoted entirely to dealing with that Government. But what is essential at this moment is some man who can undertake the carrying out of British policy in respect of Russia and Russians. Beyond Mr Bell, there is no British representative of any sort, except the Naval Attache, who is said to be of such extreme opinions as to be almost a Bolshevik himself. The position of the British Government, in the eyes of the Russian refugees, is deplorable. We are getting more and more hated, and there is great danger that the section of Russian opinion, which these refugees represent, will go over to Germany.’

Leech then made a plea for British support for General Yudenitch. ‘According to him, what is required is nothing more than the moral support of the British
Government, and a promise that if and when General Yudenitch takes Petrograd, the British Government will provide the population with food…

‘General Yudenitch will not communicate his plans to any representative of the British Government, because Russian leaders have done so often, and have been so often given away by the indiscretion of the recipients of the information, that they will never do so again. But he is not only able to dispose of this small body of troops, but is in relation with all the counter-revolutionary movements throughout the country. These appear to be very widely extended. The working-class of Petrograd hate the Bolsheviks, and all the Public Services, such as the railways etc and the Bolshevik Army, are run by officials who are really bitterly opposed to Bolshevism. They are constrained to undertake the positions which they hold, no doubt by fear, but at the first opportunity they would help to overthrow the Bolsheviks. And they could do so not merely by deserting, but by rendering the machine unworkable at the critical moment when the Bolsheviks want to use it.

‘Mr Leech considers that if an adequate diplomatic representative could be sent to Finland, and if the moral support, to the very modest extent which has been suggested of the British Government, could be extended to General Yudenitch and his friends, something would be done towards regaining the popularity of Great Britain amongst the loyal elements in Russia, which has been so gravely compromised."

In London, the main problem in the Baltic, it was thought, was not so much the capture of Petrograd, which was considered relatively simple, but feeding the starving city on recapture. Colonel Richard Steel (the DMO’s officer responsible for military operations in Russia) had asked Harold Williams (a journalist who specialised in Russian affairs) about it; and on April 8, Williams had sent an estimate by Vorobiev, former President of the Petrograd Corn Exchange, stating that the main requirement was grain. Taking the population of Petrograd and district as two million, they would need 24,000 tons of grain during the two months between the liberation of Petrograd and the restoration of normal trade, the cost of which (c.i.f.*) would be £603,600; other unspecified necessities would cost about £900,000."

Colonel Steel had also received from the French War Office several requests for help from Yudenitch, and a copy of a wire he had sent to Kolchak, requesting Kolchak to ask the Allies, from whom Yudenitch could get no reply. The French wished to know what had been or was to be given to Yudenitch, and whether French assistance was needed. Colonel Steel had replied that nothing had been or would be at present be sent, as little was known about Yudenitch in London, and it had not yet been decided in Paris which Allied Power was to help in the Baltic.

In Paris, Margulies (the former Petrograd lawyer, leading figure in the CNUR party in Odessa, and indefatigable diarist) confirmed, from visits to the Quai

* i.e., including carriage, insurance and freight charges.
d’Orsay and Ministry of Finance, that the French were waiting on the British. Gouchkov (former War Minister in the Russian Provisional Government in 1917) was fed up with all this delay, and told Margulies that he was going to Berlin to try and extract some of the Russian prisoners in Germany to build up Yudenitch’s force.5

Thus, lack of effective Allied policy towards the Russian Northern Corps in Estonia was also beginning to drive its adherents towards the Germans.

Another of the provisos of Ironside’s guarantee was that there should be a ‘certainty’ of successful cooperation by the Siberian forces. There could, of course, be ‘no positive guarantee’ about the Siberian Army, the General Staff admitted, but there was ‘every hope’.

The Allied press now took it upon themselves to turn ‘every hope’ into a ‘certainty’. There was, in fact, to be a press campaign boosting Kolchak’s advance, similar to the recent one which had predicted disaster in North Russia, unless a Relief Force was sent out.

Siberia

In London, Lord Curzon was angry that Churchill had forestalled him over his proposal for the recognition of Kolchak; this was a Foreign Office matter. ‘By a curious coincidence’, Curzon wrote to the Cabinet on April 17, ‘the Secretary of State for War has circulated to the War Cabinet a memorandum urging the recognition of Admiral Kolchak’s Government on the very day on which, without any knowledge of his intentions, I had addressed a dispatch to Mr Balfour at Paris in the same sense.’ He therefore now circulated his despatch.6

It appears that—in somewhat distorted fashion—the contents of the despatch leaked out. On the 18th, the New York Times reported unofficial advices from London that the Allied Powers would all recognise Admiral Kolchak as soon as the Germans had signed the Peace Treaty.

On the 19th, The Times, under the headline ‘High hopes for Moscow’, printed a report from Omsk, dated the 12th, stating that spring had suddenly arrived with a rush. The advance had been extremely rapid up to now, as sleighs could rush the troops up forty miles in a day, ‘but sleighs are now almost useless’, for ‘the roads are breaking up and within a fortnight will become impracticable’. The ice on the Volga was cracking, and would go during the week; then the ice on the river Kama to the north would go. Kolchak’s tactics would thus alter, ‘and the operations will probably slow down’, he warned ‘but regarding their outcome no doubt can be entertained’.

On the 20th, however, the New York Times, under the headline ‘Reds collapsing in the East’, quoted the Russian Embassy in Washington as stating that a Bolshevik collapse in Siberia was ‘imminent’, as the Red Army was becoming ‘more and more demoralised’.
London and Paris

That day, as George Barnes (the Labour Minister) sent the Prime Minister a short paper, approved by General Smuts, urging him to come to terms with the Bolsheviks, Churchill, amidst this barrage of exaggerated and false press headlines, tackled Lloyd George on the Nansen proposal. He was ‘somewhat perplexed’ by the Council of Four’s letter to Nansen about Russian relief, he wrote to Lloyd George. ‘I do not understand what course you actually contemplate.’ As the Prime Minister had pointed out in his speech on April 16th, the areas held by Kolchak and Denikin were the richest in Russia. Therefore to give food to the rest of Russia is to put the Bolsheviks on an equality with these loyal armies and to rob the latter of one of their principal advantages. Further, economic pressure in Bolshevik Russia was ‘undoubtedly a tremendous weapon’ leading to the Bolshevik breakdown and overthrow. ‘If this pressure is removed, the regime will be strengthened.’ Finally, the Nansen scheme would bring the Allies into ‘close and complicated’ relations with the Bolshevik Government, and thus increase their prestige.

Therefore, ‘from every point of view it seems to me that the proposal to feed Russia “impartially”, which means in practice feeding Bolshevik Russia, as the others already have food, will not commend itself to Denikin and Kolchak’, wrote Churchill. ‘Kolchak’s armies are advancing victoriously at the present time on a very wide front, and there are good hopes that this advance will continue.’ They would certainly not stop to allow the Bolsheviks to be fed. ‘I do not think they could afford to do so for a moment’, he explained, ‘because their armies, if remaining stationary during a kind of armistice, would disintegrate and Bolshevik propaganda, which is even more formidable than Bolshevik arms, would continue unabated during the truce.’ What would happen if there was no ceasefire, and the scheme fell through? ‘Will you simply drop the proposal, or will you wish to put pressure on Kolchak?’ Churchill feared Kolchak might thus be denied his promised munitions, ‘which are indispensable to his continued success. I hope indeed that this will not be so’. There was no answer to this all too logical letter.

The same day (the 22nd), Churchill sent a copy of this letter to Curzon. ‘I must frankly confess myself utterly unable to understand’, he wrote in a covering note, ‘how we can feed the Bolsheviks with the one hand and fight them with the other, and how we can reconcile feeding Bolshevik Russia with re-arming the armies of Denikin and Kolchak. Is it our plan to keep both sides going in order that they may continue fighting for ever?’

‘I am very glad that you have advocated the recognition of Kolchak. The General Staff consider that the moment has come for this, but how can it be done at the same time as we are feeding Lenin and Trotsky?’ Churchill then wrote a brief angry personal letter to Austen Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, enclosing an official War Office letter to the Treasury on the need for continued payments to the Russian Military Mission in London. Churchill detailed the progress made by the various White Russian
Armies, and stressed the advance by Kolchak.’ At this moment to paralyse the Russian Missions here for the sake of sums in the neighbourhood of £1,236 is, I think, wholly out of harmony with the interests of the country and the policy we have been definitely authorised to pursue…I hope this matter may have your personal attention. The subordinate officials of the Treasury seem to me to hit out blindly at every item of expenditure, however necessary or however small, without any clear conception of the policy which the Government proposes to pursue.’

**Siberia**

On April 21, a wire reached the War Office from General Knox at Ekaterinburg, stating that Kolchak’s army had crossed the Kama river, was mobilising the population in the newly occupied regions; and after reorganising and strengthening its divisions, would continue its offensive westward towards Kazan and Viatka. The same day (the 21st), *The Times* correspondent was reporting from Ekaterinburg that Gajda’s troops had taken Glazov, midway between Perm and Viatka. ‘The fall of Glazov means the doom of Viatka’, he wired, ‘whence we can stretch a firm hand to Kotlas’. On the 24th, *The Times* correspondent was reporting from Ekaterinburg that the Siberian Army had reached Chistopol (the last port on the Kama river before it joins the Volga), only 70 miles from Kazan; while the Uralsk Cossacks were now 35 miles west of Uralsk, thus straightening the White Russian line to the Caspian. The position was ‘never brighter’.

The Bolsheviks were concerned about Chistopol, where there were many supplies and a Bolshevik flotilla. During a meeting, Lenin passed a note to Sklyansky (Trotsky’s Chief of Staff), telling him to instruct the Eastern Front to hold the town. Sklyansky scribbled back: ‘Better if you wrote out a telegram to Gusev now.’ Lenin did so. ‘Special measures must be taken for aiding Chistopol’, he wired. But though Lenin was too late, Chistopol had just been held until the ice broke up, and the ships and stores removed before Kolchak’s troops entered.

Allied—especially American—press hysteria over Kolchak continued. On April 21, the *New York Times* even stated firmly that Kolchak had attained power the previous November by means of a ‘democratic change. There was no arbitrary coup d’état’

Lord Curzon now decided to answer Sir Charles Eliot’s various private letters, which had taken some time to reach London, in a private and personal wire to Vladivostok.

‘I fully realise that you must feel you have been left somewhat in the dark as regards our policy towards Russia’, he stated on April 21, ‘but it has been, and still is, difficult to give an indication of the policy of His Majesty’s Government, which has necessarily to be subordinated to the results of the deliberations of the Paris Conference. So far that body has produced little that is concrete beyond the Prinkipo invitation.’

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(Lord Robert Cecil here added to the draft in his own hand: ‘That proposal was
never communicated to us officially, and we assumed that Paris would take such
steps as seemed advisable for warning or consulting Allied Representatives in
Russia.’)

Curzon went on: ‘I was accordingly unable to give you any information. It was
not in fact till March 23rd that I was told from Paris that the proposal might be
definitely considered to have lapsed, and by that time it was patent to the world.’
Since then, there had been a tendency to concentrate on the consolidation of the
former Russian border states, from the Baltic southwards, in particular Estonia
and Poland, as a barrier against the Bolshevik advance; and, short of the actual
despatch of troops, Britain had done what she could to strengthen and assist them
materially by sending them supplies and food, thereby helping to establish what was
known as the ‘Cordon Sanitaire’.

The principle of self-determination, in fact, obliged Britain to encourage the
growth of these new states, and also of Finland; and that was why she had so far
hesitated to support the small Russian forces, under General Yudenitch, which
were operating both in Finland, and astride Estonia and Latvia, since his aims,
which were supposed to be monarchical, must necessarily conflict with the
national aspirations of the border states towards independence. ‘Kolchak and
Denikin may perhaps share his political views in this respect, but they are remote,
and in any case recognition of the former would probably be made conditional on
his renouncing all idea of eventual reconquest of the border states.’ Poland, added
Curzon, had been recognised as a sovereign independent state, and Britain was
doing everything possible to ensure her reconstruction and strengthen her military
resources.

‘The Soviet Government is regarded as wholly unrepresentative of Russia, and
it is not proposed to try to come to terms with them. On the contrary, we are giving
our full moral, and in a lesser degree material, support to General Denikin and
Monsieur Tchaikovsky (at Archangel) in their efforts to overthrow it. Public
opinion, including nearly all sections of Labour, is on the whole anti-Bolshevik,
but definitely opposed to military intervention in Russia on a large scale. In any
case, such intervention would involve us in too great commitments (‘military and
financial’, added by Curzon personally), from which it would be impossible to
recede, nor can Russia really be regenerated except by the Russians themselves.’
The freshly recruited troops being sent to North Russia were solely to relieve the
hard pressed Archangel forces, and to cover a withdrawal, to which circumstances
might compel Britain in the near future.

Britain was, however, blockading Bolshevik Russia, and was ‘not without hope
that economic conditions will eventually upset the Soviet Government’, he
stated.

‘Confidential. The evacuation of Odessa and now of Sebastopol is said to have
been necessitated by the impossibility of feeding the population, but the situation
in both cases was mainly due to French incompetence. The consequent blow to
the Allied cause and the enhancement of Bolshevik prestige are incontestable.
'As regards the Omsk Government, I have urged the War Cabinet to recognise Admiral Kolchak, and, as you know, all our efforts are directed to securing coordination and harmony among the Allied Powers who are working in Siberia. 'I have every confidence in your handling of this difficult problem and you may rely on my entire support', Curzon assure Eliot in conclusion.10

On the 22nd, as The Times headlined ‘Victorious Siberian Army—100 miles from the Volga’, the New York Times, under the headline ‘Red rule totters as Kolchak wins’, stated that their Washington correspondent reported that the Allied decision (sic) to recognise the Omsk Government was reached ‘under the leadership of the United States’. This was nonsense. Next day, the New York Times reported that news was reaching the State Department that the ‘Lenin-Trotsky regime is beginning to crack’; and—added a Geneva report of the 22nd—it was being ‘menaced by an entirely new revolutionary movement’.

In fact, during the first three weeks of April, news of Kolchak’s campaign was ‘not substantial’, wrote Walter Lippmann (who later made a special investigation into the appallingly low standard of American journalism during this period). In fact, the ‘extraordinary thing about the news of Kolchak’s westward push’, he rightly pointed out, ‘is the extravagance of the claims that were made for him, on the basis of what can fairly be called indefinite information’.11

The standard of British journalism, especially in The Times, was nearly as bad. The Times was constantly stating that Kolchak was going to win, and would get to Moscow, and so on, not because they had hard evidence to support such an assertion, but because they could not imagine a situation in which he was defeated. What, in fact, was reported as hard news was simply wishful thinking.

North Russia

At Archangel, there was increasing tension in the absence of any real orders, and everyone—including General Ironside—was speculating on what they were going to do. On April 15, the American Consul Poole had wired from Archangel to the State Department that though two British brigades were coming out, ‘Ironside insists that he is without definite instructions from London’, but thought it was agreed to help the Russian troops ‘perfect the union with Siberia’. The ‘logical development’, Ironside had told Poole, would thus be to ‘advance on Kotlas as promptly as possible’. This crossed a strong rebuke from Lansing, the American Secretary of State, in Paris: the State Department was to give no military information whatever to Poole. On the 17th, Consul Poole acknowledged Lansing’s rebuke. ‘I understand this to mean that there is unity of policy with Great Britain’, he wired.12 Ironside had the day before received ‘detailed information’ about the new British force, which would number 12,000 men. ‘The final objective will be the occupation of Kotlas’, he stated.

At Murmansk, as General Maynard pushed on down the Murmansk railway, he heard that a Finnish force was assembling north of lake Ladoga. On April 17, he wired the War Office for permission to continue his advance, and seize the
shipping on lake Onega before the ice broke. This would give him a very strong position, and a ‘splendid opportunity’ for joint action with the Finnish force to expel the Bolsheviks from Petrozavodsk, further down the western shore of Lake Onega, and the last important town on the Murmansk railway before Petrograd.  

There was no immediate reply from the War Office.

At Archangel, Lindley was much concerned about Maynard’s state of nerves and general sanity. After Maynard’s scare report in early April that the Finnish Legion was about to revolt and join the Bolsheviks, Lindley had wired privately to Lord Curzon that the Archangel command considered that General Maynard had all along taken much too alarmist a view of his position. Lindley urged that Murmansk now be placed under the Archangel command. ‘General Ironside being junior to General May [sic] and not desiring to appear to seek to increase importance of his command, has probably not put forward case for unity as strongly as he would have done in other circumstances’, explained Lindley. ‘But as a non-interested party, who has followed matter as closely as a civilian can, I venture to recommend most strongly that change be made. If it is necessary to substitute someone else for General May, state of his health entirely warrants change.’ General Ironside had the necessary physique and stamina needed for this very arduous campaign; and whatever else was decided, he should remain in supreme command at Archangel.

This appears to have drawn no response from Curzon. But on April 20, just after Maynard had wired with news of another Finnish force, this time on his side, Lindley wired again to Lord Curzon that two reliable travellers had just arrived overland from Murmansk and reported that ‘utmost nervousness’ existed in the town, due to the general panicky attitude of Maynard and his staff. ‘No one knows what it is all about, but people seem to be afraid of attack by unarmed [rail]men and a few Chinese on troops well supplied with machine guns and covered by British battleship’, explained Lindley. ‘I trust I shall not be considered as going beyond my province in expressing strong opinion it is time General M’s state of health really unfits him for his position [and he] was replaced by more robust and less nervous officer definitely under General Ironside.’ Quite apart from military reasons, Lindley had no sort of control over Maynard from Archangel, and he was now ‘seriously afraid’ of Maynard committing some blunder, which would involve serious political consequences. If Ironside were in supreme military control, he could always be sure that the political side of any question would be given due consideration.

The Foreign Office was now concerned. ‘This might be mentioned privately to Gen. Radcliffe, the D.M.O.’, minuted Lord Robert Cecil.

Lord Curzon felt for General Maynard. ‘His nerves are obviously shattered’, he added. But nothing was done to remove him from Murmansk.

Consul Poole’s wires soon reached the American Delegation in Paris. On April 22, President Wilson asked Lloyd George if more British troops were being sent to Archangel; instead of withdrawing, he was told, Ironside was taking steps to link up the Russian troops in North Russia and Siberia, ‘which would involve an
advance to Kotlas and Viatka’, and 12,000 more British troops were being sent out. Lloyd George replied that there must be some misunderstanding. As great importance was attached to secrecy about the withdrawal from North Russia, this was possibly ‘some local bluff’ to give the impression that there would be no withdrawal. Not nearly so many British troops were being sent. But he would look into the matter.14

Three days later (on the 25th), Lloyd George told President Wilson that only 5,000 British troops were being sent out to Archangel.

In London, Churchill was much more cautious. A wire had recently arrived from Ironside, he minuted to Sir Henry Wilson on the 22nd, about withdrawing his present troops the moment the Relief Force arrived. ‘In my opinion it is too soon now to take decisions of this character.’ Before Britain could withdraw, reinforcement of the whole North Russian theatre must have been completed. When the Relief Force was in position, and British troops were at maximum strength, it would be easy to disentangle the tired troops from the line first. ‘But there may easily be one month in which both the Relief Force and the present force are in contact with the enemy together. Nothing will be lost if this occurs. I did not contemplate the ships being filled up with men pulled out of the line and sent back to England immediately’, he underlined. ‘The policy is that we are to go’, he admitted, ‘but as between June and July I conceive we have latitude.’

Every day gained might enable the Russian troops whom Ironside was raising to acquire enough strength to hold their positions, ‘and secondly may enable Kolchak’s forces to come into touch on our left Archangel flank’.15 These possibilities must not be sacrificed for the sake of a few weeks one way or the other. The War Office thus should first use the Relief Force to establish the British position strongly, and then consider how to carry out the evacuation. He asked to see any telegram concerning these matters before it was sent to Ironside and Maynard.

The next day (the 23rd), Churchill was more explicit in private conversation about what he really had in mind. ‘The response for Archangel—3,500 men—is good’, records Sir Henry Wilson in his diary, ‘& Winston & I discussed a good punch towards Viatka to join with Kolchak before we cleared out.’16

On April 24, as The Times headlined, ‘Awaiting battle at Archangel—Action likely within 10 days’, it was decided that Ironside should be sent plenty of poison gas.

*‘D.A.’ was the code name for diphenyl chlorasine, a non-lethal gas, which caused violent irritation to the nose and throat, running of the eyes, prolonged sneezing, pains in the chest, and violent nausea and vomiting. This gas, however, was difficult to manufacture. ‘D.M.’ was the code name for diphenylamine chlorasine, which was ‘superior’ to DA, [and had] to be discharged by thermogenerator; but as it had only come into service since the Armistice, it had never been used. It would appear that either Sir Keith Price had muddled the two up, or that DA had been turned into a lethal gas.
On March 27, the War Office had asked him if he wanted smoke generators containing a secret type of gas sent out. Ironside replied that he did. Churchill was doubtful. ‘Are you sure that it is wise to give away the secret of our new gas for the sake of such a small application as would be possible in North Russia?’ he asked the General Staff on April 4. The answer was that some—unnamed—experts stated that it would not be long before the secret was out anyway. The question is, therefore, whether we are likely to have any other use for this gas within the next few years; if we are, it might be a pity to use it in Russia; if not, there is no argument against doing so…we would also heighten our prestige among our allies and other countries who have not been pioneers in this weapon; and in addition we would provide a fillip and a triumph for our scientists, which is a matter of no little importance.’ The DCIGS accepted this monstrous advice, and told Churchill that he thought that a ‘case is made in favour of using but it will depend on report from the Adviser who starts on the 9th and will wire back’. Churchill agreed. ‘Of course I shd vy much like the Bolsheviks to have it, if we can afford the disclosures as proposed.’ Two days later, the War Office informed Ironside that 24 gas officers would be sent out.

On April 16, Churchill’s secretary received a letter (probably in answer to a request for advice) from Sir Keith Price (who had been in charge of explosives and chemicals on Churchill’s Munitions Council, when he was Minister of Munitions), which stated, ‘If there is going to be a White Sea campaign, do not let the powers that be overlook the new gas generators. I really believe they are the most deadly weapon which has yet been produced, and in my opinion they can quite conveniently be used in North Russia being very handy and portable. The D.M. generator knocks people out for say 48 hours but does not kill them, the D.A. kills alright,* which is the right medicine for the Bolshevist, I don’t know. I know the Archangel district pretty well and the kind of country we shall have to fight in, and you may take it that artillery is not likely to be much good, there is far too much forest; but gas would I think drift along very nicely, and certainly put the wind up someone. I believe if you got home only once with the gas you would find no more Bolshies this side [i.e. north] of Vologda. With kind regards…’

This letter seems to have clinched it. On April 24, the General Staff stated that they were sending out 50,000 generators, enough for an half-hour discharge on a five-mile front, and 10,000 respirators. Secrecy, they maintained, would not last long anyhow. ‘As regards safety of civilians…considering its general efficiency this gas is much less likely to kill or even to leave permanent effects than most and as we never hesitated on account of risk to French civilians to use more deadly types of gas in France, why should we do so now? This, we know, is also the opinion of the Secretary of State.’ The gas was duly sent out.

Less than a month later, this lead to awkward questions in the House of Commons. On May 19, Colonel Wedgwood asked Churchill ‘whether poison gas or plant for the making of it has been sent to Russia for use against the revolutionary Russians, either for the use of our troops or for the use of counter-
revolutionary Russians?’ Captain Guest stated: ‘As the Bolsheviks have already employed gas on the Northern front, preparations are being made to retaliate with this weapon. Every precaution is being taken to protect our brave troops against the inhuman methods of the Soviet forces.’

It must be emphasised that there is no proof that the Bolsheviks ever employed poison gas in North Russia.

On April 25, rumours reached Paris that the Finnish force, operating south of Murmansk, was now moving on Olonetz (between Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega, and south of Petrozavodsk), apparently for an attack on Petrograd. That day, as Ironside’s new Chief of Staff arrived at Archangel with a copy of the War Office paper of April 15 (which, of course, contained no orders, simply proposals), fighting began again on the Dvina front. After a further Russian mutiny, the Bolsheviks attacked just below Bereznik (the junction of the Dvina and Vaga rivers), and Allied troops had to retire.  

London and Paris

On April 25th, a telegram reached the War Office from General Knox in Ekaterinburg, stating that General Gajda declared that by the end of May he would occupy Kotlas and Viatka with his own forces, and without British assistance.

This evidently had a strong effect on Churchill.

On April 26, Churchill wrote again to the Prime Minister about Kolchak, who had now achieved a ‘very remarkable measure of success’, might soon reach the Volga, and then advance on Moscow. He had already made contact by patrol with Russian troops at Archangel, which had been fighting ‘extremely well’, he stressed. If they were ‘fostered and seconded with real goodwill, Britain could thus withdraw without leaving the Archangel Government, the ‘most democratic’ anti-Bolshevik Government, in the lurch, and without bringing away the local people, or leaving them to be massacred. Though things were always ‘very changeable’ in Russia, he thus urged Lloyd George to do everything possible to assist the Russian forces under Kolchak and at Archangel, ‘which may conceivably, in the improving circumstances, be able to defend themselves when we are gone’. Kolchak’s advance was the ‘more remarkable’ since it had been carried out by 100,000 ‘purely Russian’ troops, for the ‘Czechos’ were now simply guarding the Siberian railway. Another 100,000 Russian troops were being assembled, five divisions of whom would reach the front in the next three months. ‘Apparently wherever Bolshevism has been tried it is loathed’, he wrote. ‘It is only popular where it has not been felt, and Kolchak’s armies have been well received by the population on their onward march.’ (Churchill exaggerates all these facts and figures.) Britain had given £12 million worth of munitions to Kolchak, which was more than any other Allied Power. In fact, all the White Russian Armies had already received substantial British support, which ‘may shortly prove effective’.
Both the Foreign Office and the War Office recommended recognition of Kolchak, ‘and I most earnestly press it upon you at this juncture’. It was ‘entirely justified’, would have a ‘most favourable’ military effect, give the ‘greatest possible satisfaction’ to Lloyd George’s Parliamentary supporters, and ‘consolidate our Russian policy and strengthen your hand in many directions’. But before it was done, ‘I think it would be a very good thing if your suggestion of trying to secure a democratic programme about Russian land from Kolchak were carried through’. Since Chaikovsky, head of the ‘most democratic’ anti-Bolshevik Government (at Archangel), was about to join Kolchak’s Government, the moment thus appeared ‘very favourable for securing from the Kolchak Government a declaration of policy in regard to (a) the land and (b) a constitutional and non-autocratic [“dem” crossed out, and “aut” added in ink] regime, in return for their simultaneous recognition by the Allies, or at any rate by Great Britain’.

He concluded, ‘I send you herewith a military paper [of April 15th] which has been prepared by the General Staff, to the general policy of which I desire to obtain your approval and that of the Cabinet. If necessary Wilson and I can come over to see you on this subject, which seems to me to be of equal importance and urgency.’

He added a post-script in his own hand. ‘Since writing the above yr summons to H.W. has arrived, & I therefore ask him to deliver this letter personally to you.’

The same day, Churchill sent a copy of the General Staff paper to Curzon, adding that he hoped to have it considered by the Cabinet on April 30 or May 1. ‘You will see that, owing to Kolchak’s victories, the improvement in the morale and increase in numbers of the Russian troops in North Russia, and the fact that we have at our disposal a compact body of highly disciplined volunteers, there is now a prospect, for the first time, of our getting clear from North Russia without humiliation to ourselves and disaster to all who have trusted in us.’

He asked Curzon to give the paper the most careful attention, as he intended to press for a formal Cabinet decision on it. He earnestly hoped that he could count on Curzon’s support for what was General Staff policy, he underlined.

On arrival in Paris, Sir Henry Wilson found a rather curious letter awaiting him from General Spears (head of the British Military Mission in Paris), who had just met a Russian Princess Kotchouby, who had recently escaped from the Caucasus.

‘Some of her friends were shot for having 3 shirts. A great many executions constantly took place, the condemned persons being mostly buried alive’, wrote Spears. ‘At one place, on the train, the Kotchoubys were in a truck with some Red Guards, and a man, his wife and a very young child. The mother of the child had lost a small boy on the journey, which had affected her health, and her baby, suffering from this, kept crying. The Red Guards ordered the mother to keep her child quiet, which she endeavoured to do, but however failed. The Bolsheviks thereupon flung the child out of the moving train. The father protested. Nothing was said at the time, but at the next halt, he was taken out of the train and tied
down across the rails, the coach in which were his wife and the Commissioner, passing over his body.

‘At another place they went through, a lot of Bolsheviks had got hold of great tanks of alcohol from which they were all drinking. In order to drink with more ease, they had put planks across the tops of these tanks; presently the whole thing caught fire and the scaffolding broke down with the men falling into the burning liquid. More planks were at once put across the tanks and a fresh batch of men presently fell in, the remainder calmly going on drinking this mixture of stewed Bolshevik and alcohol…

‘One rather curious fact is that people, even in the position of the Princess, feared the anti-Bolshevik army almost as much as the Bolsheviks, as they appear to have been quite as cruel.’

This letter was also passed to the Prime Minister. (On May 3, General Spears wrote to Frances Stevenson [Lloyd George’s private secretary], enclosing various other accounts of Bolshevik atrocities, to supplement the tale of the Princess.)

On the evening of the 27th, Sir Henry Wilson dined with the Prime Minister; and after dinner, they had a short discussion about Churchill’s letter (which Sir Henry Wilson fortunately appears to have opened before handing it to Lloyd George, since the alteration of the word ‘non-democratic’ to ‘non-autocratic’ seems to be in his hand), and about the General Staff paper. Sir Henry Wilson had been round again next morning for a further talk with the Prime Minister. But with the Peace Treaty soon to be handed to the Germans, their conversations were constantly interrupted by other people, coming in with other subjects on which they wanted a decision; and pressure on the Prime Minister and everyone else was very great. But after two talks with Lloyd George, Sir Henry Wilson summarised the Prime Minister’s thinking for Churchill as follows:

‘He wants to know exactly what it is you mean by recognising the Government of Kolchak. He says that he cannot find in your letter a clear definition of your proposal, and he wants to know whether you think Kolchak ought to be recognised as the de facto Governor of Siberia, in which case he thinks we may clash both with Kolchak and with Sazonov, who claim that Kolchak represents the Government of all Russia; or

‘Whether you wish to recognise Kolchak as the Governor of all Russia, i.e. European Russia and Siberia?’

Sir Henry Wilson had told the Prime Minister that he thought it would do if Kolchak were recognised for those parts of Siberia and European Russia which he actually controlled; similarly Britain could recognise Chaikovsky as the de facto Governor of that part of North Russia which he controlled. ‘I pressed strongly the view that without unnecessarily delaying our own departure from Archangel and Murmansk, we ought to do all in our power to stretch out a hand to Kolchak’s people, so that before we went, the Chaikovsky Government and the Kolchak Government would be in immediate touch’, Sir Henry Wilson reported to Churchill.
‘I did not find the Prime Minister opposed to this idea, although he was not as enthusiastic about it as we are’, Sir Henry Wilson went on. The CIGS had also pointed out that a paper on the Russian situation, drawn up by the British Military Section in Paris, stated that, from all the evidence in their possession, the Bolsheviks appeared to be tiring of their campaigns in North and East Russia, and in the future appeared to be going to concentrate on the Ukraine. ‘This is all in favour of our plan, and makes our proposals all the easier’, added Sir Henry Wilson.22

Churchill received this letter the same day (the 28th), and replied at once in his own hand to the Prime Minister. ‘You seem to be having exciting times in Paris & Wilson having quarrelled with Italy* will have to be extra-civil to the British Empire. I suppose you foresaw that trend of events.

‘Don’t be vexed with me about my Kolchak. There really is a good chance of his pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for all of us. The volunteering for N.Russia is quite good, & almost all are men who wd not join the ordinary Army. I am reaching the modest limit we require vy soon & shutting it down. “House full.”’23

Meanwhile, the press boost for Kolchak continued unabated. On April 28, the New York Times printed an Associated Press report from Paris that Kolchak was now only forty miles east of Samara. On the 29th, The Times headlined, ‘Reds in Full Flight—Sweeping to the Volga’.

When the War Cabinet met at noon that day, Churchill urged Bonar Law, who was just off for a further visit to Paris, to obtain the Prime Minister’s view on the recognition of Kolchak, as recommended by the War Office. The night before, a wire had arrived stating that Kolchak expected to be in Kotlas in late May or early June. If so, this would ‘greatly facilitate’ future operations. But before recognition, Kolchak should be asked to declare his ‘democratic policy’ on the land question, etc. The people of this country should be reassured that we were not endeavouring to reinstate a Tsarist regime’, stated Churchill. He also hoped that Bonar Law would induce the Prime Minister to decide in favour of the General Staff proposals for North Russia.25

As soon as the Cabinet was over, Churchill wired Sir Henry Wilson in Paris to discover whether he had obtained any result in his discussions with the Prime Minister about the proposals for North Russia. ‘Mr Bonar Law thinks that till the Prime Minister’s opinion has been expressed, it cannot be brought before the Cabinet.’ But it was vital that in the near future the Cabinet should reach a formal decision either for or against the General Staff proposals, ‘as such matters

* The Italian delegates claimed Fiume (near Trieste), whereupon President Wilson vetoed the claim, and appealed over their heads to the Italian people. This lead to a violent row in the Council of Four, so violent that Lloyd George’s butler, looking out of the window in the rue Nitot towards President Wilson’s house next door, saw Orlando (the Italian Prime Minister) leaning against the window of the Council chamber weeping.24 The Italian delegates then returned to Rome.
cannot remain indefinitely in suspense’. Churchill thus hoped that Sir Henry Wilson would first try to convince the Prime Minister ‘of the wisdom and necessity’ of the course proposed, and that he would then pass the matter on to the Cabinet with a favourable expression of his opinion. If he was not convinced, Churchill still hoped he would allow the matter to come before the Cabinet, so that a ‘formal definite record’ of the decision might be taken.26

Churchill then wired Sir Henry Wilson about the equipment needed for a ‘possible expansion’ of Kolchak’s armies. ‘Already we are asked whether we can supply 100,000 equipments for a general mobilisation around Viatka, should that fall into Kolchak’s hands. I am strongly in favour of supplying these equipments, although it is a new demand. Then there is the expansion of the Russian forces at Archangel, which may require another 10,000 or 15,000 equipments.’26

In Paris, Sir Henry Wilson received Churchill’s wire about the General Staff proposals on the morning of the 30th. He had not been able to see Lloyd George at all on the 29th, and as he had failed to see him that morning, he ‘got a message to him impressing him with the importance of this Russian problem, and telling him how anxious you [Churchill] were about it, and how important it was to get a decision from him at any rate to allow the matter to go before our Cabinet at home’. Bonar Law would be in Paris that evening, and he and Sir Henry Wilson might be able to make a ‘combined attack’ on Lloyd George the day after. But there was a great state of scramble going on in the last few hours before they met the Germans, and matters were complicated by the absence of the Italians.26

On April 30, therefore, while he was kept hanging about waiting for Lloyd George, Sir Henry Wilson secretly wired via General Knox to Kolchak stating that Britain hoped, before Allied troops were withdrawn from North Russia that winter, to enable the Archangel Government to stand alone by securing a real link with the Siberian Army. Two British brigades were thus going out to Archangel, with Russian officers and supplies; and it was hoped that Ironside could then strike the Bolsheviks a hard blow and reach Kotlas. But a real link depended upon help from Kolchak, whom the War Office considered the major figure in the military situation. They felt he could:

1. Try to join Denikin with his left flank. This operation seemed very difficult, as Denikin was now held down, and might be hard to supply through the Black Sea when the French finally left South Russia; and would be even more difficult when Denikin lost control of the Caspian on the British withdrawal. Thus, the objections to this move were many, and the potential results seemed small.

2. Move straight on Moscow, thus reducing Bolshevik pressure on both Denikin and the Archangel forces, from where he could link up with all Russian forces from the White Sea to the Black. If feasible, this operation would be decisive.
3. Move his right flank towards Viatka and Vologda, and thus link up with the White Sea and Archangel. He could then move south on Moscow, or west on Petrograd.

But the Ukraine was mainly in Bolshevik hands; Denikin’s left wing, in spite of British help, might have to retire south of the Don, from which Kolchak was at least 650 miles distant; while from the Dniester mouth to the Baltic, all action was limited to the defensive. Finland did not want to fight the Bolsheviks, though their little force near Olonetz might help Maynard to capture the Russian ships on Lake Onega, and thus establish a river link with Vologda and Yaroslavl. But if Kolchak’s main objective was to link up with North Russia, he must state what British help he wanted, and send a definite plan for submission to the War Cabinet. The War Office would then say if they could help, and he could then decide; but the War Cabinet could not be asked until the War Office knew whether such a move were feasible. With a sound plan, however, Britain would do her best, ‘and whatever we promise will certainly be carried out’. In conclusion, Sir Henry Wilson wired, ‘please convey my heartiest congratulations to Admiral Kolchak on his recent magnificent successes. With all my confidence in the Siberian Armies, their victories have surpassed my most sanguine expectations’, he ended.

Lloyd George, meanwhile, had been making his own soundings of the Russian scene. On the 29th, he had seen Chaikovsky, Prime Minister of the Archangel Government, who evidently spoke disparagingly of the reactionary views of both Kolchak and Denikin and their entourage. When Lloyd George asked Chaikovsky what sort of Russian Government he and Kolchak, in the event of a link-up, were proposing to set up—whether it would be a form of Tsardom or a more democratic institution—Chaikovsky had to reply that he would consult Kolchak, and let the Prime Minister know in due course.

But Chaikovsky had let fall some remarks which might induce the Council of Four, and especially President Wilson, to approve the coming link-up between the forces at Archangel and the Siberian Army. On the 30th, therefore, Lloyd George urged the Council of Four to see Chaikovsky, who was very hopeful that Russian forces at Archangel might link up with Kolchak ‘by their own efforts’. President Wilson was suspicious. There would be little use in seeing Chaikovsky, he stated; his views had already been received by telegram. There was only one American regiment at Archangel, and American opinion would not tolerate the despatch of more American troops, he warned Lloyd George. At this, the Prime Minister remarked that the British Government had called for volunteers, and had received more offers than they could accept.

But as Lloyd George could not obtain the Council of Four’s acquiescence to the Kotlas operation even by this method of presentation, he had to let the matter drop.

On April 28, as The Times headlined ‘When the ice breaks—Archangel ready for the Attack’, British Intelligence at Archangel wired the DMI: ‘Intelligence
Bereznik reports river flowing rapidly and has risen two or three feet only occasional ice on surface main ice now considered to have passed and river now believed open up to Kotlas…Dvina column reports ice going down rapidly water rising almost level with islands.29

On the 29th, the DMI received another such wire stating that Bolshevik deserters, who had been further examined on the 28th, stated that the Bolshevik steamers at Kotlas had not been burnt out, as previously reported; but the machinery of 16 armed steamers had been removed for repair at Kotlas.29 ‘Counter-revolutionaries blew up workshop thus rendering 16 vessels unserviceable until machinery can be replaced’, claimed the wire.

But that day (the 29th), while the British flotilla was still iced in at Archangel, Bolshevik gunboats reappeared on the Dvina river. The same day, the War Office approved General Maynard’s seizure of the shipping on Lake Onega; but he was not to link up with the Finnish force near Olonetz to his south until the Finnish Government undertook to return this territory to the Russians.30

On April 29, meanwhile, news had reached Paris that the Bolsheviks were evacuating Petrograd in face of this Finnish advance. The big question for the Russians in Paris was—how would this affect General Yudenitch and the Russian Northern Corps in Estonia?

Savinkov was pessimistic; without Finnish and Estonian support, he told Margulies on the 29th, ‘the whole project is childish—Yudenitch has nobody’. As the Russians in Paris had refused any concessions to Estonia, he had wired to Kolchak insisting on de facto recognition of Estonia. They must act fast in the Baltic; the Finns were already on the move. Money and supplies would have to be obtained from England; but the British had no confidence in Yudenitch’s Russian Committee. The same day, Margulies asked General Golovin whether it was any use urging the British to support Yudenitch to enable him to reach agreement with Estonia, in spite of Kolchak’s probable refusal.31 ‘It doesn’t matter what Kolchak says’, replied Golovin, ‘some agreement with the Estonians must be and can be reached.’

On April 30, news reached London that the Finnish force, coming down between Lakes Onega and Ladoga, was approaching Petrograd. That day, Clement Edwards hurriedly organised a meeting of some 40 MPs, whom Vorobiev, the Chairman of the Petrograd Corn Exchange, addressed about supplying the city with food; and Clement Edwards then went to the War Office, on behalf of the National Democratic Party, to urge immediate action. Some 6,000 Finns were marching on Petrograd to take it before Yudenitch, he said, and thus to purchase Russian recognition of Finnish independence on handing the city over to him.31 As Yudenitch had already offered to take Petrograd if given supplies and food, Clement Edwards stated the War Cabinet should guarantee the food, and let Yudenitch go ahead; this would make the Finns cooperate. That night, Clement Edwards tried without success to raise the question of British support for Yudenitch in the House of Commons.
On May 1, *The Times* printed a report from Abo, dated April 29, confirming that according to ‘trustworthy information’, Petrograd was being evacuated by the Bolsheviks, ‘who are keeping the happenings in the Olonetz district strictly secret from the Petrograd population. Finlanders confidently expect the fall of Petrograd within a few weeks’.

That day, Harmsworth sent a minute to the Prime Minister, marked: *General Yudenitch and Petrograd*, in which Harmsworth wrote: ‘Clement Edwards was very keen on raising this question on the adjournment last night, and it was with some difficulty I persuaded him not to do so…Edwards says he has authentic information confirming the evacuation of Petrograd by the Bolsheviks.’ He added. ‘So far it has not been confirmed at the Foreign Office.’

Churchill now for the first time had to consider the possibility of a successful attack on Petrograd in conjunction with a link-up between the Archangel and Siberian forces. He wired Lloyd George that the British Fleet in the Baltic, accompanied by some foodships, should be told to stand by to go into Petrograd to feed the starving capital immediately on its recapture.

In Paris, the Prime Minister had to be induced to make some decisions. On May 1, Bonar Law and Sir Henry Wilson had a long discussion, during which Sir Henry Wilson persuaded him that there was a ‘good military chance’ of a link-up between the Archangel forces and Kolchak. Just before the two men went into dinner with the Prime Minister, Churchill’s wire about feeding Petrograd arrived. This Sir Henry Wilson handed straight to Lloyd George, who declined to agree to the proposal. ‘Prime Minister returned to your letter, which I brought over last Sunday [April 27], and said he had never found out what you meant by recognising Kolchak’, Sir Henry Wilson reported back to Churchill. ‘You will remember I wrote to you last Monday on the subject, and asked you to let me know’, he added.

Sir Henry Wilson felt they should ask Kolchak for his views on Mannerheim and Yudenitch occupying Petrograd, before committing themselves to approving, and possibly supporting, such an operation. Sir Henry Wilson then raised the matter of Gajda’s move on Viatka and Kotlas. ‘Prime Minister would not go further than to say that if Gajda reaches Viatka, and establishes himself there firmly, and if he moves up the railway to Kotlas, there would be no objection to Ironside having everything prepared for a blow up the Dvina on Kotlas, but that Cabinet would have to be consulted before such a move were actually carried out.’ Churchill had thus got Lloyd George’s tentative approval; and with that, the matter could go to the Cabinet with good prospects for its approval. (In his diary entry of the night before, Sir Henry Wilson reported the Prime Minister’s decision somewhat differently. ‘After great struggles’, he wrote, ‘L.G. agreed to my proposals to let Ironside join Gajda at Kotlas.’)

The next evening (May 2), Sir Henry Wilson saw Chaikovsky. ‘He sees no reason why Kolchak should not reach Viatka, Vologda and even Petrograd this summer’, he recorded. Here then was further support for linking the junction between Archangel and Kolchak with a successful move on Petrograd.
In London, Churchill was already trying to define Kolchak’s recognition in more precise terms. For he was alarmed at the delay in recognition of any sort which would necessarily result from Chaikovsky having to consult Kolchak in Omsk. He had sent Curzon a copy of Sir Henry Wilson’s letter of April 28, with the Prime Minister’s questions. ‘Is it not possible to recognise Kolchak as “The Russian Government” without defining its actual territorial scope either as against the Bolsheviks or as between united Russia and the Allies?’ Churchill asked. The French expression that Kolchak represented ‘La Principe Russe’ seemed very convenient. ‘In harmony with this, could we not perhaps recognise the Omsk Government as the “Russian National Government” as opposed to the International conceptions of Lenin and Trotsky? It seems to me important that we should have a clear idea of what we mean.’

Curzon replied to Churchill on May 2 in definite terms. ‘In response to a call from the P.M., we yesterday sent over to Paris from the F.O. a series of hastily compiled memoranda on the various embryo states or Govts in Russia. With reference to Kolchak, we answered your question of anticipation.

‘We did not think that anything so wide or compromising as the Russian Govt or the Rn National Govt would be advisable. We contented ourselves with the more modern formula of “The Provisional Government of Siberia”.

There is as you know great suspicion of Kolchak’s imperialistic indiscretions in many Russian quarters, and any too ambitious designation wd be quite as likely to bring about his downfall as to give him help.’

On May 3, Churchill accordingly passed on Curzon’s recommendations to Sir Henry Wilson.

In Siberia, Kolchak’s forces stood before Kazan and Samara. But Bolshevik troops had by now been concentrated in both towns, and at Simbirsk and Viatka, while to the south, Orenburg held out on its own. On arrival at the Eastern Front, however, the C-in-C Vatsetis strongly disagreed with the Military Commander Kamenev that the coming counter-offensive against Kolchak could be maintained, even if troops were diverted to the Southern Front. With Trotsky’s backing, Vatsetis therefore had Kamenev dismissed, and a new Military Commander, and Chief of Staff, appointed instead.

The counter-attack against Kolchak opened on April 30. A strong Bolshevik force under Frunze, concentrated near Buzuluk (on the Samara-Orenburg railway), struck hard at the Western Army’s left flank. Kappel’s Volga Corps, in its British uniforms, was at once thrown in piecemeal, and wasted. But for some while, the issue of the battle (news of which did not reach Europe for nearly two weeks) remained in doubt.

On May 3, The Times, main leader, entitled ‘Taris and Petrograd’, stated that it ‘now looks as though the Finns were likely to be the first to occupy Petrograd, which according to rumour is about to be evacuated by the Bolshevik officials’. The military movements were ‘exceedingly obscure’, but it would be a ‘pity if the Finns were to occupy Petrograd first or alone. The dominant political passion of the Finns is hatred of Russia…The first principle of a sound policy in Russia is
that what we do we should do quickly...If the Finns are right in thinking that the Bolsheviks are about to evacuate Petrograd, there is no doubt who should occupy the city. It should be Yudenitch and his Russian Army, not the Finns...

'We cannot extract any intelligible principle out of the policy of the Paris Conference towards Russia. When prompt and vigorous action is required, we shilly-shally and take up a fresh subject. When the prestige of Bolshevism is waning, we give it a fillip by renewing the talk of negotiation...We sorrow over the sufferings of the Russian people, but boggle over the arrangements for helping Yudenitch to revictual Petrograd.'

That day (the 3rd), as it became known that Nansen's long-delayed relief offer was about to reach Moscow, the Finnish Government hastily informed the Allies that it was 'particularly undesirable' for food to be sent at this moment to Bolshevik Russia; it would be far better to wait 'until a military decision had been reached'. The Russian Political Conference in Paris thoroughly agreed. This 'generous idea', they stated, would have a quite opposite result, unless steps were taken to stop the Bolsheviks getting the food. The supply of food would anyhow not solve the Russian problem, and support for the White Russians 'must not for any reason be halted'.

The Golovin Plan

General Golovin now hurriedly returned to London to see Sir Samuel Hoare, armed with a general strategic survey of the Russian military situation, and a detailed plan for the capture of Petrograd. But he found Hoare prejudiced against Yudenitch’s movement; it had a ‘German flavour’, and was unlikely to succeed. After a long conversation, Golovin managed to convince Hoare, who finally promised strong support; he would study his appreciation and plan of attack, and asked Golovin to draw up a short paper for Churchill, whom Golovin would meet at Hoare's house. But after studying the plans, Hoare changed his mind. On May 3, he rang Churchill's secretary to make an appointment for Golovin to come to the War Office on the 5th, and managed at the same time to clear up certain points; for he then told Golovin that it had been decided to provide a wireless station for Ekaterinodar, and a steamer to take Russian officers to the Far East, and to retain Allied troops in North Russia. Later in the day, he wrote to Churchill explaining that Golovin, ‘much the most intelligent Russian General in Paris’, thought that matters were reaching a ‘most critical point’ in Siberia. ‘The further Kolchak gets from his base, the more difficult it will be for him.’ For as neither the Archangel forces nor Denikin could launch an offensive, the Bolsheviks could concentrate against Kolchak, ‘and there is a risk of Kolchak’s defeat’. Golovin therefore wished to develop an offensive from Esthonia. Hoare stated that he had talked to Professor Piip (the Estonian Prime Minister); and thought that if Britain sent them something, the Estonians would ‘make no opposition to the movement. Hoare added, ‘In order that I should not be guilty of the mistake that has frequently happened in connection with Russian affairs by
making a suggestion that is founded neither upon definite facts nor reasonable probability, I enclose 3 memoranda that General Golovin has drawn up for me. Hoare strongly urged that either Sir Henry Wilson or the DCIGS should study Golovin’s plan for the capture of Petrograd before Golovin came in.*

Of the first two memos,† one was a general strategic survey, dated April 12, which stated that the summer would be decisive in the Russian Civil War; and as they could only hope for Allied supplies, and not Allied troops, the White Russians would have to rely on themselves. But as Allied mistakes in South Russia had lost Odessa and the Crimea, the former reliance on Denikin to advance on Moscow must be dismissed. Denikin, for the moment, could only have limited objectives. The salvation of Russia would now only come from Siberia; only when Kolchak advanced could Denikin play an active role. Mobilisation was proceeding on all fronts. But it could only succeed in North Russia if Allied troops remained; General Miller thought that if they left, all would be lost. But though the Northern Army was of considerable importance in taking pressure off Kolchak’s front and giving him an outlet to the Arctic, it was at the moment weak. A new front under Yudenitch must therefore be formed to take Petrograd, which would entirely clear the Bolsheviks from North Russia. But political problems with Finland and Esthonia had to be overcome; a credit of 20 million francs, arms and supplies for 50,000 men, and two months provisions for Petrograd found; and 30,000 Russian prisoners enlisted. In this way, Moscow and Petrograd could be taken this summer. But Kolchak must give the necessary orders.

The third memo, also dated April 12, detailed the organisation of the offensive on Petrograd. Since the Russian people could not overthrow the Bolsheviks from within, a quick, sudden blow had to come from outside. But the successive capture of Eastern Russia, and then the South East, would take too long, as there was no one main objective whose loss would severely affect the Bolsheviks. But the conquest of North West Russia, especially the Petrograd, Olonetz, Vologda, Archangel and Novgorod districts, would be a severe blow, and be hastened by the capture of Petrograd, which contained many factories, the printing presses for rouble notes, and military depots, which the Bolsheviks could not remove. If this district was taken, the deplorable state of inertia would disappear, and the whole anti-Bolshevik population would awaken.37

* At the bottom he added a postscript: ‘I am afraid that you will think that you are always being bothered with requests of Russian Generals. A delightful beau sabreur, General Bicherakhov, one of the most famous Cossack chieftains, is most anxious to see you. You would certainly find him a delightful person.’ Bicherakhov was almost certainly after money for both his ‘naval cut-throats’ and his ‘land blackguards’, as Lord Curzon called those Russians lately in Bicherakhov’s service, to whom the British Government had made (Jefinite promises of support, upon which they had then ratted. The men had been reasonably loyal too, as far as loyalty went in Russia those days.
† The second is not important.
After the capture of Petrograd, while the Archangel force linked up with Kolchak’s right wing, they would seize the northern railway line from Petrograd to Vologda, Viatka, Perm and Ekaterinburg, and thus link up with Kolchak’s main force. The link with Siberia could be made two months after the capture of Petrograd. It would not only help the liberated population to obtain food, but reinforce the whole front; for as Denikin was in difficulties, it would much assist a later movement south and south west, from the line Novgorod-Yaroslavl-Kazan, towards the Moscow area, and then Moscow.

1 The main offensive from Finland

The advantages were a short distance to the objective; a narrow front needing only a few troops; and the impossibility of defending Petrograd in depth from the frontier, for with the fall of Pargolovo,* Petrograd could only be defended on the Neva river, that is in the city itself. The main force should attack Pargolovo by skirting the shore of Lake Ladoga; and after the capture of Petrograd, turn on Tosno. A second group would come from Narva and make for Gatchina and Tosno; while another group from Kem would come down the Murmansk railway towards Petrozavodsk, and take Zvanka junction, and then support the Narva group and free the Olonetz area, where many recruits could be raised. This operation required the retention of the Allied Fleet, since the Bolshevik Fleet, both in the Gulf of Finland and on Lake Ladoga, could impede Russian forces coming from both Finland and Estonia. Helsinki and Reval must therefore be guaranteed from attack as soon as navigation opened, and the Bolshevik Fleet blockaded in Kronstadt Bay, to stop them laying a new minefield between the two ports, behind which they could have freedom of action between Viborg and Narva.

There were at the moment only 4,000 Russian troops in Estonia, which would form the nucleus of the Narva group, to be built up to a division with Russian prisoners in Germany. As the Murmansk group could not be brought up to a division of 10,000 troops from the Archangel forces, since this number was hardly enough for the defence of Archangel itself, it would have to be built up with local recruits. As there was only a nucleus of 4,000 half-mobilised Russian officers in Finland, measures had already been taken to raise recruits from Russian prisoners in Denmark and Germany to form the main group. But owing to lack of money and political difficulties, there had been no real result.

* Pargolovo is just to the north of Petrograd. Tosno is an important junction on the Petrograd-Moscow railway. Zvanka is at the junction of the Petrograd-Murmansk and the Petrograd-Vologda railways. With the capture of both Tosno and Zvanka, Petrograd was quite cut off from the east and south.
They therefore required from 25,000 to 30,000 Russian troops, at the lowest estimate, to form three divisions for the main group in Finland, and 5,000 to bring the force in Esthonia up to one division. To take and hold Petrograd without Allied help, and with or without very limited Esthonian and Finnish help, they thus had to recruit 35,000 Russian troops. Subsequent operations as detailed would need 15,000 more troops, which could be locally recruited at Olonetz and Petrozavodsk, and would bring the force up to 50,000 troops to form 5 divisions.

2 The main offensive from Esthonia

If the necessary Russian troops could not be assembled in Finland, they should be concentrated in Esthonia. But an Esthonian offensive would entail a greater distance between the start line and Petrograd, whose south-western approaches were barred by the river Luga, while the right flank would need protection to stop the Bolsheviks widening the front. From the Esthonian frontier to Petrograd was four to five infantry marches, while the start line, along the Narva river, was about 30 miles long. To protect the right flank on the line Pskov-Stara Roussa, or Pskov-Novgorod (i.e. north or south of Lake Ilmen), a supporting force had to advance from the Lithuanian coast south of Lake Peipus, which would lengthen the front to 120 miles. The nucleus of 4,000 Russian troops could be built up to a force of 30,000 to 40,000 men to form four divisions from local recruits if all Russian prisoners were also sent to Esthonia. While three divisions advanced along the Baltic railway and made for Tosno, the other division should advance from Pskov either on Luga or to Shimsk, on Lake Ilmen, to cover the right flank. The Murmansk force should move as before on Zvanka junction, while a Russian force of 3,000 men in Finland should help to hold down Bolshevik forces, if Finland agreed; while the Allied Fleet protected the ports and blockaded the Bolshevik Fleet. After the capture of Petrograd, more recruits could be raised from the Pskov, Novgorod and Petrograd districts to bring the force up to 50,000 troops to form five divisions.

But whichever plan was adopted, Russian prisoners had to be recruited, and assembled, perhaps on Esel Island, until the Allies had arranged for them to move to Finland and Esthonia; the Allies had to supply finance, arms and especially technical equipment, for 50,000 troops; and food both for them and for the Petrograd population for two to three months. Golovin reckoned that 15,600 tons would cover both.

Churchill read this paper through quickly, marked it ‘urgent’, and passed it straight on to the DMO, who gave it a hasty glance, and minuted back to Churchill that they were in full sympathy with Golovin’s general aims, and ‘already doing everything possible to give effect to them’. If it was impossible to organise an advance on Petrograd from Finland, it was intended to transfer Yudenitch’s force to Murmansk, where there was a Russian force with very few officers, ‘and as 50% of General Yudenitch’s force consists of officers, there is an
argument in favour of its transfer to North Russia’. (Churchill scribbled here, ‘Transfer of (say) 500 officers is an arguable proposition. What does Gen. Golovine say?’) If the Russians could not assemble either in Finland or at Murmansk, then they should go to Estonia, wrote the DMO; but there was this difficulty of Estonian independence. It was also ‘questionable’ whether Russian prisoners in Germany could be enlisted, since their morale was bad; while the capture of Petrograd depended upon an Allied guarantee to supply food.

Churchill was not best pleased with this response. ‘We must not take no for an answer’, he wrote against the last sentence; and that day, he wired urgently to Kolchak to ask if he approved Golovin’s plan, which would expand the northern operation, which Sir Henry Wilson had described in his wire of April 30, and to urge Kolchak to promise land to the peasants and to convoke a Constituent Assembly to help Churchill induce Lloyd George to recognise the Omsk Government.37

On May 4, the New York Times, under the headline Tetrograd reported won’, stated that Petrograd had ‘probably been taken by the Finns, according to information believed to be trustworthy, which has reached Paris’.

That day, Golovin gave Hoare copies of some wires just received from Paris: some concerned the Finnish detachments in Karelia, which Golovin asked should now be placed under Allied command, and have Russian troops attached to them; other wires urged that the British Fleet should come to Kronstadt, if the Finns did in fact take Petrograd.38 That evening, Hoare told Golovin that he had given his wires to Churchill, who was extremely interested, and had read all three memos, which he had passed on to the DMO; both now wanted to see Golovin.

On May 5, as The Times headlined ‘Hungarian Soviet capitulates’, the second main leader stated firmly: ‘There are many signs of an approaching break-up of Bolshevik Government.’ There was still danger at Archangel, and some Bolshevik success in South Russia. ‘But elsewhere we have every cause for satisfaction. Petrograd is going, Budapest is said to have gone, and alike on east and west the area of the Bolshevik tyranny is contracting.’ Denikin’s statement of policy was welcomed. ‘What an insult, too, it is to a great people like the Russians to suppose that a form of government like Bolshevism, which is nothing but a grotesque mask, expresses their real political lineaments!…Bolshevism in Russia will fall, as it has done in Hungary, the moment we have a real and single-minded policy there.’

That day, wires from both the American Consul Poole and from Lindley at Archangel arrived, stating that the Archangel Government had decided on April 30 to recognise the Omsk Government as the Provisional National Government of all Russia—and hoped for a ‘direct junction’ with the Siberian Army, added Poole.39

* This was hardly true, since the DMO disapproved of both Golovin’s main requirements: assembly in Estonia, and recruitment of Russian prisoners.
Churchill at once wired straight to the Prime Minister. ‘C.I.G.S. tells me that you have several times asked what exactly I mean as to recognising Kolchak. I consider that the Omsk Government should at once be recognised as the National Provisional Government of all Russia.’ He directed Lloyd George’s attention to Lindley’s recent wire, which showed that this was what Chaikovsky’s ‘North Russian Provisional Government’ had just done. The word National draws a clear distinction from the International character of the Bolshevik Government. If however you prefer National Provisional Government of Siberia, that would be better than nothing.’ It was now nearly a fortnight since both the Foreign Office and War Office had brought this matter before him, and Churchill very much hoped that Lloyd George would be able to reach a decision himself, or allow the matter to be discussed in Cabinet, subject to any guidance he might wish to give them. ‘If Kolchak continues to advance successfully, there is a good chance of securing at no distant date a civilised Government for a united Russia more friendly to Britain than to any other power.\textsuperscript{40}

‘Further, the overthrow of Bolshevism in Russia is indispensable to anything in the nature of a lasting peace, and will cut off from Germany that refuge in Bolshevism which she may seek in her despair. I need scarcely say how extremely advantageous the recognition of Kolchak’s Government would be among the political forces in the House of Commons on which you are relying.’\textsuperscript{40}

Churchill sent a copy of this wire to Sir Henry Wilson. ‘The important thing is to recognise them at the earliest possible moment’, he stressed. ‘Now is the time to help…What we recognise him [Kolchak] as is a small matter. The vital thing is recognition. Recognition is taking sides formally, and once committed to this, wider forms of recognition must follow.’\textsuperscript{40}

On the 5th, Hoare took Golovin to the War Office to see the DMO, who said that he was doubtful about using Russian prisoners in Germany. Golovin replied that he would be satisfied with less than 50,000, but 500 Russian officers must be sent to Archangel; they had no money, however, and no transport, and the despatch of Russian officers to Kolchak and Denikin was being held up for the same reason. Secondly, all Russians willing to fight the Bolsheviks must be assembled; even if Yudenitch’s movement was not approved, they must be given means of temporary subsistence. (‘All this could be done under the cover of the Red Cross, and then the formation of detachments could begin’, stated Golovin.) The conversation turned to Estonia; the DMO remarked that it wanted independence. Golovin answered resolutely that there ‘could not be any talk whatsoever about Estonian independence; and explained in detail its ‘utter impossibility from the standpoint of Russia’s existence’. The DMO, whom Golovin apparently thought had agreed with him, concluded that everyone was interested in Yudenitch, to whom the War Office had now decided to send a British Mission. He asked Golovin to remain in London to meet the British General who would be sent out. Golovin agreed. But the DMO said nothing about transferring Yudenitch to Murmansk, and there was no further discussion about Golovin’s plans.\textsuperscript{41}
At 5.30 pm, Golovin saw Churchill, who said that he had been unable up to now to meet any senior Russian generals; and he asked Golovin to keep their conversation ‘in full and strict confidence’. He told Golovin that he could do nothing without the consent of Kolchak, to whom he had just wired about Yudenitch. It was difficult to send British troops, owing to the opposition of the British workers. Fresh British troops were being sent to cover the Allied withdrawal from North Russia, and if Kolchak advanced further, ‘he would be willing to give active support to the left flank’, reported Golovin, adding that Churchill ‘does not reject the possibility of help to Yudenitch on the right flank’. He urged ‘great secrecy’. British instructors and technical troops, however, would be sent to Denikin, and if these will fight side by side against the Bolsheviks—this will, of course, be natural’. British arms and supplies would, of course, continue to be sent to all Russian fronts; and £24 million would be allocated for this.

Churchill said that he would do all Golovin wished about Russian prisoners, but asked that the matter be carefully handled. He would that day arrange for the despatch of 500 Russian officers to Archangel, for whose transport, pay and upkeep the War Office would be responsible. He confirmed that a British Mission, similar to the Missions with Kolchak and Denikin, would be sent to Yudenitch, but reminded Golovin that a prior condition for the capture of Petrograd was a sufficient supply of food; he had asked Sir Henry Wilson for a statement on this. After some friendly concluding remarks from Churchill, the meeting came to an end.

It must be emphasised that this is Golovin’s account of his interviews with the DMO and Churchill, and Churchill, for instance, is made to promise enough arms and supplies for 100,000 troops under Yudenitch. One also wonders whether Golovin really said that Esthonia could not possibly have independence, or merely told his colleagues that he had said so. It does not seem to square with what he had told Margulies. In spite of the presence of an interpreter, one also wonders how much Golovin understood what was said to him. (Both Golovin’s important papers were written in bad French.)

Churchill wired to Sir Henry Wilson (in answer to a telegram which is missing) that there were ‘two distinct cases’ in regard to action in the Baltic. ‘First, that the Finns go for Petrograd whether we like it or not. In this case, surely the more Yudenitch cooperates, and the quicker a British or Allied squadron arrives in Petrograd, the better Kolchak and Denikin will be pleased, because the enterprise will cease to be a purely Finnish show.

‘The second case is whether we should encourage Mannerheim and Yudenitch jointly to make this move. I agree with you that we have not the information at our disposal at the present time to justify any such action on our part. We have no means of knowing whether the operation is feasible, and certainly we should commit a grave imprudence to mix up ourselves with what may possibly be a hopeless failure…Therefore the only question open is the first, on which I hope we are agreed.’
Baron Makino (the Japanese delegate at the Peace Conference) had information 'that General Yudenitch is acting in cooperation with Admiral Kolchak. This is also vehemently asserted by the Clem Edwards group, who are by no means ill-informed. I am therefore sorry to see that [Lord] Hardinge [Head of the British Delegation in Paris] opposed any attempt being made to secure from Finland a free hand for Yudenitch. On my first assumption, viz, that the Finns are going for Petrograd on their own, surely at the very least our policy should be to urge them to let Yudenitch have a free hand to cooperate. 'I have sent a telegram to Knox asking him to find out what Kolchak really wishes about Yudenitch and the Finns'.

North Russia

Meanwhile, a further crisis at Archangel had forced the War Office to take action. On May 1, Ironside had wired: 'Bolshevik gunboats have arrived opposite our Dvina positions.' But the same day, British Intelligence at Archangel wired the DMI that 'reports of destruction of machinery of about 16 steamers at Kotlas confirmed by agents as well as prisoners April 30th.' On May 4, however, a wire from British Intelligence at Archangel reached the DMI apparently contradicting the reports of the destruction of machinery in the Bolshevik steamers. 'Bolshevik flotilla of 29 steamers of various sizes and 9 barges reported by air reconnaissance May 3rd to be between Troitsa and Puchuga.' This was just down-river from Bereznik (the junction of the Dvina and Vaga rivers).

The War Office decided to take such action as they could. On May 4, they wired Ironside: 'You are authorised to make all preparations, with the resources at your disposal, to strike a heavy blow against the Bolsheviks in the direction of Kotlas, if a favourable opportunity should occur for effecting a junction with Gajda about that point. Before such a move is actually carried out, however, Cabinet approval will have to be obtained.'

Next day, The Times headlined 'Fierce Archangel Fighting—Enemy Offensive'. But on May 6, The Times had this headline: 'Crisis over at Archangel', 'British Monitors in River', 'Bolshevik defeat'.

That day, the SNO Archangel reported to the Admiralty that the Monitor M. 23 had arrived at Bereznik; and that the gunboats Cricket and Cockchafer had left Archangel at 4 am on the 5th to proceed up river, and Glow-worm and Cicala had left at noon. 'Considerable quantities of ice still coming down river', he warned.

London

At a War Cabinet at noon on May 6, Churchill waxed eloquent when pressing his proposal for the despatch of 700 Russian officers to North Russia, and a further 500 to Siberia. In North Russia—where he had been asked to provide for 100,000 Russian troops later on their arrival from Siberia—there were now 15,000 Russian troops, and there would soon be 25,000. Affairs there were
satisfactory. Kolchak was advancing ‘rapidly’, and ‘proposed to go to Archangel himself very soon’. His right wing would be at Kotlas by June 15, ‘and there was no doubt that this purely Russian Army was really rolling forward, and would add to its ranks in the districts through which it proposed to advance’. Five new Russian divisions had been formed in Siberia, ‘and were now being brought into action’, he told his colleagues—quite wrongly. ‘The victories of these troops were being won with British weapons and uniforms.’ At Archangel, he repeated, all was going well, ‘and the gunboats were now being used’. Britain would hand over in North Russia to Kolchak. The Prime Minister had discussed the situation with Sir Henry Wilson, ‘and had authorised certain plans and preparations to be made’, he stated guardedly, ‘but no action would be undertaken without a Cabinet decision’.

On the Murmansk front, the Finns had made a ‘successful push’ at Petrozavodsk, and cut the Murmansk railway behind the Bolsheviks facing the British troops to their north. The movements and intentions of both Generals Mannerheim and Yudenitch were, however, ‘very uncertain’, and the War Office was sending out a British Mission to investigate. ‘The only unsatisfactory news was from Estonia and the other Baltic provinces’, Churchill told the War Cabinet.

Churchill ended confidently. ‘It was quite possible that the Bolshevik regime would crumple up, and we should get a civilised Russia friendly to us above all other Powers.’ For the Russians were ‘now fighting bravely’, he stated.

Chamberlain agreed to finance these 1,200 Russian officers. That evening (the 6th), Golovin told Jules Hessen that Kolchak had assigned 10 million roubles to Yudenitch; but owing to foreign exchange difficulties in Paris, Hessen’s plan for raising money in England was the only feasible one. The British should thus advance £1 million, secured by promissory notes from Russian bankers, to the Finns, provided they spent the money in England, and in turn advanced a similar amount (i.e. 50 million Finnish marks) to Yudenitch. Golovin asked Hessen to draft a short note which he could show to Churchill the next day. Margulies then drafted the note for Hessen. (Margulies was under no illusions about Kolchak; and caused consternation at the National Liberal Club, when he told the Russian colony in London that ‘Kolchak would bring with him a regime of black reaction, but that we were obliged to go along with him’).

The War Office now, in fact, began to give serious consideration to the combination of an offensive in the Baltic with the link-up between North Russia and Siberia. But although Churchill had more than once impressed the need for secrecy upon him, Golovin not only told many of the Russians in London and Paris of what Churchill had said, but put the whole interview into a lengthy memo, had it duplicated, and copies were sent flying off in all directions to the various White Russian commands. And as Grishin-Almazov (the former Russian Governor of Odessa), while on his way to join Kolchak with all Denikin’s plans, was shortly afterwards caught by a Bolshevik gunboat as he was crossing the Caspian, Golovin’s memo probably soon reached Trotsky on his train.
In early May, there was complete chaos in Paris—no one had read the Peace Treaty, Clemenceau was trying to sack Foch, the Allied C-in-C, and Lloyd George wanted to declare war on his Italian allies. May 5 was indeed an ‘amazing day’, recorded Sir Henry Wilson, who was first taken off for a walk through the Paris streets by Lloyd George, who was convinced that the Italians were about to carry out a coup in Bulgaria and Anatolia. ‘I don’t believe half these things’, Sir Henry Wilson wrote, ‘but Lloyd George greatly excited.’ After poring over a small map sitting on a street bench, they went off to President Wilson’s house to hear that the Italian delegates would be back in Paris on the 7th, at which Lloyd George ‘pressed for a fait accompli (in Asia Minor) before the Italians come back’. Foch then wrote formally to the Council of Four asking for a copy of the Peace Treaty to be handed to the Germans in forty-eight hours, as he was Allied C-in-C, and might have to act on its provisions. But at 5 pm, Lloyd George simply read out some extracts; the Peace Treaty itself did not yet in fact exist, and would only be printed the next evening. ‘So that we are going to hand out terms to the Boches without reading them ourselves first’, recorded Sir Henry Wilson in disgust. ‘I don’t think in all history this can be matched.’

Next day, the pace hotted up. Lloyd George told Sir Henry Wilson to see Foch urgently and tell him that he (Lloyd George) was doing his best to patch things up between Foch and Clemenceau, and to see that Foch was properly treated. After lunch, Sir Henry Wilson went on, ‘Lloyd George got hold of me and Venizelos [the Greek Prime Minister], and told us the three Frocks had just decided to put the Greeks into Smyrna at once. Not a moment to be lost, as the three think Italy is up to tricks.’ He asked Lloyd George if he realised that this was starting another war, ‘but he brushed that aside’. At midnight, the Peace Treaty was still not printed.

Sometime during this hectic day, Lloyd George found time to wire to Churchill—in understandably irritated terms. ‘Surely question of recognition of Kolchak’s Government is a matter for the whole of the Allies acting together’, he stated. ‘We have all been very hard pressed with the completion of German Treaty, and the Italian discussion, and it was impossible to suspend these urgent discussions because War Office a fortnight ago came to certain novel conclusions about Kolchak’s Government.’ The Council of Four intended to review the whole Russian situation as soon as the peace terms had been presented to the German delegates, and the Italian crisis disposed of.

Meanwhile, Lloyd George had had a long interview with Chaikovsky and Paderewsky (the Polish Premier) about the Russian position, and neither took Churchill’s views about Kolchak and Denikin and their entourage. On the contrary, they expressed genuine alarm lest their victory should result in the triumph of reaction. ‘Whatever steps are taken by us, we must have guarantees on this subject’, insisted Lloyd George. Both had especially warned Lloyd George
against Denikin’s right-hand man, whom they described as not only reactionary, but strongly pro-German.

When the Russian situation was reviewed, all such considerations must be taken into account. As this review would probably take place next week, Lloyd George thought it ‘extremely desirable’ that Churchill should come to Paris, ‘and whatever happens, we must act in concert with our Allies’, he warned. Separate action would only result in serious misunderstanding; the War Cabinet thus ought not to act alone.

But there now, in fact, seemed a good chance of Allied agreement. On May 4, Alexander Kerensky (former Prime Minister in the Russian Provisional Government in 1917) had come to the American Peace Delegation. ‘Kerensky is convinced that the Bolsheviks are just about at the end of their rope’, noted an American delegate, ‘and that their complete overthrow is only a matter of a few months now.’ The only way to stop Kolchak setting up a regime ‘hardly less sanguinary and repressive’ was for America to propose Allied recognition to Kolchak, provided he formed a ‘genuinely democratic’ Government, excluding both Bolsheviks and reactionaries, whom the British and French had ‘constantly been aiding and abetting’ around Kolchak; promised to call a Constituent Assembly, until when the peasants could retain their land, and the workers their rights won in the March Revolution; and restored civic liberties and the Siberian Parliament. If he agreed to do so, then the Allies should at once recognise Kolchak’s Government as the ‘Provisional Government of Russia until the meeting of the Constituent Assembly’.

Lansing was evidently quite impressed by this. That night, he wired Polk at the State Department that there was a ‘feeling here among some’ that the Omsk Government should not even have provisional recognition, because it was a military dictatorship. But if Kolchak took steps to summon a Constituent Assembly, opposition would diminish. ‘What are your views as to the possibility of inducing such action by Kolchak?’ Lansing asked Polk.

Lansing received a reply on the 7th. Ambassador Morris, Polk stated, had wired on May 3 that if England and France recognised Kolchak, America should also. ‘Unity of action in Siberia is more important than the character of the action’, he stressed. Other American officials in Siberia also felt that the time had come for such recognition, which would restore American prestige, which was ‘badly damaged’. American troops in Siberia were not only serving no useful purpose, but ‘doing actual harm in tending to prolong the disturbed conditions’. They should either be withdrawn, or give active support to the Omsk Government, ‘preferably the latter’. But the Allies must act together, and issue new declarations of policy with the Omsk Government. Even General Graves (the American Commander) agreed.

Polk concluded, To my mind these telegrams bear out my own opinion that all the [Allied] Governments…should recognise the Omsk Government as a de facto government in Siberia, and in such other parts of Russia as may now or hereafter be under its actual control.’ On taking office, Admiral Kolchak had
solemnly declared that the power conferred on him would be relinquished to the All-Russian Government which would be created by a properly constituted Constituent Assembly. ‘I am confident that if the Omsk Government were aware that recognition was at hand, they would willingly issue a satisfactory statement providing for the convening of a Constituent Assembly’, stated Polk.47

The same day (May 7), Churchill replied in exasperated tones to Lloyd George. ‘By all means let us take united Allied action if there is any chance of it. I agree absolutely with you about exacting guarantees to secure the democratic future of Russia, and the land for the peasants. I feel convinced that now is the time, and that if the opportunity is lost, Kolchak may either become too weak to be of any use, or too strong to require our advice. It seems to me we have a tremendous chance of securing the future of Russia as a civilised democratic state, friendly above all to us, and that an event of this kind is indispensable to the completion of the main work in which you are engaged. Such a policy wholeheartedly carried through would secure overwhelming approval here.’48

Thus the British and the Americans seemed in general agreement over recognition of Kolchak—and France would soon follow suit.

At 11 am on the 7th, Orlando (the Italian Prime Minister) suddenly appeared at President Wilson’s house—and caused consternation. Lloyd George came running out to see Sir Henry Wilson, ‘and said Orlando’s unexpected appearance was very awkward—we were going to thrash out the Greek occupation of Smyrna’. He, Clemenceau and President Wilson would meet at Lloyd George’s house at noon; Sir Henry Wilson was to bring Venizelos.49

The restored Council of Four discussed the Russian situation instead, which was developing in a very remarkable manner, ‘and would have to be dealt with soon’, Lloyd George reminded them. There had been a ‘curious collapse’ by the Bolsheviks, and the War Cabinet were pressing him for a decision. Kolchak might soon join hands with the Archangel forces, or march direct on Moscow. The Allies might thus soon be faced with a Kolchak Government in Moscow. Chaikovsky and Paderewsky (the Polish Premier) thought that Kolchak was ‘simply a soldier and nothing more’, and that Denikin was pro-German, or in the hands of a pro-German Chief of Staff. Conditions should be imposed on them before further supplies were sent. Kolchak’s political programme was vague and indefinite, and he might set up a powerful military regime, Paderewsky feared. Clemenceau remarked that Paderewsky, like all Poles, was anti-Russian.

President Wilson agreed that continued Allied support should depend on a programme of reform. Lloyd George stated that both he and Sir Henry Wilson had formed a ‘very high opinion’ of Chaikovsky, whom his colleagues should see. He was urging the Allies to prevent a return to Russian reaction, which he feared more than Bolshevism. Clemenceau said he feared both. President Wilson pointed out that Bolshevism ‘must collapse’, and Russia might remain reactionary. There was nothing in the Peace Treaty to prevent a powerful economic alliance between Germany and Russia. He asked what Allied help had been given to the White Russians. Lloyd George said they had been sent arms
and supplies; but Kolchak’s success was probably due to Bolshevik lack of coal and oil.49

Abandoning Orlando, Lloyd George, Clemenceau and President Wilson then rushed off to Lloyd George’s house, where they approved the plan which Sir Henry Wilson had been forced, much against his will, to draw up. ‘They want the move of Greeks to Smyrna to be secretly done—I said this was quite impossible—and they are not going to tell either Italy or Turkey until the whole thing is well on the way. All this is wrong’, wrote Sir Henry Wilson angrily, ‘and after the others had gone I told Lloyd George he was making a lot of trouble with the Turks and the Italians for nothing; but he would not have it.’ It was now past midday, and the Peace Treaty was still at the printers. As soon as it was off the press, they all hurried out to Versailles, ‘and the Peace terms were handed over never having been read by any of us’.49

Now, with Germany out of the way, there might be time for a proper discussion of Russian policy—four months after the opening of the Peace Conference.
The Peace Conference, having delivered their peace terms to Germany, could now turn to Russia. Peacemaking with the Bolsheviks had failed. Could they now assist the Whites to overthrow them? The Golovin master-plan seemed the best proposal to bring this about. It envisaged the immediate creation of a new Russian front in the Baltic to link up with Kolchak in Siberia and Allied troops in North Russia, and thus clear the whole area north of Moscow, and prevent the Bolsheviks massing against Kolchak, whilst Denikin was reorganising his forces after the French debacle in the Ukraine, which had prevented him from marching on Moscow from South Russia.

**The Baltic**

What were the various forces available in the Baltic? In Finland, there were 20,000 to 30,000 Finnish troops, of poor morale; various German-trained Finnish Jaegers, now on the Viborg front; various Finnish White Guards, upon whom General Mannerheim particularly relied; and lastly, some 1,200 Red Finns, who had joined the British troops at Murmansk, and whom Mannerheim would not allow to return to Finland. There were also various political groups, who all wished to seize Petrograd. First, there was Trepov and other Russian reactionaries, with close German links, and supported by German Jewish bankers, who wanted a Tsarist restoration. They relied on the Finnish Jaegers and German troops in Latvia under General von der Goltz, who—the War Office wrongly believed—was now trying to come to terms with the Bolsheviks, and thus bring them under German control. As they could not recruit further troops, they wanted Russian prisoners from Germany. Second, there were the moderate Russians, lead by General Yudenitch and Professor Kartashev, supported by other Russian bankers and a ‘certain British financial group’ (i.e. the SIS), who allegedly stood for the Constituent Assembly. Though Yudenitch (based in Finland) claimed 10,000 Russian troops (mainly in Estonia) he in fact had few forces, and wanted both Finnish and Estonian assistance; but the Estonians refused to cooperate until Finland recognised Yudenitch’s Russian Committee, and both then recognised Estonia. Third, there was General Mannerheim, the Finnish Regent, who was waiting for an Allied mandate to move. Though he could only
count on the Finnish White Guards, he was clandestinely in touch with 10,000 to 15,000 local Finnish troops in the Olonetz district. They claimed contact with some 2,000 men within Petrograd, who would allegedly rise up on their approach. Opposing them were some 4,300 Bolshevik troops on the Olonetz front, and 15,000 on the Viborg front; while at Kronstadt, the Bolshevik Fleet was unreliable, like the Bolshevik troops on the Narva and Pskov fronts, who tended to desert when defeated.1

In Esthonia, feeling was ‘said to be pro-British’, and there were 25,000 good—British-equipped—Esthonian troops. But the Esthonian Government, in fact, wished to negotiate with the Bolsheviks, and then rebuild their country. Thus a bad peace would be better than no peace; and only a definite British promise would make them fight on.

In Latvia, where the Russian Tsars had settled the German Baltic Barons, who were thus hated by the Latvians, everything hinged on the land problem. In February, the Baltic Barons had failed to overthrow the young Latvian Government. But in April, German troops, who also wanted to settle there, had been more successful at Libau, where they still held the Latvian Government. There was also a small pro-German Russian group, under the Russian Prince Lieven, who wanted Russian prisoners from Germany. The Latvians wanted Allied support to build up their small Latvian Army to replace the German troops, who should gradually withdraw; but if German troops withdrew too soon, the Bolsheviks—who at present held the capital Riga—would seize more of Latvia.1 But whoever won the Russian Civil War, it would clearly not be the Latvian peasant who got the land.1

But in Esthonia (the only Baltic State freed from Bolshevik control), there were continual squabbles over the little Russian Northern Corps, which was under the Esthonian Command. General Yudenitch, whom Kolchak had placed in command, but who was sitting across the Gulf of Finland in Helsinki, wanted them to move north of Lake Peipus to the Narva front near the coast, where the British could both supply and support them. General Rodzianko, who was in de facto command, and General Laidoner (the Esthonian Commander) both thought the capture of Petrograd to be simply a political matter, and wanted them to remain south of Lake Peipus, on the Pskov front (where they would act as a buffer between the Bolsheviks in Petrograd and the Germans in Latvia).

But as the ice had melted, and the Bolshevik Fleet was now showing signs of activity at Kronstadt, Admiral Cowan had returned with the British Squadron to the Gulf of Finland, and contacted both the Esthonian Command and General Mannerheim, the Finnish Regent, in Helsinki. After Yudenitch’s ‘categorical statement’ that the British Fleet would support them, Rodzianko now agreed to move his troops to the Narva front. On arrival, they remained in Narva for a while to smarten themselves up. Though some had captured Bolshevik uniforms, their general appearance was awful, admitted Rodzianko; and others had no greatcoats or boots, and looked ‘utterly nightmarish’. The Esthonian troops, whom the British were supplying, were well clad, he noticed, as were the local
Baltic German ‘gentry and landlords’ of the Baltic Landeswehr, who made a good impression, their ‘German uniforms, German drill and German words of command making a sharp contrast to the rest’.  

Rodzianko at once decided to launch an attack to consolidate his position. He had exact information on the Bolshevik strength. On the Narva front (from Lake Peipus to the Gulf of Finland), they had 15,000 troops, 60 guns and 500 machine guns, and 3 armoured trains. The Russian Northern Corps only had 2,500 troops, 6 guns and 30 machine guns. But Bolshevik morale was known to be very low; on May 9, *The Times* headlined, ‘Petrograd famine riots—Thousands of executions reported.’  

On the 10th, when Rodzianko was told that Laidoner would land an Estonian force further up the coast, supported by the British Squadron, he decided to attack on the 13th with his three Russian columns to seize the three Bolshevik armoured trains. One column would attack towards the coast, the centre column would seize and blow up the Narva-Petrograd railway, while partisan cavalry would blow up the Narva-Pskov railway behind the Bolshevik line, and then take Gdov; other partisan troops would then move along the River Pflyussa south of Gdov, and seize the Bolshevik Flotilla on Lake Peipus. The Estonians ‘categorically refused’ any further support apart from their sea landing; but if the initial Russian attack was a success, they agreed to send Rodzianko his Talabsky regiment up to Narva for a frontal assault on Yamburg, on the River Luga.  

News of this coming attack leaked out, and was at once linked with the Finnish advance between Lakes Onega and Ladoga. On May 13, the *New York Times*, under the headline, ‘Two Russian columns moving on Petrograd’, quoted a report from London that a socialist newspaper in Helsinki had stated that 3,000 Russian troops would advance along the Estonian coast, while another 3,000 troops would come down from the Olonetz district.  

That afternoon, there were some sharp exchanges in the House of Commons about the activities of the British Squadron in the Baltic.  

*Colonel Wedgewood* asked Bonar Law whether he had seen a report from Stockholm stating that the Allies were ‘preparing naval and military operations against Petrograd based upon Helsingfors; whether there is any basis for the report; whether a British Squadron has been ordered to Helsingfors, and whether naval or military operations in cooperation with Finland, or any other counter-revolutionary body, are under discussion?’  

*Mr Bonar Law:* ‘The first and second parts of the question I believe to be accurate. The third part of the question is not accurate.’  

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* It is worth noting that this report from The Hague, dated the 7th, came from a Berlin telegram, which quoted a Polish newspaper, printing a Moscow report about the Petrograd situation.
Col. Wedgwood: ‘Are we to understand that the British Government are contemplating naval or military operations against Petrograd, in the teeth of the statement made by the Prime Minister the other day?’

Mr Bonar Law then said that he did not have a detailed reply. The facts are that a Squadron of British ships is available, and that no such arrangement as my hon. Friend suggests has been made, and it must be obvious that, if anything of the kind were contemplated, it would be impossible to say anything about it.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘Did I understand…that there was a basis of truth in the reports that military and naval operations were being prepared?’

Mr Bonar Law: ‘I meant precisely what I said. A British Squadron is there and has been there for a long time, to consider what emergency may arise.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘May we take it that the British Government will not be committed to an attack upon Petrograd, and will not go on in cooperation with Finland and General Mann[er]heim without this House first being made acquainted with these operations?’

Mr Bonar Law: ‘I could not give such an undertaking, but I can say that no definite proposal of the kind is at present in contemplation…’

Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy: ‘Has this House no say in these matters?’

In both Paris and London, action was now taken in the Baltic. On May 13, the Baltic Commission in Paris hurriedly advised that a British Mission should organise the local troops in the Baltic to enable them to withstand the Bolsheviks on the German withdrawal.

In London next day, the War Office issued the necessary orders to Lieutenant-General Sir Hubert Gough, who was to head the British Mission. Gough (who had commanded the 5th Army in France, until precipitately sacked after the German offensive of March 1918) was, however, simply to report on Yudenitch’s prospects of taking Petrograd, and enquire if he would move to Murmansk. Second, he was to make the Finnish troops near Olonetz halt their advance, unless they undertook to withdraw again later. All operations had to have Kolchak’s approval, and Petrograd must not be taken by Finnish troops alone, but jointly with Russian troops; and before anyone took it, there had to be an Allied guarantee to supply food. Gough was not to promise anything to Yudenitch.

Lord Curzon had already told Gough in blunt terms what British policy was in the Baltic. ‘It was a policy of non-interference’, he told Gough, ‘and he was anxious that Mr Churchill’s hostility to the Bolsheviks should not lead me into committing Britain to any action which was contrary to the Government’s view, which might happen if Mr Churchill’s views were my sole guide’. Gough was to make it quite clear to Mannerheim that the British Government strongly disapproved of him marching on Petrograd; for the War Cabinet clearly saw trouble, whoever won the Russian Civil War, if Petrograd was occupied by foreign troops with British support.
But as Curzon clearly did not trust Gough, he appointed Colonel Stephen Tallents (a senior Ministry of Food official, who had visited the Baltic in February, while in Warsaw on relief work) as British High Commissioner to the Baltic States. Tallents was to handle political matters, on which Gough was ‘not to act without your advice and consent’, he told Tallents firmly. As Gough was still smarting at his unjust removal from the 5th Army, the disparity in rank was to cause immediate trouble. Leaving an old Harrovian friend, Harry Pirie-Gordon, to collect a small team in London, Tallents now returned post-haste to the Baltic.

Gough was summoned by Churchill, whom (it seems at Curzon’s request) he did not inform of his ‘highly confidentiar talk with Curzon. Churchill, of course, while striding up and down the room, constantly pointing to a large map of Russia on the wall (probably the map attached to the General Staff paper of April 15, with all its phantom armies and its encircling lines, which, if looked at long enough, do tend to converge on Moscow), told him the exact opposite. The various invasions and converging movements would encircle and crush the Bolsheviks, now Yudenitch was going to advance from the Baltic, too. ‘He seemed to overlook the scale of the map’, recorded Gough. But when Gough pointed out that the White Russian forces were too widely separated to afford each other mutual support, Churchill would not listen; Bolshevik morale was so low, he was told sharply, that the ‘resolute advance of any armies, however small, would cause their organisation to disintegrate’. General Gough, mystified and muddled from the start, then departed for the Baltic on the cruiser Galatea.

In London, the Russian colony could not make out what British policy was, ‘because the Admiralty and the War Office are each carrying out their own separate policies, which often differ from the policy of the Foreign Office’, noted Margulies (the Russian politician and diarist) on May 14. But British policy generally seemed ‘opposed to interference in Russian affairs…it was Germany’s job to guide the affairs of Russia, a “wild” country incapable of governing itself’. But something seemed afoot, ‘otherwise Bonar Law would have denied all British participation in the Russian operations’, he felt. There was much concern about an interview with Kolchak, printed in the Daily Telegraph the day before, in which Kolchak expressed doubts whether the Constituent Assembly could be convened for some time; but he said that once in Moscow, he would form a new Russian Government drawn from the Zemstva, Municipal Councils, and so on. This article had aroused ‘disgust’ in the City of London, and ‘all the Russians in the City were now hostile to Kolchak and were at no pains to conceal their attitude from the British’, wrote Margulies. But at lunch that day he was told that the Board of Trade had discussed the Department Overseas Trade proposal for the War Risks Office to insure British traders and bankers who shipped goods to Russia;* there was also a proposal to introduce an international rouble in Siberia, but the Americans had refused to peg this to the dollar, and the plan had collapsed. So had the British Secret Service’s plan to finance Yudenitch in the Baltic via their new bank in Finland. On the 15th, Jules Hessen (Yudenitch’s emissary) was warned that General Golovin was considered too left-wing by the
Russian bankers, who would thus not sign the promissory notes which the British Government required before they would advance £1 million to Yudenitch. But everything was topsy-turvy. That evening, Margulies dined with a Russian Jewish banker, who said the ‘rich City Jews would never assume any obligations to assist Yudenitch, since to them Jules Hessen represented the monarchist movement’.†

Early on May 13, General Rodzianko personally led his centre column into action, who advanced with ‘tremendous elan’. At 3 pm, he heard that they had crossed the River Plyussa. Some, he found, disguised as Bolsheviks, had crossed the river by night, and thus seized the Bolshevik General Nikolaiev’s entire brigade HQ. All three Bolshevik armoured trains, and an artillery battery, had already been taken; and the Bolshevik troops had hastily retreated back to the River Luga—which Rodzianko decided at once to force. His centre column was to advance on Sabsk, and his northern column was to take Muraveino, and then Weimarn (on the Narva-Petrograd railway). News then came that the partisan cavalry had blown up the Gdov railway. Rodzianko asked the Esthonians to send his Talabsky regiment up to Narva, where their brilliant success had made a ‘shattering impression’ on both the Russian and Esthonian Commands, and he enjoyed some ‘very happy moments’ (his last for some time).

As their telephone lines had been cut, Bolshevik troops were still facing Narva, and still unaware of the capture of their brigade HQ. Rodzianko thus decided to advance on Yamburg at once. Early on the 14th, the Talabsky set off. By moving fast, they captured the vital Yamburg bridge over the River Luga by 1 pm, and seized all the railway engines, goods wagons and Bolshevik supplies. As there was news that the Esthonian force was advancing on Kotly to their north, and the centre column had cut the Petrograd road at Weimarn, the Talabsky were told to pursue the fleeing Bolsheviks, and seize their heavy weapons. But though they quickly reached Volosovo and then Kikerino (more than half-way to Gatchina), the Esthonian force, which had landed at Kaporje bay, was being beaten off by Bolshevik troops, as they were being given no naval support. For Admiral Cowan did not like what he saw in Petrograd bay; there were strong Bolshevik naval forces at Kronstadt, and strong Bolshevik naval guns at Fort Krasnaya Gorka.

* Under this scheme (proposed on April 15), which would cost £25 million, and could be in operation in two weeks, the War Risks Office would insure both British traders and British banks to reopen trade immediately with Russia; as the Odessa debacle had shown that military support without economic help was of little use. The DOT would guarantee the necessary tonnage. British banks would then advance the total value of each shipment to British traders, and open branch banks in Russia, which would either issue credit certificates at a fixed sterling value, or give credit to British firms or to the Russian Cooperative Societies (which the DOT claimed were still very much in existence, and untouched by the Bolsheviks.) The area envisaged was South Russia. This scheme had been approved by Lloyds, the Hudson’s Bay company, and Lloyds Bank.†

† This was because Hessen had apparently been hobnobbing with General Dessino, the London representative of the Russian Monarchist Congress in Nice.
Rodzianko, much concerned about his left flank, then found that the Estonian force was an Ingermanland detachment, ‘busy spreading propaganda for the idea of an Ingermanland republic’. (Ingermanland is a small area to the west of Petrograd, whose people have close links with the Finns. Like all such small peoples, they were extremely apprehensive of the reactionary tendencies of the White Russians. The historian Gorn remarks that they only wanted ‘cultural autonomy’, not independence; and with a little more commonsense, the Russians could have retained their support. On balance, I prefer Rodzianko’s account.)

Rodzianko now told the Estonian Command that he could not tolerate ‘dual authority’ on Russian territory; it would seriously effect the Russian advance, as Fort Krasnaya Gorka was a permanent threat to his left flank, and more Bolshevik troops had been brought to Petrograd. When the Estonians confirmed that the detachment was under Russian command, Rodzianko went up to the front line, and read the riot act. There was to be no more propaganda whatsoever, he told the Ingermanland commander; the question of Ingermanland independence could be raised with the Peace Conference in Paris. Most of the officers were Russian-speaking Finns, who ‘obeyed my orders without question’, records Rodzianko.7

On return to Yamburg, he gave orders for the abandoned Bolshevik guns on the Kaporje road to be recovered, and for Bolshevik prisoners to be housed in a Yamburg glass factory. (In fact all prisoners and machine guns were ‘immediately absorbed’ by the front-line regiments. When the elderly General Nikolaiev was interrogated, he castigated the White officers; they should serve the Russian Government, and whether it was legal or illegal did not concern military officers.8 At his court-martial, they were unsure about what to do with him, and there was a move to acquit him. But as they were always merciless with the junior Bolshevik commanders when captured, they feared what their troops might say. He was sentenced to death. When the noose was put round his neck, General Nikolaiev crossed himself. Then their troops said, ‘What sort of a Bolshevik is he, if he crosses himself?’ Trotsky turned him into a hero, as a warning to all his other officers not to join the White Russians.)

Rodzianko then departed to Gdov, which his partisans had now taken, to find that the Bolshevik flotilla on Lake Peipus (which, he claims, had wanted to desert, ‘but specifically to us, the Russians, and not to the Estonians’) had been taken by the Estonians to Dorpat, and they refused to hand it back. When the partisans then advanced south of Gdov, Estonian troops at once took the Russian city of Pskov.

Meanwhile, Bolshevik cadets and picked communists had been brought up to the Narva front, where Rodzianko was now faced by two divisions and two brigades. From intercepted signals, he learnt that one division was to advance from Peterhof and Krasnoe Selo, and, supported by Fort Krasnaya Gorka, take Kaporje; while the other was to advance from Krasnoe Selo and Gatchina, and retake Muraveino on the River Luga.9 The two brigades were to protect each division’s exposed flanks. Rodzianko’s real danger was on the Russian left flank, where the Ingermanlanders were already withdrawing. As Rodzianko heard that the
Bolshevik Semyonovsky regiment in the brigade attacking their left flank wished to desert, the Talabsky were told to mount a strong attack, and capture this regiment intact.

The Bolsheviks also sent naval support on this left flank. On May 17, Admiral Cowan spotted a great deal of smoke over Kronstadt. Next day, five Bolshevik ships put to sea, and crossed the minefield; but on spotting the British Squadron, turned back. Admiral Cowan went full speed at them, closing the range rapidly from 20,000 to 16,000 yards, at which a Bolshevik destroyer, flying a large red flag, fired the first shot (see map 8). The British ships returned the fire, and one good hit on the Bolshevik destroyer was observed. Cowan stood on until within half a mile of the minefield, when he came under fire from the Grey Horse battery (i.e. Seraya Loshad), and so no decision could be obtained; and the Bolshevik ships escaped. Beyond them, Cowan saw the Bolshevik cruiser *Oleg* and the battleship *Petropavlovsk*.

But Rodzianko’s operation on land was a success. The Talabsky nearly reached Gatchina, then wheeled left to Kikerino, knocked out the Bolshevik brigade going round their flank, and captured the Semyonovsky regiment. Rodzianko went up to inspect them at Kikerino; they numbered 600 men, a few regular officers, a band, and a field battery; and all ‘expressed a wish to start fighting the Bolsheviks at once’. Their wish was granted. The Russian Northern Corps was now firmly based in advance of the river Luga line.

‘To give all ranks their due’, wrote Rodzianko, ‘they had worked hard and well—there was never any talk of fatigue. A few commanders had made mistakes, but there was no choice and we had to be satisfied with those we had…There were very few honest, hard-working men among them, and the entire cause rested on a handful of really able officers’, he stressed. But after this initial success, there were some promotions. ‘As soon as the embryo of a future army was formed, Colonels and Generals began to spring out of the ground like mushrooms after the rain’, recorded Vasily Gorn.10 (By the end of the campaign that winter, in fact, an army of 17,000 troops was being led by no less than 34 generals—an excellent example of that old military law that an army is successful in inverse ratio to the number of generals who believe themselves to be in command.)

But Rodzianko concludes his account of this opening spring offensive thus: ‘Neither I nor anyone else entertained the thought of seizing Petrograd with such insignificant forces.’ The Golovin master-plan, however, was proceeding satisfactorily. For the River Luga line, which Rodzianko now held, was the main obstacle which Golovin had foreseen, if the main Baltic offensive was to go in from Esthonia; and the British Fleet had cooperated.
Map 8 Admiralty map of the naval engagement in the Gulf of Finland, dated 18 May 1919
The next major feature of the Golovin plan was the acquisition of 35,000 Russian prisoners from Germany. It is thus important to see how this matter had been developing. On April 7, as the War Cabinet agreed that Russian prisoners should remain at present in Germany, General Weygand told the Council of Four that the Allied Generals all thought that the German Government should send them back to Russia, unless it was against their will. This the Council of Four agreed. On April 22, the DMI sent the Prime Minister a paper by Churchill urging that they remain in Germany. This had little effect. On May 9 (by when Churchill had seen Golovin), Churchill wired Balfour that he was ‘profoundly shocked’ that they were being sent back to Russia. ‘What choice have the great mass of these men got but to join the Bolshevik Armies or starve or be put to death’, he asked. ‘Such an instance of a State deliberately presenting its enemy with a reinforcement of 500,000 trained men is without parallel…The Army Council and Cabinet here were unanimous; still the thing is going on.’ On May 14 (the day that Gough received his orders), the French Colonel Georges told the Council of Foreign Ministers that though the risk of the massacre of anti-Bolshevik Russian prisoners and the reinforcement of the Red Army had been ‘very clearly set forth in a letter of April 19, giving the views of the British War Cabinet’, the Allied military envoys in Berlin felt it impossible to make a selection, and that it was best to repatriate the Russian prisoners as agreed at once and en masse.

But this view had been reversed after Rodzianko launched his offensive; selections, it was decided, should be made, and anti-Bolshevik Russians given priority. General Malcolm (Head of the British Mission in Berlin) added that some 1,500 Russian prisoners had now been returned via Tilsit and Vilna. This process should continue; about 600 a week could be sent back. Balfour remarked that he had heard that there were 500,000 Russian prisoners in Germany; but General Malcolm assured him that there were not more than half that number.  

London and Moscow

But the involvement of the British Squadron in the Baltic in Rodzianko’s attack had repercussions in both London and Moscow. When the Admiralty received an account of this brief naval action some days later, the DCNS minuted. ‘I do not imagine that heavy ships would operate with any comfort or success in these waters—as the only enemy vessel engaged was 1 destroyer. A light cruiser, a [flotilla] leader & 2 T.B.D.s [torpedo boat destroyers] seems a sufficient margin of force. R.A. [Cowan] does not seem to have been prevented from pressing his action home by the strength or reverse of his Squadron but by the minefields. The latter weapon has exercised a deterrent effect on stronger forces’, he remarked. The Admiralty thereupon issued further orders for the British Squadron. Their main duty, it was stressed to Admiral Cowan, was to prevent the destruction of Esthonia and Latvia by ‘external aggression, which is threatened at present by
Bolshevik invaders. Whenever we are in a position to resist Bolshevik attack upon
Friends or Allies by force of arms from the sea, we should unhesitatingly do so. A
Bolshevik man of war or armed auxiliary of any kind operating off the coast of
the Baltic Provinces must be assumed to be doing so with hostile intent and
should be treated accordingly.

‘It is essential that you should not interfere in any way with local politics, nor
give any colour for the assumption that Great Britain is favouring one party or
another in the Baltic Provinces. Consequently any operations which you may
undertake should be strictly confined to assistance to the local Government
against external aggression’ A special reminder was added about minesweepers. ‘As
these ships are manned by crews which have signed on for mine clearance only,
they are not to be used in operations in which they might come under fire’,
Admiral Cowan was instructed firmly.12

On May 27, however, this brief naval engagement caused an angry exchange in
the House of Commons when Colonel Wedgwood asked, ‘what was the cause of
the attack made on the Russian warship in the Baltic; why no survivors were
picked up from the ship sunk; and what were our total casualties in the action?’

Dr Macnamara gave a brief account of what had taken place. ‘No Bolshevik
ships were sunk. There were no British casualties.’

Colonel Wedgwood: ‘Can the right hon. Gentleman say whether the British ships
were ordered to fire on the Bolshevik ships, and whether we are at war with Russia? May I have an answer?’

Hon Members: ‘No.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘I want to know whether these British ships had orders to fire
on the Bolshevik ships?’

Mr Speaker: ‘The hon. and gallant Gentleman must put his question on the
Paper.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘I submit that it is a perfectly proper supplementary to the
question I have on the Paper.’

Mr Speaker: ‘That is a matter for me to judge.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘I desire to draw your attention, Sir, to my question:- “If he
will state what was the cause of the attack made on the Russian
Warships in the Baltic?” I asked for the cause, and, so far, I
have had no explanation.’

Dr Macnamara: ‘I am afraid I cannot add to the answer I have already given.’13

Lord Curzon was disturbed by this Parliamentary exchange. ‘Can anyone
explain to me what the British Fleet operating in the Gulf of Finland is doing?’ he
minuted to the Russia Department. ‘Is it fighting or going to fight anybody? Who
sent it? What are its instructions?’

‘The British Fleet operating in the Gulf of Finland’, minuted the Russia
Department, ‘is supporting British policy in the Baltic provinces by protecting
Estonia and Latvia against external aggression by Bolshevik invaders…it has
actually been engaging Bolshevik ships threatening Estonian troops in Kap-orje Bay.’

‘What it comes to is this’, replied Curzon, ‘that the [British] fleet though sent nominally to protect the Baltic states was sent in reality to fight the Bolsheviks by sea. This might be an excellent policy but it does not at all square with the frequent declarations that we are not at war with the Soviet Government.’

Lenin was not concerned by such niceties. Though the Bolshevik Naval Commissar Raskolnikov (who had been captured in the Baltic on board the destroyer Spartak on December 26) and another Bolshevik had surprisingly been exchanged for various British prisoners on May 26, Lenin passed the following note across the table to Sklyansky (Trotsky’s Chief of Staff) during a meeting sometime in late May: ‘How was it that we did not fire at the [British] destroyer?’

Sklyansky scribbled back; ‘It was beyond our range’. Lenin would not accept this. ‘Vatsetis [the C-in-C] must be got in touch with by phone (he will be telephoning Zinoviev today) and ordered to tighten things up in earnest’, he wrote.

The Baltic

Grossly exaggerated reports of this small offensive in the Baltic reached Paris. On May 19, The Times’s second leader stated that the Bolshevik hold on Petrograd was ‘becoming as precarious as their hold on Riga, and when so little assistance would loosen it altogether, it is much to be regretted if the agony is prolonged by the abstention of the Allies from more active assistance’. We should act in the Baltic. Next day, The Times headlined: ‘Naval fight off Kronstadt’. On the 21st, under the headline, ‘Steady Advance on Petrograd’, the Times second leader, entitled ‘The Bolshevik decline’, stated that ‘events in Russia are beginning to move more rapidly, and almost everywhere in the right direction…Two months of resolute action and of unambiguous sympathy with our friends and Allies, and Bolshevism will have fallen to a point at which the Russians will be quite capable of dealing with it’.

That day (the 21st), the British Consul at Reval wired urgently to Balfour to support the request of the Russian Northern Corps for the immediate despatch of Allied food supplies for their troops, for the local population; and for Petrograd itself, should it fall (another feature of the Golovin master-plan).

But the Russians and the Finns were still at odds. On the 22nd, The Times, under the headline, ‘Bolshevik morale declining’, quoted a report from Helsinki, dated the 20th, that the Helsinki newspapers had that day published a statement by Yudenitch, in which he said that the Allied recognition of Finland had produced a ‘calming effect’ on the Finnish people. The Russian Political Conference in Paris, however, had protested at the ‘final recognition’ of Finland—which was also the view of ‘very large sections of Russian opinion, which I share entirely’, added The Times correspondent.
The Germans in Latvia now decided to consolidate their position. On May 22, while German troops at Libau held down British warships by threatening to open fire with the shore guns, other German troops, supported by the Baltic Landeswehr and Prince Lieven’s Russian detachment, seized Riga; which much alarmed not only Lenin, but also the Estonians, who suspected collusion between the Germans and the Russian Northern Corps against Esthonia.

When this news reached London, the War Office wired urgently to Gough for news of military operations against Petrograd on either side of the Gulf of Finland, as their only information was 'limited to press statements'. This crossed a wire from Gough, who had just reached Libau, stating that the Estonians were attacking north-east to Gatchina, south to Pskov, and south-west to Riga, but solely to push the Bolsheviks out of Esthonia. They had no wish to take Petrograd without Allied and Finnish cooperation and recognition of Esthonian independence. The Russian Northern Corps had 5,000 troops (and another 5,000 unarmed, though said to be trained) astride the Narva-Gatchina railway. Gough considered that 'Northern Corps can take Petrograd if at once given 2,000 tons of food and arms etc. for 5,000 reserves'. Food was also vital for Petrograd itself, and arms and supplies for the ‘thousands of deserters who have come and are coming over to the Russian Corps’. Preparations, he was told, were completed for a rising in Petrograd to coincide with the Russian advance; but it all depended on the food. The Russian Command were also much hindered by the lack of Russian administrators for the areas to be liberated. Gough urged that both the Allies and Kolchak should recognise Esthonian independence, whose goodwill was necessary; and that the American ship *Lake Wimico*, now at Libau, should discharge its cargo of food at Reval.17

On the afternoon of the 23rd, Hoover urged the Council of Foreign Ministers to support Esthonia to spread Esthonian influence westward, and thus dispense with the German presence. Esthonia might also be encouraged to march on Petrograd. It was difficult, owing to the German occupation, to form a Lithuanian or Latvian Army.18 Balfour agreed with Hoover, except over a £10 million loan to the Baltic States. He wanted the military view. Would the Russian and Esthonian force be stopped if the Allies refused to provision them and Petrograd, should it fall? How would the fall of Petrograd affect the Archangel and Murmansk fronts, and Latvia and Lithuania? Could the Russian and Esthonian force prevent the Bolsheviks filling the gap left on the German withdrawal?

Sir Henry Wilson said that the military position was obscure. There were not enough troops in Esthonia and Finland to knock out eight to ten Bolshevik regiments. They might have gone away, ‘and it might be possible to drive into Petrograd in a car’, but a Bolshevik force of that size could not have been crushed. If Petrograd could be taken without offending Admiral Kolchak, this would be a ‘military event of great importance’, as the capture of Zvanka junction would link the Russian and Esthonian force up with Allied forces at Murmansk, and later link up the Archangel and Siberian forces; and ultimately, if warfare in Russia continued, ‘the fall of Moscow might be expected’. He therefore favoured the
occupation of Petrograd, if Admiral Kolchak approved. Save for an Allied loan of £10 million, the Baltic Commission’s report was then approved.

Sir Henry Wilson was thus giving open approval to the Golovin master-plan. But would he actively assist the Russian Generals to carry it out?

**North Russia**

At present, the War Office, of course, was only actively planning an immediate link-up between British troops at Archangel and the Siberian Army. On May 7, Ironside wired the War Office confirming that all preparations were being made for the link-up. The vital thing was to pass Kolchak arms and supplies; there were 45,000 Russian rifles at Archangel, but more stores were necessary. Gajda, it seemed, had many unarmed men, and if he took Viatka, he would have many more, as would the Archangel Government; and arms for all these men must be ready in time. The War Office replied to Ironside on the 12th that Knox’s estimates of the supplies and clothing needed by Kolchak, on his arrival at Archangel, were now being examined in London.

But there were already suspicions of British intentions in North Russia. On the 12th, the American Consul Poole wired the State Department that his colleague at Murmansk reported that the American railway troops there had made a ‘very favourable’ impression locally, which might account for the generally improved atmosphere at Murmansk. But there was much talk among the Russian troops at Archangel about the coming American withdrawal; and though hostile to the Bolsheviks, they might not cooperate with the British, whom they suspected of ‘ulterior territorial ambitions’.

At Archangel, there were then more Bolshevik desertions, and more Russian mutinies. On May 18, the British Commander of the Dvina force informed the Allied troops that propaganda was being distributed by aircraft to the local Bolshevik troops ‘encouraging them to desert to our lines and guaranteeing them good treatment if they do so’. Many were anti-Bolshevik, ‘and are anxious to assist the Allies if they are given an opportunity of doing so’. Though many had already come over to the Allies, it was hoped greatly to increase the numbers in the next few weeks. As recent deserters had stated that ‘our promises of good treatment finally decided them to desert’, there would be ‘severe disciplinary action’ taken against anyone mistreating deserters. But the same day, General Ironside reported to the War Office that he had had fifteen Russian soldiers shot after Russian troops at Pinega (south-east of Archangel) had killed their officers after protests that they had not been paid. The situation on both sides of the Archangel front was thus highly unstable.

On the 22nd, the War Office informed Ironside that Knox had now shown Sir Henry Wilson’s long wire of April 30 to Admiral Kolchak, whose plans were as follows:
1 The Siberian Army would occupy Kazan and Viatka, and then join up with the Archangel forces.
2 The Western Army would hold the Volga river line from Kazan to Samara, and then join up with the Don Cossacks.
3 Both Armies would then advance on Moscow. (This would complete the Golovin plan, without a Baltic offensive, which Kolchak did not mention.)

Kolchak thought it vital to open up the Dvina river route this summer, so that he could be independent of the Siberian railway; the junction with Denikin was thus not so important, he had wired, intoning Sir Henry Wilson’s recommendations. All this seemed satisfactory; but there was fair warning at the end. ‘We are warned by Knox that it is part of Russian character to draw up plans without the means of carrying them out being taken into consideration.’

Ironside, having wired back for a definite date, then discussed the Kotlas operation with General Miller (the Russian Commander); if only the British could ‘start the ball rolling’ by breaking the enemy front, the Russian troops could do the rest, Miller said. But Ironside remained sceptical, especially as the one idea of the Russian officers now arriving at Archangel (all former prisoners in Germany) was to return straight home. Nor would Miller show any interest in the Slavo-British legion (recruited from Bolshevik prisoners); it often happened, he remarked, that the ‘worst and most dangerous’ men seemed the best disciplined. Miller was to be proved right.

At the Admiralty, there was now some concern about the real intentions of the War Office in North Russia. On May 8, Captain Collard, DDOD (H), sent a secret wire to the SNO Archangel, to be decyphered by him alone. ‘Archangel river expeditionary force has been organised on assumption that no military operations would be undertaken much south of present positions held on Dvina’, he stated. ‘There appears now possibility of extending operations in direction Kotlas. Obtain opinion of experienced local people and telegraph what will be probable minimum depth in navigable channel of river Dvina during each month May to October inclusive,

a) between Archangel and Berenetskaya [i.e. Bereznik].
b) between Berenetskaya and Nikolski in latitude 62 north.
c) between Nikolski and Kotlas.’

There was no immediate reply.

At Archangel, Captain Altham was planning for the link-up as best he could. On the 19th, he had this message passed to the Admiralty. ‘In view of probable extended operations and signs of river being low this year, shallow draught craft will be essential’. Next day, the SNO Archangel reported that the monitors M. 25 and M. 27 were at Kurgomen, and the gunboats Cricket, Glow-worm and Cockchafer were at Pless, and Cicala at Bereznik. There had been a naval action at 2 a.m. on the 19th, in which Bolshevik gunboats had been driven off near Tulgas, but two
Bolshevik guns had outranged the British guns by some 1,500 yards; and Captain Altham wanted more and bigger guns sent out. The Admiralty agreed to their despatch.

On May 22 (as Ironside was informed of Kolchak’s plans), Captain Altham submitted an appreciation of the situation in North Russia. ‘Having committed ourselves to the policy of intervention in Northern Russia and become the mainstay and prop of the [Archangel] Provisional Government in their struggle against Bolshevik aggression, a premature withdrawal would mean disaster to those whom we have befriended and irreparable damage to our prestige’, he wrote. The conditions for clearing up the situation completely and terminating our military obligations before the end of this year are most favourable.’ Fresh troops, ample guns and supplies, a strong naval river force, and seaplanes were being sent out. ‘The morale of the Bolshevik forces is low, as has been proved by recent desertions and surrenders’, he wrote. ‘A vigorous offensive in July should enable a rapid advance on Kotlas to be made.’ If British forces withdrew without first striking at the enemy, the Bolsheviks would claim that they had driven them out of North Russia, ‘with the consequent added prestige to a scourge whose sands of time are at present ebbing low’, he warned.

Altham went on, ‘The naval part in connection with such operations will necessitate the use of all the most shallow draught craft as far as Kotlas and possibly of the gunboats on the Soukhona river. If optimistic expectations are fulfilled, it may be possible for these latter to work through to Petrograd and return home via the Baltic. The heavier draught gunboats will not be able to work in the upper reaches of the river in all probability.’ He concluded, The naval forces already approved are adequate and suitable, but the shallow-draught ships, which will be the last arrivals, are essential to the success of the operations owing to their extended scope and the low water which is reported in the River this year.’

Altham’s plans were as follows. Before the Relief Force arrived, there were to be 2 monitors and 3 gunboats on the Dvina, 1 gunboat on the Vaga, 6 seaplanes based on Bereznik, and 2 monitors at Archangel. The minesweepers would go up river on arrival.

When the general advance took place, 6 monitors would go up the Dvina, as far as navigation allowed, 2 would remain at the advanced base, and 2 at Archangel; 3 gunboats would go up the Dvina, 2 would remain at the advanced base, and 1 would go up the Vaga; while the minesweepers would tow the seaplanes on lighters. (The gunboats, however, would be kept in reserve as much as possible for the final operations.)

In the final stage of the advance, when only gunboats and shallow draught craft could be used, 2 gunboats would remain at Kotlas, while 4 would go down the Soukhona river; the minesweepers would tow down the seaplanes on lighters; while the monitors guarded the communications on the Dvina, allowing the heavier monitors to return to Archangel.
When the British withdrawal took place, ‘selected ships may be turned over to Russians, if conditions make this necessary and Admiralty approve. They will get their Russian crews at Kotlas and winter up-river.’ All the remainder would return to Archangel, and then England.

On the 24th, the SNO Archangel finally replied to Captain Collard’s secret wire of the 8th, about the depth of water in the upper Dvina river in the summer. ‘Reliable depths for each month are unobtainable’, he wired. ‘Least depths are during months of July to beginning of September when following were obtained in 1915 and 1916.

a) Archangel to Bereznik. Four feet one inch.

b) Bereznik to Nikolski. Four feet one inch.

c) Nikolski to Kotlas. Three feet $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

In 1917 least depth 3 feet 6 inches in several places. In 1918 four feet. In bad years as little as two feet has been obtained.

It was thus clear that the War Office’s failure—or refusal—to inform the Admiralty in April of their real intentions for extended operations up the Dvina river was going to lead to trouble; and Captain Altham’s ambitious plans (as outlined above) were now pure moonshine. As the Dvina river looked like being low that year anyhow, as Altham admitted, and the Kotlas operation looked like taking place in late June or early July, the Monitors (which drew between 8 feet and 5 feet 9 inches) would be unable to move from the port of Archangel: the 4 gunboats (which drew 4 feet) would be practically scraping the bottom if they tried to get out of Archangel harbour as far as Bereznik; only the 4 minesweepers (which drew 3 feet 6 inches) could get any further, and they—in a low water year—would be scraping the bottom as they neared Kotlas. The various barges and lighters, if guns could be mounted on them, would now be the only hope.

On May 26, as supplies and material, to be sent via Archangel to Kolchak after the link-up, were being hurriedly assembled, the first Relief Brigade arrived at the Dvina river mouth, and made a triumphal entry next day into Archangel watched by some 20,000 local people (see Figure 1). ‘As I looked at the crowd’, records Ironside, ‘I calculated that there must be at least 3,000 able-bodied men there. I thought how disgusting it was that out of this number we had got no more than 150 to come forward for the defence of their country.’ A warm message came from King George V, which Ironside did read out (unlike Churchill’s recent message), assuring him of the ‘interest with which I shall continue to watch your operations, and may all good luck attend you’.

The War Office then warned that Knox in all wanted 180 vehicles, 30 aircraft, and arms, clothing and equipment for the 100,000 Russian troops, which Kolchak hoped to mobilise in North Russia, sent in via Archangel. Could Ironside handle this amount? (But the material already sent had already proved somewhat indifferent. Ironside had wired angrily that the 6 Sopwith aircraft sent out on the War Grange had been proved by test flights to be ‘even worse than
NORTHERN RUSSIA'S WELCOME

Governor General Miller’s Tribute to Britons.

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth daring sailors and traders from England arrived in Archangel, which was then part of the dominions of the Moscovite Tsar, John the Terrible. Here, on the banks of the Dvina, Englishmen and Russians met for the first time. Archangel received the strangers with courtesy, and they were regarded by the Terrible Tsar with favour. He invited them to visit him in Ancient Moscow, where he received them cordially and granted them, before they left his presence, a Trading Charter which assisted the relations between the two countries.

Much time has passed since. England and Russia, guided by their statesmen, have pursued their own courses in history, more than once passing through historical crises which shook Europe—sometimes fighting shoulder to shoulder against a common enemy and sometimes meeting as opponents. And, as the political lives of our countries followed their own courses, so did the lives of our peoples.

In Ancient Moscow, the heart of Russia, in St. Petersburg, the young and splendid Russian Capital, and in other parts of the immense Russian State, British Colonies appeared and flourished. The British brought us their knowledge, and sent to us the merchandise she needed.

On the field of battle and in peaceful work among our people, Englishmen, from time immemorial, have been known to us as people of undaunted courage, of practical working ability, always unswerving in their aims and unwaveringly honest in their dealings. Russians came to value the word of an Englishman higher than any written bond. The English word "Gentleman" was adopted into the Russian language, and in every Englishman, before all else, we always expect to see a gentleman.

Three and a half centuries passed, and again the British landed on the banks of the Dvina, where their help was needed. Russia was under the heel of the Bolshevik—The Bolshevist who, in the middle of the great war, treacherously signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, committed the most unheard-of crimes in Russia (one of their victims was Captain Granrie of the British Navy,) threw hundreds of innocent sons of Britain into prison, and finally aroused the indignation of the British Government which, a year ago, sent troops to the distant North of Russia—to Murman and Archangel.

These troops formed the outpost, under the protection of which began the creation of the Russian Navy for the struggle for the deliverance of Russia from the despotic power of the one-time German agents—the traitorous Bolsheviks.

These tyrants and cutthroats—mostly aliens—stained with the guilt of every kind of crime, helped by Germans and supported by Estonian and Chinese mercenaries, have, by deception, force and terror, enslaved a portion of the simple and ignorant Russian people.

Now we have witnessed the arrival of further British troops. These soldiers volunteered to strengthen the "outpost" in order to help Russia to free herself from the yoke of the Bolshevist.

Welcome, Gallant British Soldiers, hastening in disinterested and self-sacrificing aid in the struggle for the deliverance of Russia from the miscreants under whose yoke the majority of the Russian people groan.

Long live Great Britain, who helps us to re-build our Mother Country on a basis of Right and Justice.

WELCOME! BRITAIN’s Outpost.

(Signed) E. MILLER

GOVERNOR GENERAL NORTH RUSSIA

Figure 1 The Russian General Miller's message of greeting to the first British Relief Brigade, which arrived at Archangel, 27 May 1919
anticipated’. One engine, already written off, had even been sent out with a bent crankshaft. These machines might do basic ferry work, ‘but all six are useless for operations against enemy…as I consider the matter disgraceful, I wish attention of S of S to be drawn to this’, stated Ironside.)

The Bolsheviks had already taken action to repel Gajda’s force by despatching their own special brigade to Viatka—with singularly sad results. It was lead by a character called Paniushkin, a wild Bolshevik sailor from the Baltic Fleet, who had guarded the Kremlin in early 1918, then fought at Kazan during the critical operations in August, when Trotsky had noticed Paniushkin’s undisciplined and ‘independent’ attitude. In late December, Paniushkin was at Simbirsk with ‘undefined powers’, and the 5th Army also complained strongly about his indiscipline. Paniushkin retaliated by passing on ‘sinister hints’ about the 5th Army to Lenin. Trotsky smoothed things over; but he was not pleased to hear in March that Paniushkin’s brigade was being recalled from the Finnish front and sent urgently to Viatka. But on April 5, Trotsky was enquiring why he was still in Petrograd. A week later, Lenin was also. When Paniushkin finally set forth, 600 of his men jumped out of the train. On arrival at Viatka, the brigade commander was drunk, and Paniushkin (the Commissar) refused point blank to obey the 3rd Army command, and declined to hand over a single soldier. When they tried to dismiss him, the whole brigade mutinied en masse; and the 3rd Army command, after making rapid calculations of how many machine guns they probably had, had hastily to withdraw reliable troops from the Eastern Front to defend themselves.

‘Another vignette from actual life’, wrote Trotsky, forwarding an account of this incident to the Central Committee on May 3. ‘Left-foot-first Paniushkin’ [as Trotsky called him] should be expelled from the Bolshevik Party, discharged from the Red Army, and handed over for trial. Trotsky protested at the despatch of such people with ‘apocalyptic mandate in pocket’. But on May 7, the Central Committee entirely rejected Trotsky’s request, and posted Paniushkin to the Cheka. Paniushkin lived on until 1960.

On May 28, Admiral Green wired the Admiralty. ‘After consulting with Captain Altham we are of opinion that owing to low water in Dvina that any monitors that have not [?already left] United Kingdom should not be sent out and that labour be concentrated on shallow draught gunboats and transport craft.’

On receipt of this wire, Captain Collard wrote a strong minute to the DCNS. ‘The Archangel River Expeditionary Force was organised on the assumption (concurred in by the War Office) that there would be no material advance south up the River Dvina this year beyond the positions held during the later winter, in the vicinity of Kurgomen’, he wrote. The policy during the winter was to evacuate North Russia as soon as the White Sea was open to navigation, and in order to successfully carry out the evacuation in the face of a probably hostile population, it was considered necessary to send as many vessels as possible capable of operating on that reach of the River Dvina situated between Archangel and Kurgomen.
'However, owing to the recent successes of Admiral Kolchak’s Siberian Armies, the policy has undergone considerable modification and it is now considered desirable to effect a junction at or about Kotlas between the Allied and Russian Forces operating from Archangel and Kolchak’s Armies. It is considered that, if this junction can be effected, the Russian Forces operating from Archangel in conjunction with Kolchak’s Forces will be able to stand against the Bolsheviks, and that it will be possible to withdraw the British and Allied Forces from Archangel before the forthcoming winter.

‘This new extended operation to Kotlas necessitates very shallow draught vessels’, warned Captain Collard, ‘and, therefore, the Monitors which draw over 6 feet of water, will not be able to operate in the upper reaches of the Dvina. The question of providing more shallow draught vessels for these extended operations is under consideration’, he stated. Only 2 Monitors (Mersey and Severn) were still to sail for North Russia; and although they might not now be able to operate on the Dvina, Collard urged that they be sent for possible use at Onega, and on the western shore of the White Sea.

‘It is a matter of men, to a great extent’, minuted the DCNS the same day. ‘I am not prepared to send these ships unless R.A. White Sea requires them, as we shall then have to struggle for men to man the shallow draught craft which he certainly does require. What is the state of affairs as regards additional shallow draught craft & how is it proposed to man them?’

At 7.15 pm that night, Captain Collard sent the following telegram (no. 35) to Admiral Green: ‘In view of possible extended operations in upper reaches of river Dvina where least depth may be less than 4 feet between Bereznik and Kotlas, what vessels do you propose to use for offensive operations and minesweeping?’

There was no reply. Ironside, it was now clear, was not going to get ‘adequate’ naval cooperation, which was one of the main provisos in his guarantee to take Kotlas. A fiasco, or worse, was in the offing on the Dvina river.

The Golovin master-plan, as we have seen, envisaged the immediate creation of a new Russian front in the Baltic to clear the whole Russian area north of Moscow, whilst Denikin was busy reorganising his forces after the French debacle in the Ukraine, which had prevented him from marching on Moscow from South Russia.

How far was Denikin being successful in his reorganisation? Could he yet march on Moscow from South Russia, albeit later than originally planned?

**South Russia**

In South Russia, the situation was now crucial for both sides. Wrangel once again urged Denikin to withdraw from the Donetz, and transfer all their troops to the Tsaritsin front, leaving only the Don Cossacks to protect their left flank on the right bank of the Don. Denikin refused. Though admitting that the position in the Donetz was becoming ‘more and more alarming’, he still maintained that he could hold off the four Red Armies north of the Donetz, while he smashed the
10th Red Army on the Manytsch. A British tank detachment, its Russian crews only partly trained, was therefore rushed to the Donetz. On May 8, in the Voskressensky Shiroky district, three Mark V and two Whippet tanks went into action against the Bolshevik troops, who opened up heavy rifle and machine gun fire against them, but did little damage; and despite an artillery barrage, the Whippets then pursued the Bolsheviks as they retired. Next day, the tanks were out of action because of the ‘exhaustion of the crews’, and the need for minor repairs. But on the 10th, as the Bolsheviks had withdrawn, the tanks were put on trucks, and taken to Choumakovo by rail.

On seeing them, the Bolshevik troops ‘fled panic-stricken’, reported a British officer. ‘Prisoners say that the Bolsheviks, on seeing the tanks, left their positions & went to the rear, saying that they would fight no more unless tanks were given them…The arrival of the tanks made a great moral impression on the local inhabitants.’ (This report, unfortunately, did not reach London until June 24.)

Volunteer Army troops, supported by three tanks, then advanced towards Khanjenkovo north of Khartsissk, where they drew heavy artillery fire, one of the tanks receiving a direct hit and some twenty hits with shrapnel; but after minor repairs on the spot, it caught up with the Russian infantry again. ‘The tanks in this fight made a strong impression on the Reds; the mere sight of the tanks threw the enemy’s ranks into confusion, & he fled panic stricken, abandoning rifles, ammunition and clothing’, reported a British officer. ‘In general, the moral effect of the tanks justified to the full the hopes…placed in them.’

Matters were also critical for the Bolsheviks not only in the Donetz but also on the Manytsch. As the C-in-C Vatsetis warned that Denikin had 20,000 more troops than the Bolsheviks on the Southern front, the Central Committee wired to Kiev on the 8th that after discussing the ‘critical, wellnigh catastrophic’ situations on both the Donetz and Manytsch fronts, they directed that more military aid be sent from the Ukraine to the Donetz, and that 20,000 workers be mobilised at once in Odessa, Ekaternoslav, Nicolaiev, Kharkov and Sebastopol. ‘You must understand that, failing the rapid capture of Rostov, disaster is inevitable for the Revolution.’

But disaster had already struck in the Ukraine. On May 7, Ataman Gregoriev, who had been ordered to link up with the Hungarian Bolsheviks, launched a revolt against the Bolshevik leaders, seized Elizavetgrad, and issued a violent manifesto calling for their overthrow at Kiev. Makhno, the young anarchist leader now holding the railway near Mariopol, was urged to denounce Gregoriev; but his ambiguous statement strongly attacked the Bolshevik Commissars and Chekas. There was now a mortal danger for the Bolsheviks that the Ukrainian Atamans would somehow link up with the Cossack insurgents in the Donetz. On May 12, Voroshilov was put in command of the Kharkov Military District, and instructed to liquidate Gregoriev with another striking force which was sent from Kremenchug.

On the 13th, Trotsky wired Sklyansky urgently from Boguchar on the Don for more Military Commissars—even to serve in the ranks—in view of the ‘enormous
importance’ of liquidating the Cossack rising. There had, in fact, been a ‘perceptible set-back’ on the Southern front, he warned Lenin. The demoralisation of our regiments has gone pretty far.’ It was this that had delayed matters. Reinforcements must be divided equally between the Southern and Eastern fronts. He was leaving for the Ukraine. This message caused much concern in Moscow, since there was news that Denikin was moving to link up with the Cossack insurgents.

Next day, Trotsky sent Lenin a more detailed appreciation of the position in the Donetz. There had been ‘criminal negligence’ over the suppression of the Cossack rising. There was no operational direction. The regiments were shuffled about without rhyme or reason. Demoralisation among the units was fostered by operational ineptness, if not deliberate wrecking, and total passivity on the part of the commanders and commissars. The art of directing operations was reduced to the compilation of operational communiques that were false from beginning to end. “Pressure” exerted by superior forces, encirclement and outflanking are the terms used throughout. What in fact took place was desertion, retreat and, at the best, marking time on the spot. After it had been reported that the cadets had been encircled and annihilated, it turned out that their detachment had successfully made their way back, losing two of their number killed and four wounded. It should have been clear to Command Headquarters that the mutineers were not capable of encircling and destroying any detachment that was at all organised and combat-fit, given the state of their own strength and resources. There had also been no political work. The regiments, cut off from their own divisions and deprived for many weeks, even months, of newspapers, naturally tended to succumb to the influence exerted by the insurgents. The regiments not only refused to advance but threatened to fire on those units which agreed to carry out military orders.’

Trotsky had therefore set up a Tribunal to have ‘all offenders severely prosecuted’. All guilty Military Commissars and Commanders would be handed over in the presence of their regiments. The Moscow cadets had arrived in Chertkovo ‘in excellent order and high morale’. A new Commander was regrouping a proper striking force instead of trying to surround the insurgents with a ‘thin red line’. Trotsky wanted six armoured cars sent down to the Don. ‘I am very glad to hear of the energetic measures taken to suppress the uprising’, replied Lenin with relief. There must be the ‘swiftest possible’ drive on the Donbass. ‘Without the taking of Rostov we shall soon be unable to emerge from under our other burdens.’

However, on May 17, Trotsky wired the Central Committee from Kharkov that the ‘chaos, irresponsibility, laxity and separatism’ in the Ukraine exceeded the ‘most pessimistic expectations’. The Ukrainian Command must either be reorganised, or placed partly under the Southern front, while a special army would move against Hungary. They must take advantage of the Gregoriev mutiny to carry out a ‘radical, implacable liquidation of the partisan movement, of separatism and left-wing hooliganism’, and switch their main attention to the
Donetz basin. Trotsky asked for the full support of the Central Committee, whereupon he would proceed to Kiev and take action.

But in South Russia, it was above all a contest of the weak. For on May 14, Wrangel (the Volunteer Army Commander) came to tell Denikin on the Manytsch that the situation in the Donetz was now critical; a retreat was inevitable. Denikin refused to accept this. No greater headway was being made on the Manytsch; and there was no unity among the Cossacks, he complained. Denikin offered the Manytsch command to Wrangel, who now accepted with alacrity, though still suffering from typhus.

From a church tower, Wrangel saw that all Bolshevik forces on the Manytsch were concentrated in Velikokniageskaya, which was well defended. Though it was impossible to force a crossing of the Manytsch river there, he noticed that it became shallow and swampy nearby. He therefore had a causeway built from the local wooden fences, which was laid down one evening. At dawn, his troops and artillery began to cross. After bitter fighting, the town was taken,* the 10th Red Army wiped out; and there was nothing to prevent Wrangel marching on Tsaritsin, and then up the Volga. General Denikin arrived ‘overjoyed and embraced me’, Wrangel records. ‘When are you going to win Tsaritsin for us?’ he asked. Wrangel said he could take Tsaritsin in 3 weeks, if sent an infantry brigade and the necessary artillery.28

This redoubled Lenin’s anxiety. They were ‘very disturbed’, he wired to both the 10th Army and to Astrakhan, by the enemy’s advance on the Manytsch and on the Caspian. ‘Why is there no new?’ There was no reply. (On May 18, the Bolshevik flotilla set out from the Alexandrovsky fortress to attack the British base at Chechen Island. Seven Bolshevik ships were lost. It was thus decided to evacuate the Alexandrovsky fortress at once, no doubt because Denikin’s troops had just taken Cherny Rynok, on the western shore of the Caspian, some 150 miles south of Astrakhan.) Lenin, far more concerned about the Cossack rising in the Donetz, then—to his fury—had to excuse the Donetz miners from mobilisation.† The ‘most merciless and immediate suppression of the uprising has, coute que coute,† become an absolute necessity for us’, he instructed the Southern front. But nothing happened.

But as Denikin progressed at the front, dissension again broke out in the Caucasus in the rear. On May 5, General Briggs (Head of the British Mission) reported that delegates from the Kuban, the Don, the Terek, the Chechens, from Astrakhan and the Crimea (but not from Georgia and Azerbaijan), were discussing the reformation of the South East Union (backed in early 1918 by the British, but only put into effect after the Brest-Litovsk Treaty by the Germans). Denikin,

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* Wrangel states that he captured this town on May 19. But there is strong evidence that it was in fact taken a few days earlier than this; and President Wilson had told the Council of Four of a ‘great victory’ by Denikin on May 17.

† This phrase is in French in the original Russian text.
angry at these petty politics at a time of great danger, told them the matter was premature, and to drop it. General Milne (the British Commander at Constantinople) was more concerned about Georgia. The present Georgian leaders, he wired the War Office on the 9th, were all the worst Bolshevik elements, and the Georgian Army near Gagri (on the Black Sea coast) was nothing but a Bolshevik rabble, which had hoisted the Red Flag, and were openly insulting British troops. Only strong action would bring them to heel. Milne wished to tell them that they no longer had British support, and that Britain would not back Georgian independence at the Peace Conference. Once the Georgian frontier was defined, British warships should open fire on any troops who advanced north of it. A Mandatory Power was urgently necessary for the Caucasus States, Milne emphasised. Next day, he wired again that Denikin should meet all the South East Union delegates, including the Caucasus delegates, provided they recognised Russian sovereignty. But both the DMI and the Foreign Office agreed that Russian re-absorption of the Caucasus States could not possibly be approved.

But though the Treasury had now given grudging approval for a further 150,000 sets of British equipment (for which Briggs had just asked) to be sent to Denikin, only a small amount of the British arms and supplies originally promised by the War Office had actually reached South Russia, except for the tanks. The British Mission was also very understrength; the surplus from the British volunteers for North Russia was not nearly sufficient. The General Staff therefore suggested that some forty officers might collect about fifteen men each, and these ‘feudal bands’ could make up the difference. This odd project was approved.

It had, however, by now been decided to replace General Briggs with an officer of greater administrative ability. Churchill had, in fact, seen Major-General H.C. Holman on May 2, and asked him for his ideas on an enlarged British Mission in South Russia. After studying all the relevant documents, Holman on May 10 wrote down his views, to which Colonel Steel (the DMO’s officer responsible for military operations in Russia) added his remarks in the margin.

The British Government’s intention, Holman understood, was to help the Volunteer Army to defeat the Bolsheviks, ‘and when this is done, to leave the Russian people, free from terrorism, to shape their own destiny. (“Yes”, noted Steel.) Consequently the British Military Mission has to confine itself to the… military needs of the Volunteer Army, to avoid politics except where politics are inseparable from military questions’, to explain Denikin’s views to the War Office, and supervise the delivery of British supplies. (‘Yes’, added Colonel Steel, with a large tick. ‘The Foreign Office are not doing their share. Mr Bagge, lately at Odessa, a first class man, should be sent forthwith to join Gen. Holman as his political adviser.’)

Holman therefore recommended:
1 British instructors now scattered about amongst the Volunteer Army should be withdrawn to base, and some sent home.

2 Tightening assistance to the Russians [should] be concentrated in the shape of British units, consisting of aeroplane squadrons, tank detachments, armoured car detachments, and armed river craft detachments.’ (‘Yes’, noted Steel. ‘But Admiralty in conversation have unofficially said they could not do (river craft). Raising these depends entirely upon the terms of service to be offered.’ No decision had yet been reached.)

3 The British Mission’s main task was to help Denikin with administration; for it had been proved in France that men well fed and clothed were capable of ‘almost incredible endurance and fighting tenacity’. It was thus vital to set up a proper organisation at Novorossisk and on the railways, and maintain good links with the front. The Russians almost invariably fail in such work’, Holman wrote. Though there could be no ‘open assumption of administrative control’, the British Mission should thus be placed ‘nominally at the disposal of Russian Military Authorities, work in with them in such a way as to let the Russians think that they are controlling, whilst it will be our personnel who will really see things through’. British officers in charge must therefore be men of ‘great tact and of real administrative ability’.

Colonel Steel passed this on the same day to the DMO, adding that it would ‘form the basis of the instructions which we are to give him’. Both the DMO and the DCIGS thought Holman’s proposals ‘very sound’. So did Churchill. ‘Who is holding up the decisions to which reference is made in the marginal notes?’ he asked. ‘I am quite ready to approve all these points and to take the matter up personally with the Treasury with the least possible delay. Pray let me know how the matter stands.’ The British Missions to both Denikin and Kolchak should at once be brought up to 2,000 men each; and if they could make proper use of more supplies, the War Office were not to limit themselves to the amounts agreed. ‘I hope General Holman…will go out with the feeling that his Mission is being well provided for.’

Churchill also wrote a personal letter to Denikin. General Holman, he pointed out, was a ‘technical authority of the highest order’ on administration, who had been in charge of supplying Rawlinson’s army in France. He also spoke Russian well, and was a ‘great admirer and friend of the Russian people. He comes out to help you and to aid you in every way in your task of warring down the Bolshevik tyranny…I hope you will regard him as a friend and comrade and treat him with every confidence…Agreeably with the policy of His Majesty’s Government, we shall do our utmost to assist you in every respect.’ Holman was also the bearer of the KCB for Denikin himself, and a number of other British decorations for such Russian officers whose conduct especially merited recognition.

The DMO, however, was dissatisfied with this letter, since Britain’s resources were ‘not endless’, he minuted, and added a paragraph reminding Denikin that while the War Office ‘will give you every assistance within our power…you will
realise, I am sure, that our resources, drained by the great struggle successfully concluded six months ago and to a smaller degree by our past commitments in all parts of Russia, are not unlimited’. When this matter was settled, Colonel Steel told General Holman to ‘take the principles contained in your memorandum as your instructions’.

From South Russia, Captain George Hill, now the chief British political agent on Reilly’s departure for London in late March, reported that there was great friendship and respect for the British after the Odessa débâcle, which had created real hatred of the French, which would take years to forget. Hill strongly urged that advantage be taken of this, and that a British High Commissioner be sent to Denikin; this idea was favoured by many influential Russians. Reilly’s project for forming a local anti-Bolshevik section, he added, had been taken up at Constantinople, and was working well, though confined to very narrow limits. On May 20, Hill reported on Roumania, where all danger of a Bolshevik outbreak—which had been steadily decreasing since February—had now passed, owing to economic improvement and a new national spirit after the Hungarian Bolshevik defeat. There were no real leaders amongst the Roumanian socialists and workers. The main danger now lay in Bessarabia (the disputed border territory between Roumania and Russia); and Rakovsky (the head of the Ukrainian Soviet Government) was doing his best to undermine the situation from Kiev. On the Dniester, the morale of the Roumanian troops was very good; but the French troops there were ‘quite unreliable and very much out of control’, and thus a grave and immediate danger. Harvest time, however, might bring trouble unless the Roumanian troops were given some leave, and some released; and Rakovsky was said to be waiting until then.

General Milne confirmed this. Roumanian morale was high, but Greek troops on the Dniester were now infected with Bolshevism, and could not be relied upon; while French troops were far more dangerous than useful. General Franchet d’Esperey had left for the front, and was going to leave the Greek troops there, but replace the French troops by Senegalese. ‘Neither I nor Roumanians have confidence in Senegalese’, stated Milne.

On May 22, the British tanks in the Donetz were withdrawn to Taganrog to enable the Russian crews to complete their instruction. But owing to anxiety on the Tsaritsin front, Denikin decided to send the tanks back into action before the Russian crews had finished their training. On the 28th, Briggs wired the War Office for another fifty Mark V tanks to be sent out. Those in action had shown excellent results, and he now had enough ‘highly trained’ Russian crews to man this extra number; for War Office expert opinion had been quite wrong, as he could train Russian crews in three to four weeks. (Telegrams were so delayed at this time that this wire, in answer to a War Office wire of May 6, never reached London until June 17. In view of the vital importance of the British tanks, this was a crucial blow to Denikin.)

But it was decided at the War Office that no further supplies or tanks would be sent out until General Holman had properly organised the base at Novorossisk;
and on May 22, armed with orders written by himself, and the revised letter to Denikin, he left London for South Russia to help ‘war down’ Bolshevism and all its works.

There remained great difficulty in bringing the British Missions up to strength. On the 23rd, the General Staff decided that both in South Russia and Siberia they must receive an extra ‘colonial allowance’, which Kolchak and Denikin would pay for, and the Treasury guarantee; officers would receive 4 shillings a day, and other ranks 2 shillings and sixpence. ‘The bonus’, minuted the General Staff, ‘will be announced as…an inducement offered by the Russian anti-Bolshevik Government…North Russia will thus be excluded.’ Special leave would also be granted, and local allowances adjusted to meet the actual cost of living.

The exchange rate also had to be settled. For Milne had wired that while the Army was being paid in roubles at the rate of 80 roubles to the pound, the Navy at Novorossisk was being paid in sterling, which was then selling to the Russians at 250 roubles to the pound. This was not only causing resentment amongst the British Mission, but ‘might well result’ in them selling British supplies to make up the deficiency. Milne thought that everyone should be paid in sterling, and the rate fixed at 250 roubles to the pound or whatever the Navy could get. A special allowance of 10 shillings a day should also be paid to the British Mission, over and above all other allowances, which should be retrospective. But in the end, the Treasury, with a great show of reluctance, only approved the small ‘colonial allowance’, and nothing else at all; the Navy ceased to be paid in sterling, and the rate seems to have been fixed at about 200 roubles to the pound.

Lenin was still obsessed by the danger of the Cossack rising in the Donetz—the front from which Wrangel wished to withdraw. On May 21, however, Lenin wired Trotsky at Kharkov that as the Eastern front were bombarding the Central Committee for the return of Kamenev (whom Trotsky and the C-in-C Vatsetis had just dismissed for his contention that the counter-attack against Kolchak could be maintained even if troops were diverted from the Eastern to the Southern front), he should be reinstated as Military Commander. Matters could be settled by wire. Lenin urged Trotsky to bring the Cossack rising to an end himself, ‘as there is no hope of victory otherwise’. Trotsky agreed to the return of Kamenev. But the matter must be discussed with Vatsetis, ‘so as not to disrupt the entire apparatus at one stroke’. There were other people who supported the new man. ‘These front-line attachments are our general headache’, he admitted. But as Lenin went on wiring to all and sundry to put down the Cossack rising, Trotsky wired again to Lenin sharply that the troops would have eight days to regroup before the ‘decisive operation’ to suppress it. ‘Hence the lull…is in the due order of events’, he explained. ‘They should not be jerked into action so as to avoid any recurrence of premature sallies.’

On the 22nd, as the Central Committee asked Sklyansky to discuss with Trotsky the appointment of Kamenev as Bolshevik Chief of Staff, the wires again hummed between the Kremlin and Trotsky’s train at Kharkov. Unless the Cossack rising was at once put down, ‘we shall be powerless even to defend
Astrakhan’, Trotsky was told. Lenin ‘yet again’ insisted that Trotsky himself return to Boguchar on the Don. Trotsky replied briefly. ‘I am leaving for Boguchar where I shall endeavour to see the matter through.’ Trotsky then wired again for a Cheka battalion, several hundred Baltic sailors, some Moscow workers and Party officials, both to obtain bread and coal from Mariopol, and discipline Makhno’s anarchist bands. ‘Only on this condition will an advance in the Mariopol-Taganrog direction become possible’, he warned Lenin.33

Next day, as Lenin kept up the pressure, and Sklyansky warned Trotsky of the plan to appoint Kamenev as Bolshevik Chief of Staff, the two striking forces—from Kharkov and from Kremenchug—linked up to liquidate the rebellious Ataman Gregoriev at Elizavetgrad in the Ukraine. When this was completed, instructed Trotsky, their best troops were then to help the Ukrainain troops against General Shkuro’s Cossacks and Makhno’s anarchists. They should use the remains of Gregoriev’s ‘reasonably reliable’ units to split up Makhno’s bands, remove his leaders, and restore order. Trotsky then replied sharply to Sklyansky that Kamenev should return to the Eastern front, not become Chief of Staff. Trotsky would remain on the Don to speed things up. ‘I now hope that a decisive blow will be inflicted within ten days time.’34

Lenin wired to Kharkov and Kiev that the coal at Mariopol should be loaded forthwith for delivery to Petrograd. If Makhno opposed this, they were to barter the coal for textiles and other goods, he stated—thus countermanding Trotsky’s orders. In another wire, to be read out to all prominent Bolsheviks, he insisted on the liquidation of Gregoriev and the ‘wholesale disarming of the population; apply shooting on the spot, without mercy, to every case of concealment of a single rifle’, he ordered.34 ‘The whole crux of the situation is swift victory in the Donbass, the collection of all the rifles from the villages and the creation of a solid army.’

Everything went wrong. Denikin finally broke through to join the Cossack insurgents at Millerovo in the Donetz. Trotsky wired in alarm on the 27th that operations would begin the next day. ‘All practicable measures’ had been taken to liquidate Denikin’s breakthrough. But he was too late. On the 28th, the Central Committee wired in alarm to Kiev that, in spite of the C-in-C’s orders, they had only sent two weak Ukrainian regiments to the Southern front, and no workers at all. ‘Meanwhile Makhno is wheeling away to the West and exposing the flank and rear of the Thirteenth Army, thus leaving the way open to Denikin’s forces’, now breaking through to link up with the Cossack insurgents. ‘We have to resort to last-ditch measures.’ Even the cadets under training would have to be sent en masse to the Southern front, thus depriving the Red Army of its Military Commanders. The Ukrainian troops requested by the C-in-C must be sent to the Donetz within 3 days. Any further delay would be a ‘criminal act’. But the Central Committee was now wiring to the wind.34

Thus, exactly seven weeks after the French debacle at Odessa, which had shattered his left flank, and rendered an immediate advance on Moscow through the Donetz impossible, Denikin was now breaking out of the tight Bolshevik
net—towards Tsaritsin on the Volga, and back into the Donetz basin, while the Ukraine was again lapsing into chaos. The Bolshevik Southern front, which had looked so secure, was in peril.
With the German Peace Treaty temporarily out of the way, Lloyd George turned to Russia. He had abandoned the idea of peacemaking with the Bolsheviks. Perhaps the whole untidy affair could be cleared up by doing a quick deal with Kolchak, who looked as if he was going to win anyhow by such standards of the Great War as could be applied to the confused situation in Russia. Then the Allies could try and control him, and keep him away from the Germans. So Lloyd George had given way to Churchill; and Sir Henry Wilson, seeing which way the Arctic wind seemed to be blowing, had wired Kolchak to strike through to North Russia, and link up with British and Russian forces at Archangel—and leave Denikin to his own devices. It remained for Lloyd George to break this fait accompli discreetly to President Wilson, and win him round. The best way of doing this, he felt, was by inducing Kolchak to revive the Constituent Assembly (many of whose original members Kolchak had, however, long since murdered), and to promise land to the peasants; these were the cardinal points, he thought, that were worrying the President. The ‘broker’ for this operation would be the venerable revolutionary Chaikovsky, who had spent many years in exile in the United States, who had already recognised Kolchak—and from whose territory British troops were to make their transarctic dash to Siberia. This, then, was Lloyd George’s task while the Council of Four were awaiting the German reply to the Peace Terms.

There was no time to be lost. On May 8, General Spears wrote prophetically from Paris to Churchill that Kolchak’s advance, and his recognition by the Archangel Government ‘would seem to justify the optimistic attitude of the Russian Committee [in Paris], the members of which do not hesitate to state that Russia “will have lots of friends when Kolchak gets to Nizhni-Novgorod”. In the meanwhile’, warned Spears, ‘there is no doubt that practically all Russians, non-Bolsheviks as well as Bolsheviks, have become profoundly anti-Entente…of all the Allies we are perhaps the least unpopular. It is obvious that some one will have to “rediscover Russia” and help her to work out at least her economic
salvation…but if we wait too long, they will accept it from the Germans who will have to look East in the future.’

Early on May 9, a wire reached Paris from the American Consul Poole at Archangel that Bolshevik agitation there had now sunk to little or nothing, the position was much stronger than in early 1919; in fact, the situation had improved to an extent ‘hardly to be foreseen’. But recognition of Kolchak would have a greater moral than practical effect. ‘These aspects of the matter move me deeply’, wired Poole. ‘The great vice of Allied policy in Russia has been equivocation. It has tried to run with the hare while hunting with the hounds.’ The story of the Archangel expedition and of events in central Russia last summer amply proved this. It was impossible to compromise with the Bolsheviks. There could never be more than a paper peace with them. When a balance was struck with every allowance in their favour, it showed ‘incontrovertibly a preponderance of wickedness which corrupts intercourse and challenges the fighting spirit of all right-thinking men’.

Thus, the present conflict in Russia was ‘above all a moral conflict’. But as the Bolsheviks used force, so must the Allies ‘The Bolsheviks have had the moral audacity to cheat and lie and betray and murder, and then to defy the world with the sophistry, “we represent the working people, hands off”. They have succeeded so far because no one sufficiently powerful has yet had the courage to reply, “they do not represent the working people—they must and shall be put down”’. It concerned the Allies just as much as the Russians. ‘The hesitancy of the United States has long been a reliance of the Bolsheviks’, Poole underlined. ‘Possibly it is well that we have waited but surely it is long enough.’ A clear pronouncement now would be a ‘mark of moral leadership’, which would sweep away the ‘sophistries and equivocations which have degraded the gallant work our troops have already done for Russia’, and disclose the truth now obscured that ‘every blow struck at the Moscow Government is a blow as necessary and as potent for decency, justice and liberty in the world as those which have been struck on the Western Front’. Such a wire, clearly destined for President Wilson, now had a much greater effect in Paris.

At the State Department the same day, Polk informed Lansing in Paris that he had seen a wire from General Graves, which the Secretary of War had sent to the President with the recommendation that American forces in Siberia must cooperate with Kolchak, or be withdrawn. Polk thought that Graves had been very tactless. ‘I understand one of the results is that the British regard him as apparently sympathising with the Bolsheviks rather than with the Omsk authorities.’ Unless America backed Kolchak, Polk feared that Graves would clash with the Russians or the Japanese, or both. ‘I hope you will find it possible to discuss this matter with the President and Mr Lloyd George and reach some common agreement’, he wired.

That afternoon, the Council of Four considered the matter. President Wilson stated that America had been trying to send supplies to Siberia from Vladivostok, and had agreed to police the Siberian railway as far west as Irkutsk. But the
American Government ‘did not believe in Kolchak’. The British and the French military in Siberia were however supporting him, and Kolchak had become irritated by the American troops along the railway, ‘whom he regarded as neutrals’. And since the Siberian peasants admired free American standards, ‘they thought there must be something wrong with the Government of Kolchak’. Further, the Cossacks were out of sympathy with the American troops, and the President suspected that the Japanese would be glad to see them both collide. The American Government could thus either back Kolchak and send more American troops to Siberia, or withdraw. But if more troops were sent, Japan would certainly do the same. If American troops, however, continued merely to guard the Siberian railway, he was told that collisions were bound to occur; and if American troops were attacked, one could not expect them to do nothing. If they were withdrawn, the field would be left to Japan and Kolchak, who had Allied support. The President read out several telegrams from General Graves in support of all this.

Lloyd George replied that this strengthened his view on the need to agree on a Russian policy. Kolchak, who was advancing westward ‘at a very considerable rate’, could either link up with the Archangel forces, or march on Moscow. The President remarked that he had always thought the proper Allied policy was to ‘clear out of Russia and leave it to the Russians to fight it out among themselves’. Lloyd George urged that they hear Chaikovsky before taking a decision. The President now agreed. Lloyd George suggested that he tell General Graves not to take any action for the moment. President Wilson replied sharply that this entailed the risk of a collision between American and Russian troops. The Allies should at the same time ask Kolchak what his programme was. Lloyd George agreed: Kolchak should be asked two definite questions; whether the peasants could or could not retain the land, and whether he would revive the Constituent Assembly. The President commented that a ‘very Russophile friend’ had recently told him that each peasant had simply seized the land nearest to him. The problem would thus not only be to distribute the land, but to bring some order into the present situation, which would entail dispossession in some cases. Lloyd George then produced a map, showing Kolchak’s great advance. After some further discussion, it was agreed to hear Chaikovsky next day.

At noon on May 10, the Council of Four heard Chaikovsky, who at once announced that he had spent 32 years in England and America (and thus half his life out of Russia). President Wilson explained that in spite of Kolchak’s growing strength and rapid advance west, the Council of Four were ‘not entirely satisfied that the leadership of Kolchak was calculated to preserve what ought to be preserved of the new order of things in Russia’. They feared that it would result in a policy of military reaction. Chaikovsky replied that he had already given them the necessary assurances from both Kolchak and Denikin. The day before, he had received a further declaration from Denikin, made at the instigation of the Allied Military Attachés. As the Council of Four had not seen it before, Chaikovsky read
it out. This was the ‘fullest declaration’ yet made by Denikin, he added; Kolchak’s declarations, though, were ‘clear enough’.

President Wilson retorted that Kolchak’s proclamation was in very general terms, particularly about land reform. Chaikovsky replied that the land question in Siberia was not so acute as in Russia. There were few people, and plenty of land, under communal management. There was, however, a land problem in North Russia, about which he spoke at some length. All they could do until the Constituent Assembly met was to see that land temporarily seized was not confiscated. Kolchak was clearly also leaving matters to the Constituent Assembly. Lloyd George stated firmly that the Constituent Assembly must be a bona-fide Assembly, to which the land question could be safely entrusted. Secondly, the central Russian Government must define its attitude towards the Baltic States.

Chaikovsky realised that a military dictatorship might refuse to hand over to a Constituent Assembly. ‘There might be Mexican arguments at work.’* But Kolchak had promised the Zemstva that he would resign at once to a Constituent Assembly. ‘No one could ask more of him than that.’ Siberia was more democratic than Russia. There had been no nobles or large landowners; simply peasant farmers, and a small middle class. The only reactionaries were the newly arrived military element, upon whom Kolchak was dependent for his military success. This was why Kolchak, although a dictator, was ‘constantly announcing democratic measures’. Denikin’s position was quite different. In South Russia, there were many landowners, from whom his military officers were largely drawn. This made General Denikin’s declaration all the more significant.’ Chaikovsky, in reply to President Wilson, said that Kolchak was much stronger than Denikin. Kolchak was entering a well-populated region, from which he could draw recruits; while Denikin could raise no more recruits, and could only be reinforced from outside.

But the relations between the central Russian Government and the Baltic States were ‘most delicate and unsatisfactory’. Tsarist centralism and Bolshevik ill-treatment had produced a general ‘fashion of independence’. The Baltic States were economically weak, and must inevitably become dependent. The Esthonian delegates in Paris had admitted this to him; if treated as ‘equal to equal’, they would deal with Russia. The Lithuanians, he added, had already received large German funds.4

Denikin’s system of government was at present ‘rather complicated’, Chaikovsky went on. He had written several letters to Denikin’s Council, urging a clear demarcation between military and political duties. Though Denikin should hold full power, he should devote himself to military operations, and not interfere, nor allow his subordinates to interfere, in political matters. Denikin’s Council should deal with recruitment, training and supply. There had been great

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* A reference to the Mexican civil war, no doubt made to catch President Wilson’s attention.
difficulties at Archangel about this, but now their system was 'functioning perfectly', he claimed.

Lloyd George then began to read from a Foreign Office paper on Siberia, dated May 1, which stated that recent telegrams showed that more than 90 per cent of the townsfolk and 80 per cent of the peasants were members of Cooperative Societies, who were loosely linked with the Right SRs, who greatly resented Kolchak’s indifference to public opinion, and particularly condemned the Cossack General Ivanov-Rinov’s attacks on ‘all representative institutions, which is doing the greatest harm’. But they in no way objected to Allied recognition of Kolchak, provided he heeded public opinion.

Chaikovsky said that this was untrue. He himself was President of several Cooperative Societies, and had personal friends in Siberia high up in the Cooperative movement, who were actually supporting Kolchak from their head offices, which they would not dare to do if Kolchak were unpopular, as they were democratically organised.

Lloyd George went on reading: ‘Kolchak’s recent brilliant successes on his front are neutralised to a certain extent by the growing unrest in his rear.’

Chaikovsky stated that this report was much exaggerated. Kolchak himself, for example, was treated as the man who had carried out the coup d’etat. This was incorrect. Others had carried it out, and then forced the position of dictator on Kolchak, most of whose Ministers were former Socialists. (This was a highly dubious statement, without the correction that the military element in Siberia paid no heed to Kolchak’s Ministers.) President Wilson asked sharply whether Kolchak’s present advisers had carried out the coup d’etat. Chaikovsky replied that they had, and one Minister was a well-known SR; his own position was ‘very delicate’, as he stood between the two parties, and did not want to arbitrate. Lloyd George stressed that, as President Wilson had explained, the Allies did not want to help establish a military regime in Russia.4

Lloyd George then asked about Yudenitch. Chaikovsky replied that he could be ‘thoroughly trusted in military matters’, and would not be guided by reactionaries—and there were some in Finland. Lloyd George asked if Yudenitch could be trusted to maintain a democratic regime in Petrograd, if given the means to take it. Chaikovsky replied that he thought he could; and ‘in any case he and his friends would look after that’.

Orlando then asked Chaikovsky if he had considered the formation of the United States of Russia, like in America. Chaikovsky replied vaguely that Russian absolutism had proved impossible. ‘It meant an absolute faith in the Head of the State, as though he were a God on earth. This had died out. No one ever spoke of it now.’ But some thought that only a constitutional monarchy could eradicate the present Russian anarchy. But when Lloyd George asked whom they would choose for the throne, Chaikovsky stated vaguely that it was a ‘mere abstract proposition’. He was convinced that Russia would eventually become a federated Republic.
Sir Henry Wilson then came in and explained the military situation on a map. Chaikovsky, in reply to Lloyd George, stressed that it was ‘very essential’ that Petrograd now be taken. When Lloyd George suggested that it be taken by the Finns, Chaikovsky insisted that Russian troops must also be present, or matters would become ‘very delicate and complicated’, as the Finns now claimed Russian territory. Sir Henry Wilson then showed on the map that the Finns claimed all Karelia, the whole Murmansk coast, and the Kola peninsula. When other approaches to Petrograd were mentioned, Chaikovsky answered some detailed questions about the number of Russian prisoners in Germany, and of Russian troops in Estonia. The meeting then came to an end.4

That afternoon, Lloyd George asked President Wilson what impression Chaikovsky had made on him. The President thought he had not been very definite; it seemed that Kolchak’s advisers had ‘inclined to the right’ as soon as they had taken power. Lloyd George felt that Chaikovsky ‘did not quite trust Denikin’, but did evidently like Kolchak, though he had ‘not got a very clear impression of Kolchak’s entourage’. But Lloyd George stated bluntly that he did not think that public opinion would allow them to abandon Kolchak, ‘even if he should establish a reactionary Government’, awkward as it might be, because the restoration of order was thought so important. President Wilson thought they must obtain a ‘fresh view’ about Kolchak, for he ‘did not like being entirely dependent upon the views of British and French military men’.

After a short discussion, in which Lloyd George pointed out that Colonel John Ward (the Commander of the Middlesex Regiment at Omsk) was a Labour MP, the President said that he would tell Ambassador Morris at Tokyo to go at once to Omsk and report on Kolchak; he would tell him to consult John Ward. The President said that Kolchak’s programme might look all right to Chaikovsky, but what did it look like to Kolchak? Lloyd George concluded bluntly that he ‘felt sure that a soldier was bound to get to the top in Russia’. Even if the Bolsheviks did finally win, it would probably be by military action.4

Lloyd George’s introduction of Chaikovsky, who was quite out of touch with events in Siberia, and grossly misinformed about events in the Baltic, had not been a success.

Siberia and Paris

Meanwhile, the result of the Bolshevik counter-attack against Kolchak in late April was still in doubt. In a report from Perm, dated May 14, the Times correspondent stated guardedly that ‘three weeks have elapsed since the progress of our armies reached its maximum intensity’. It was ruefully admitted that the Bolsheviks, who were destroying roads and railways, and removing river steamers, had some ‘good brains on their side’. As Kolchak’s links with the Western Army on the main Simbirsk-Samara front were admittedly bad, he had decided to ‘let the Reds exhaust themselves rather than seek a decision’. (This report was not printed in The Times until May 24.)
But if Kolchak’s links with the Western Army were bad, he was quite out of touch with his Southern Army, which, the Bolsheviks momentarily feared, might now link up with Denikin. For though the Western Army had been strongly counter-attacked from the Samara-Orenburg line, the Orenburg Cossacks further south had now linked up with the Uralsk Cossacks, and surrounded Uralsk (in the Bolshevik rear), which had lead to Cossack risings in the whole area. On May 12, Lenin had wired to the Eastern front. ‘Are you aware of the grave position of Orenburg?’ Trotsky was acutely aware of the danger of these Cossacks linking up with Denikin. The same day, he wired Lenin that they must turn Saratov, on the Volga, into a fortified area; at present, it was in the hands of the ‘frondeurs’, and someone must take over from these ‘local soap-box orators’. The Central Committee decided that day to send out a good Party worker.\(^5\)

In further reports from Perm on May 14 and 15 (but not printed until the 26th and 28th), the *Times* correspondent tried to divert attention from the Bolshevik counter-attack by lurid descriptions of Bolshevik atrocities. When the Bolsheviks took Perm some five months previously, he wired, they marched some priests and other prisoners out of the town, and shot them in the roadside ditches; some victims who tried to jump the ditches and escape, were engulfed alive in the pestilential slime. When the White Russians retook Perm, they therefore disinterred the dead Bolsheviks, and flung them into the local sewage farm, where they ‘float to this day’. Captured Bolshevik Commissars were now being forced to retrieve the bodies of their victims, which had also been flung in. Parents of girls who had married, or been abducted by Bolshevik Commissars who had escaped, were each given twenty-five strokes of the lash.

But, he went on more cheerfully, ‘young and splendidly vigorous Permians have come with a rush to obey the order of mobilisation. A whole regiment, well armed and equipped, is running past my car with shouts of ‘Hurrah!’ to entrain’, he wired. ‘I have not seen such a cheery, lusty lot since the Imperial Guards left Petrograd at the outset of the war.’

The War Cabinet was reluctant to give more tangible support to Kolchak. At a Cabinet at noon on May 14, held in Churchill’s absence, Chamberlain strongly complained at General Knox’s proposal for the formation of a Russian brigade at Ekaterinburg, with British officers and NCOs (i.e. a Slavo-British unit, as at Archangel)—which Churchill had that day approved. For, Chamberlain argued, this would entail British officers fighting with the White Russians in Siberia, ‘that being the only logical step beyond allowing them to train Russian soldiers’, as Knox saw it.\(^6\) This committed us to ‘more definite support’ of the Omsk Government than had been given up to now, Chamberlain warned, and went far beyond anything that had yet been approved. ‘He saw grave danger, if British officers became involved in fighting.’

Curzon retorted that the proposal was ‘closely connected’ with recognition of the Omsk Government. The Foreign Office wished to recognise it as the Provisional Government of Siberia, but Kolchak wanted it recognised as the Russian Government. The American Government had hitherto opposed
recognition; but from a recent conversation with Lansing, he understood that they would now reconsider the matter. It was agreed that Churchill and Curzon should put Knox’s proposal before the British delegates in Paris; meanwhile, it could not be sanctioned.

It was, however, agreed that Barings Bank could loan £9 million to the Omsk Government, provided all the money was spent in Europe.6

On May 14, the Council of Four again considered Siberia. On May 10, Lansing had received a Russian note, sent from Omsk on April 24, complaining that the American Command in Siberia did not have proper instructions, since it ‘apparently treats the Bolsheviks as a political party of ordinary character’. As the Omsk Government was extremely anxious to avoid friction with the American troops, it was urged that General Graves be given more definite orders, and that Russian Jews of ‘extremist tendencies’ in the American contingent be replaced by ‘men more disciplined’. Lloyd George now confirmed that British officials in Siberia also feared trouble between American and Russian troops. They felt, though he could not confirm this, that the Cossack General Ivanov-Rinov had done his best to smooth matters, and that the trouble was largely due to General Graves. President Wilson felt sure that the fault did not lie with Graves, a man of most unprovocative character. The British officials were, if not partisans, at any rate friendly to Kolchak. Lloyd George agreed that they were indeed partisans. There the matter was again left. But the President was being swept along.7

On May 15, the New York Times had this strong headline: ‘Kolchak plans move on Moscow’, ‘But Siberian Dictator says he will first seek to destroy the Red Army’. An Associated Press report from Paris was also printed stating that Kolchak was now in Samara (which was inaccurate; and as such, caused much trouble in Paris).

That day, Polk instructed Ambassador Morris in Tokyo to go at once to Omsk and report on Kolchak, from whom he was to obtain ‘particular assurances’ about land reform and the Constituent Assembly, to enable the President to decide whether he deserved American recognition, or at least moral, if not material, support. But everything pointed to the need for resolute and immediate action in Siberia. As Polk was concerned about a further wire from General Graves, he decided next day to consult Consul Harris at Omsk. ‘All of Kolchak’s adherents to whom Graves talks enquire why we are in Siberia if we do not intend to fight Bolsheviks’, Polk explained. ‘Graves believes Kolchak’s adherents will be disappointed and extremely antagonistic against the United States if we do not join immediately in active military operations against the Bolsheviks whenever we may decide to recognise Kolchak.’8

In London on the 15th, The Times, under the headline, ‘Marching towards Moscow’, printed a wire from Kolchak to Churchill stating that Kolchak was ‘sincerely touched by the friendly message’ from the War Office, and expressed his ‘profound appreciation’ for British help. ‘While marching courageously towards Moscow, the Siberian troops are animated only by the desire of liberating
the country’, Kolchak added, ‘bringing her back to the place she is justified to occupy, and enabling the people of Russia to express freely their national will.’

But this message, of course, was far too weak to enable Churchill to induce Lloyd George to recognise Kolchak; something much more definite was needed. It is possible that there was more in Kolchak’s message than this, which was suppressed by his own Russian officials at Omsk. (The message has not been found in the War Office files. Both in Stewart, p. 276, and John Ward, pp. 224–7, there is mention of a despatch which arrived from London on May 5, to which Knox and John Ward drafted a reply, which was completed on May 9.)

The War Office had bad news from Siberia. On May 18, a gloomy wire arrived from Knox, sent on the 8th, stating that the French had discussed the Nansen proposal with Kolchak, who had merely smiled. ‘What would we in England have said in the middle of the blockade’, asked Knox angrily, ‘if some neutral crank had proposed to send food into Germany “from purely humane motives”?’ No food whatsoever should be sent into Bolshevik Russia. ‘Here we grope in the dark’, Knox admitted, ‘but it seems to us that Bolshevism has to be downed, for otherwise we will never be able to cheapen the necessities of life in England and, in addition, the lack of a market for our manufactured goods will bring us face to face with a dangerous unemployment problem within a few months. It is easiest to down Bolshevism in Russia’, he underlined. ‘I know you cannot send us men and you will be unable to afford us much military help from minor theatres.’ They wanted the Peace Conference to declare the Bolsheviks outlaws, to blockade Bolshevik Russia, to set up a proper anti-Bolshevik propaganda service within Russia; they also wanted a ‘generous supply’ of technical equipment, especially aircraft, and a stop on all politicians making remarks of use as propaganda by the Bolsheviks.

‘Will you press for these measures if you agree to them?’ asked Knox. ‘They will tear no Englishmen from their homes and as you have all the resources lying idle, they will not involve much expenditure. Otherwise I submit that it is a farce to retain us in Siberia’, he stated bluntly. ‘John Ward authorises me to say he agrees with this message which I have shown him.’

Colonel Steel was impressed. ‘If we could communicate this to the Service members of the House of Commons as the opinion of the men best qualified to speak, i.e. Knox and John Ward, it would do an immense amount of good’, he minuted.

It was, in fact, doubtful whether British troops could remain in Siberia at all. As the Canadian Government resolutely refused to allow their troops to remain after June 4, the General Staff in agitation put a draft reply before Churchill underlining that this would entail the immediate withdrawal of the two British regiments as well; which would have a bad effect on morale, and resurrect Bolshevism along the Siberian railway.

Churchill (who had arrived in Paris on May 17) minuted to Sir Henry Wilson that he fully agreed, and was also wiring to the Canadian Premier Borden that he hoped Canadian troops in Siberia would not abandon their ‘British comrades’, as
military operations there had reached a ‘critical and hopeful phase which may enable us to extricate ourselves from our responsibilities without dishonour before the summer is over’.

He asked the DCIGS to see Lord Beaverbrook before the wire was despatched. ‘Tell him the whole story, win him round to our point of view, & ask his advice as to how to get the Canadians to play up a little longer…Lord Beaverbrook knows more about how to manage these Canadian matters than anyone else, & his sympathy and assistance would be of the utmost value if it could be enlisted.’

But, he added, ‘No matter how this question may go, I cannot agree that the two British battalions should be withdrawn from Omsk. Some arrangements must be made which enable them to remain there during this critical period. It may be quite right to threaten the Canadians with their withdrawal, but if we are left to our own resources we must fix it up somehow.’

**Moscow and Paris**

Early on May 15, Chicherin’s reply to Nansen’s proposal reached Paris,* stating that owing to the ‘inhuman’ Allied blockade and the ‘incessant wars’ forced upon Bolshevik Russia against its will, food supplies from abroad would be most welcome. But Nansen’s proposal had been ‘fundamentally disfigured’ by the Council of Four, who demanded a prior ceasefire, which was a ‘purely political act’, and would have to be dropped. They had frequently offered to negotiate a cease-fire with the Allies, and even agreed to come to Prinkipo ‘notwithstanding the extremely unfavourable conditions proposed to us and also that we were the only party to accept it’, he stated. ‘We responded in the same peace-loving sense to overtures made by one of the Great Powers’,† he added.

But the Prinkipo Conference had been wrecked by the White Russians, the Allied ‘tools’.† It had been officially stated in both the French Chamber and the House of Commons that Allied policy was now to arm both the White Russians and the border states to attack Bolshevik Russia; while an American wireless message of May 6 stated that the Allies were also supporting Yudenitch to drive the Bolsheviks from Petrograd, so that the Nansen proposal could be abandoned. Though claiming to have abandoned intervention, the Allies were thus in fact carrying out the ‘most reckless intervention policy…even the American Government, despite all the statements to the contrary’. He then launched into a wild attack on Kolchak and Denikin, the Roumanians, the Poles, the Finns, the

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* Nansen’s proposal, together with the Council of Four’s reply, was meant to have been wired to Moscow on April 17; but in spite of the fact that it had Clemenceau’s approval, the Quai d’Orsay prevented the message from being sent. As no reply was received, Hoover finally had the message sent from Holland, and it reached the Bolshevik Government on May 4. Chicherin’s reply was sent on May 7; but was only relayed from Copenhagen to Paris on May 14.
† i.e. through Bullitt and Steffens.
Baltic Barons, the Esthonians, Petlura, and North Russian and Allied troops at Archangel, all under the direction of Allied officers. Both Denikin and Kolchak had denied the land to the peasants, and were leading ‘purely monarchical’ movements; and while Denikin had simply persecuted members of the Constituent Assembly, Kolchak had had them ‘imprisoned or shot’. Wholesale pogroms were also being carried out against the Jews.\footnote{11}

The Bolsheviks could thus only discuss a cease-fire if there was a general political discussion with ‘our adversaries…the Associated Governments’. Chicherin concluded by asking Nansen to discuss the matter with Bolshevik delegates abroad. At the end, Nansen added. ‘Please tell Hoover that I intend to meet Lenin’s delegates perhaps [in] Stockholm.’

Next day, after discussing this message, Lord Robert Cecil minuted to Hankey that Lenin’s reply amounted to this: ‘I shall be very glad to accept supplies but not to cease from fighting, though I would be prepared to enter into negotiations for a general Russian peace.’ Cecil wrote that there were thus two courses open to the Allies:

1. They could say that as there was no hope of peace in Russia while the Bolsheviks were in power, they would give full support to Kolchak and Denikin and all the border states to smash the Bolsheviks, with whom the Allies must break off even indirect relations, and tell Nansen that in view of Lenin’s reply, the matter was at an end. ‘That is one policy’, wrote Cecil. ‘It may be the right one, but it undoubtedly involves much further bloodshed and destruction of material wealth.’

2. They could ask the Allied General Staffs to define the actual position of the various Russian groups; and when a dividing line was drawn, instruct each group to retire six miles and observe a cease-fire. The Allies could then send food and supplies to those groups who obeyed, and announce that the Peace Conference would at once consider the whole Russian problem: and first ask all Russian groups to elect a Constituent Assembly. Nansen should tell the Bolsheviks that he could give them no help unless they ceased fire.\footnote{11}

Cecil stated that either policy had a fair chance. What was indefensible was a combination of both: that the Bolsheviks ceased fire while the Allies armed and supplied Denikin and Kolchak; or that the Allies encouraged Denikin and Kolchak to fight the Bolsheviks, while they gave the Bolsheviks economic help. ‘Compromises of this kind’, warned Cecil, ‘can only lead to a prolongation of hostilities in Russia, and the spreading in that country of the belief that the Associated Powers cannot be trusted.’ Cecil concluded that Hoover had wired to Nansen not to meet any Bolshevik delegates until the Allies had discussed the matter further.

Lord Robert Cecil here, in fact, touched on the crucial point, which President Wilson had never raised, but which was in the back of many British minds—
namely that Allied, and especially British policy, such as it was, was simply leading
to the further weakening of Russia as a Great Power.

But then the Council of Four became engrossed in military victory. On May 17, President Wilson told his colleagues that he had news of a ‘great victory’ on
the Tsaritsyn front by Denikin, who claimed to have captured 10,000 prisoners,
28 guns and 128 machine guns, which ‘ought to account for a large part of the
Bolshevik forces on this front’. Lloyd George agreed that ‘coming at the same time
as the capture of Samara by Kolchak, this was news of great importance’. (As
already pointed out, Kolchak never captured Samara; the Allied press, in fact, did
just as good a job in misleading the Council of Four as the general public.)
Hankey then reminded the Council of Four that the Allied Foreign Ministers
were urging them to consider their Russian policy. President Wilson merely
replied that he had arranged for Ambassador Morris to go to Omsk.12

On May 19, Lloyd George told the Council of Four that the Bolshevik reply to
Nansen was another instance of the ‘extraordinary difficulty’ of obtaining facts;
for it gave the impression that the Bolsheviks had refused Nansen’s offer because
they did not wish to compromise their military prospects. But all the information
which he had showed that the Bolsheviks ‘were collapsing in a military sense’.

That afternoon, President Wilson informed the Council of Four that he had
instructed the State Department to ask Kolchak to outline his programme and
policy. He had also heard from Kerensky, whom he could not regard as a good
source, unless his information tallied with other sources. Kerensky and his friends
hoped that there would be no Allied recognition of Kolchak or any other Russian
Government; and before they were given further Allied help, all the White
Russians should be made to pledge themselves to a progressive policy, departure
from which would entail loss of Allied support ‘This seemed to provide the
rudiments of a policy’, stated the President. When Lloyd George agreed that it
was important to impose conditions, the President underlined that these Russian
groups could be ‘broken down at any time’ if Allied support was withdrawn.
Lloyd George said he was amazed to find that they had already been sent some
£50 million of arms and munitions.13

London

On April 3, Churchill had minuted: ‘Let me have a full account of all assistance
given by us to the Anti-Bolshevik forces in Russia & on its frontiers, with an
estimate of the cost. I am anxious to give the information to the Chancellor of
the Exchequer.’

An estimate was produced on April 8th, detailing expenditure up to
March 31st.
It was pointed out that all supplies were valued at cost price, that £3.5 million civil expenditure might be recovered from North Russia; and that part of the total might be recoverable by agreement from the French.

Churchill saw this on April 10, and minuted:

1 'It shd be pointed out that N. Russian expenditure is for British not Russian object[s] & arises out of our war with Germany. It shd therefore be stated but deducted.

2 It shd also be pointed out that the munitions are surplus & for the most part unmarketable. Redraft accdly.'

The General Staff stated that this first point also applied to the Caucasus, which item they also deducted. 'Add please at the end Assistance given to Roumania, Poland & the Baltic States', wrote Churchill.

A fair copy was ready on April 23, with items 1 and 5 deducted, which totalled £29,100,000. A note on the bottom read: 'In addition to the above, the following assistance is to be given to Roumania & Poland for the reestablishment of their communications & for defence.'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In North Russia (including military and civil expenditure, of which £400,000 advanced to the Archangel Government)</td>
<td>£15,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In Siberia (including arms and supplies for Kolchak, and cost of British &amp; Canadian troops, and General Knox’s mission)</td>
<td>£12,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In South Russia (including arms and supplies for Denikin, cost of British Mission negligible to date)</td>
<td>£11,900,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>In the Baltic (including arms and supplies)</td>
<td>£1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>In the Caucasus (cost of British troops since January 1919)</td>
<td>£600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>In Transcaspia (including cash supplied to Ashkhabad Government, and cost of British and Indian troops)</td>
<td>£500,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cost of sea transport</td>
<td>£2,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£45,400,000</strong></td>
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On May 3, Churchill had forwarded this account with a very brief note to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and sent a copy to the Prime Minister.
On the 20th, the Council of Four further considered the Bolshevik reply to Nansen’s letter, and Cecil’s paper on it. Clemenceau did not see how any change could be made, for Lenin was clearly trying to draw Nansen’s humanitarian offer into politics. ‘There was no doubt that the Bolsheviks were now going down hill.’ President Wilson stated that Lenin’s argument was that the Allied price for the despatch of food, namely a cease-fire, would enable the White Russians to beat the Bolsheviks. What was really intended was to stop Bolshevik aggression so that food could be distributed. The Bolsheviks were perfectly correct in claiming that the Allies were supporting Kolchak and Denikin, and not putting pressure on them to stop fighting. Lenin’s argument was that if he stopped fighting, he would sign his death warrant. Clemenceau remarked acidly that Lenin was not under Allied control. President Wilson retorted that if Allied support to Kolchak and Denikin were stopped, they would have to stop fighting too. Clemenceau replied that it was impossible to make Lenin stop fighting, and his word could not be trusted.13

President Wilson and Lloyd George then indulged in a little general commiseration. The President stated that he did not now feel the same chagrin as before about having no Russian policy. ‘It had been impossible to have a policy hitherto.’ Lloyd George agreed that there had been very little choice. ‘There had been a lunatic revolution which certain persons, in whom little confidence was felt, were trying to squash.’ They had originally received Allied support solely to prevent the Germans obtaining supplies. Now, they were entitled to say that they could not be left in the lurch. The President retorted that the Americans had ‘only gone to Siberia to get the Czechs out, and then the Czechs had refused to go’.

President Wilson urged that at least pledges could be exacted in return for further Allied support. Both Clemenceau and Lloyd George agreed. Lloyd George suggested either a formal despatch, or a summons to the Russian delegates in Paris to appear before the Council of Four. The President considered the second proposal contrary to the basic idea of the Prinkipo proposal, which was that all parties should be heard together. A formal despatch should be sent to the Russian groups. They then sent for Philip Kerr to prepare a despatch.

The President then read from the paper by Kerensky and his colleagues, which urged that the Allies should only support those Russian groups which agreed to call a Constituent Assembly, until when Regional Assemblies should be democratically elected; that an Allied Mission should be sent to Russia; and that proposals for the supply of food were harmful. The President stated that this meant that the Allies should obtain an assurance from all Russian groups that they would unite and call a Constituent Assembly, until when each Russian group should carry on in its own area. When Lloyd George stated that he was afraid of splitting up Russia, the President remarked that he was merely proposing a democratic instead of an autocratic procedure.13
When Philip Kerr entered, the President explained the position, and asked him to prepare a draft despatch. Lloyd George pointed out that they had not discussed the Baltic States, to whose recognition all the Russian groups were violently opposed. Philip Kerr asked what promise was to be made to the Russian groups to make them give these undertakings. Lloyd George replied that it was not a question of more promises, but of continued assistance; and President Wilson added that the draft must state that without satisfactory guarantees, no further help would be given. Philip Kerr then asked if they had to accept the frontiers laid down by the League of Nations. Both Lloyd George and the President said that they must.

The President then proceeded to read out a letter from Hoover about the appalling food shortage in the Baltic, which was not due to lack of finance or shipping, but general disorder. If Allied naval protection was given to cover the distribution of relief along the coast, the local governments could preserve order. But the situation was so appalling that Hoover hoped that the Council of Four would hear some British and American Naval officers and himself. Lloyd George urged that Hoover should discuss the matter first with the Admirals. The meeting then came to an end, and Philip Kerr went off to prepare the despatch.13

In Paris, Churchill now had to deal with two powerful adversaries: Lord Hardinge (the Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, and now the Permanent Head of the British Delegation at the Peace Conference), whom Churchill anyhow disliked; and the trade unions.

On May 21, Churchill wrote to the Prime Minister that he had read the two papers, which Lloyd George had that morning given him, by Lord Hardinge and M.Vandevelde (the Belgian Socialist leader). ‘In principle I think there is no difference between any of us’, wrote Churchill. This was the moment to secure from Kolchak, in return for ‘formal recognition and active support’, effective guarantees for a Constituent Assembly, a ‘bold agrarian policy’, the acceptance of Polish independence and Finnish autonomy, and of the provisional Allied agreements with the border states. In return, ‘I consider that the Allies should together recognise that Government as “The National Provisional Government of Russia”, thus distinguishing it from the International Soviet Government of Russia’. Kolchak’s representatives could not be received until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, but Sazonov and his colleagues should be treated properly, and not ‘simply as a pack of worthless emigrants’. Once definite guarantees had been obtained, the Council of Four should appoint an Allied Minister as Ambassador to the National Provisional Government of Russia.

As M.Vandevelde’s first condition for the Constituent Assembly was fully met, the Russians should therefore be asked what guarantees they would give. But it was unfair to expect Kolchak to hold elections at the present moment. ‘Even great nations like France and Britain, engaged unitedly in a quarrel which excited every patriotic and moral instinct, found it impossible to hold elections during the period of the war…As it is’, Churchill wrote, ‘Kolchak has been blamed for his coup d’etat of November last, but it is probable that unless he had taken this step
he never could have “got a move on “and re-established and organised the structure of a disciplined army. It is to be observed that he has recently received the formal support of the Socialists of Siberia as well as of Monsieur.”

Lord Hardinge proposed that both sides in the conflict should be invited to cease fire. This had already been twice tried, and had twice failed. There could be no question of Kolchak’s Government ceasing fire. ‘If their armies stopped fighting they would disintegrate, and Bolshevik propaganda is more dangerous in a truce than when actual fighting is taking place. The Bolsheviks on the other hand will not cease fighting either. It is probable that they still think they have a chance of victory. At any rate they know that there is so much country to be covered that their [‘stand for’ crossed out] span of existence must at any rate be prolonged for several months. Further, they must have hopes that Germany and Austria will collapse into Bolshevism in the same way as Hungary has done.’

It would be quite contrary to British policy announced in the House of Commons to stop Kolchak’s supplies unless he ceased fire. ‘I should personally have great difficulty in agreeing to this…I cannot understand how Lord Hardinge could put such a proposal forward at this time of day. It betrays most complete want of comprehension of the issues which are at stake in Russia. You might as well ask fire and water to cease their conflict.’

London

Then there were the trade unions. On May 14, there had been rowdy exchanges in the House of Commons about the War Office secret circular (which had been sent out in January to discover if the troops would assist in strike-breaking, and actually go to Russia, if so ordered), which the Daily Herald had published in full. Labour members warned of a strike, and pressed for a debate. Bonar Law hedged unsuccessfully: the Daily Herald might be prosecuted; though the secret circular had not been approved by the War Cabinet, reports were still coming in; he said he would ask Churchill, and refused to be drawn further.

On May 21, Churchill sent the Prime Minister a ‘suggested answer’ for Bonar Law to make to the trade unions, which Lloyd George approved. This stated that British policy had been ‘repeatedly explained’ in the House of Commons. ‘Russia must work out her own salvation.’ The wartime origins of British intervention, and present British and Allied action in Russia and the border states, were then described. ‘Finally, there is no use in concealing the fact that we are helping the anti-Bolshevik forces of Russia against the Bolsheviks’, he admitted, ‘and that with our help their position is rapidly improving.’ It was thus now crucial to secure ‘definite guarantees’ that they would not restore a reactionary Tsarist regime. ‘We do not intend a Red Terror to be succeeded by a White one’, he stated.

* The name is left out in the draft. In the fair copy, it is given as ‘Sazonov’, but the reference may possibly be to Chaikovsky.
‘Failing these guarantees, we are holding ourselves free to reconsider the whole position.’ The other points in the Secret Circular were left entirely to Bonar Law.15 Next day, a trade union delegation came to see Bonar Law. They were, they said, being pressed ‘very strongly’ by the Triple Alliance (the miners, railwayworkers and transport workers unions) to call a General Strike, as there was such strong feeling about conscientious objectors, the Allied blockade and the Russian intervention. Why could not volunteers be sent to Russia?16 Bonar Law said volunteers were being sent to North Russia. But conscription must be maintained for the Army of Occupation in Germany. There had never been any British, or Allied, intention to send a military expedition to Russia to impose a certain form of Russian Government. ‘When you said we never interfered with the Tsar’s Government that is perfectly true’, he said. If the Bolshevik Government were recognised by the Russian people, however bad it was, Britain would not fight it, ‘except that we would prevent the evil coming across our border’. No Allied Government intended to put down one ‘atrociously bad’ Russian Government to put in another, which, ‘if not as bad’, was Very bad indeed. All British forces would soon be withdrawn from Russia. Though Kolchak was said to be a reactionary, he had had a report only that week that all the anti-Bolsheviks in Siberia had ‘complete confidence’ in Kolchak. ‘We are helping Kolchak’, admitted Bonar Law; but unless assured that a Constituent Assembly would be called, ‘we are free to change our attitude, and cease to give even the support we are giving now’. Bonar Law then dealt further with complaints about conscription, then with the Secret Circular. It would help, he was told, if he could assure them that it would be withdrawn. ‘I can’t answer that right off’, replied Bonar Law. ‘I will consider it’ Mollified by these false banalities, the trade union leaders departed.16

(In fact, there was probably little chance of a General Strike at this moment. On April 30, Basil Thomson reported to the War Cabinet that though the British workers felt strongly about conscription and Russian intervention, they would not force the hand of their unions’ executives to call a strike on either issue, because it would mean loss of wages; though they would come out if the unions called one. It was feared that compulsory military service might become a permanent institution; and though they had ‘no sympathy for the Russian Bolsheviks’, they saw no need for Russian intervention, as Russia, which had never been any good as an ally, should settle her own affairs.17)

Paris

On May 23, Clemenceau urged the Council of Four to anticipate the imminent Japanese proposal for Allied recognition of the Omsk Government. President Wilson asked if it was proposed to recognise it as a Russian or merely as a local Government. When Clemenceau said as a Russian Government, both President Wilson and Lloyd George refused. It was agreed to consider Philip Kerr’s draft despatch to the Russian de facto Government at once.
That afternoon, when President Wilson had read it out, he said he doubted if General Denikin and Chaikovsky would accept it. Philip Kerr said that both had recognised Kolchak as the central Russian Government. Lloyd George suggested that a copy be sent to them. Clemenceau then objected to the abolition of conscription being one of the conditions. President Wilson agreed, but pointed out that the League of Nations did not abolish conscription. Lloyd George stated that conscription must be stopped somehow or other in Russia, which otherwise might raise some six million troops, and sooner or later come into the German orbit.

In answer to President Wilson, Philip Kerr then read out a wire from the Acting Foreign Minister at Omsk to the Russian Ambassador in Paris, dated 27 November 1918, stating that the Omsk Government undertook to pay the Russian foreign debt. The President reminded his colleagues that they had much resented Lenin’s suggestion that their principal concern was the Russian debt. But Lloyd George pointed out that Kolchak’s statement was not made a condition in the draft. Clemenceau again insisted that the abolition of conscription be removed from the draft.

The President then asked whether acceptance of these conditions entailed Allied recognition of Kolchak. Philip Kerr said these were the conditions for continued Allied assistance; there was no mention of recognition. President Wilson pointed out that insistence had previously been made not only on free elections for the Constituent Assembly, but also for Regional Assemblies in the areas held by Kolchak, Denikin and the Archangel Government. Lloyd George thought that the draft went as far as was now possible. It was asking too much to ask the Russian groups to hold elections amidst the great confusion of war. The President then suggested the phrase ‘to promote elections’ instead of ‘to permit elections’. But Lloyd George did not think this fair. After Kolchak’s very big advance, there must be considerable confusion in his rear, and he could not fairly be asked to promote an election. It had been impossible to hold an election even in England during the war, much less so in France and Italy. A Constituent Assembly had been elected within the last two years in Russia by universal suffrage, which was a thoroughly democratic body, and only got rid of because the Bolsheviks did not consider it extreme enough. Clemenceau stated that Russia must be allowed to choose. Lloyd George pointed out that the draft allowed for this; if elections could not be held, the Constituent Assembly would be summoned when Kolchak reached Moscow.

President Wilson retorted that the complete truth was that the draft only applied to the British Government, which had alone supplied Kolchak with munitions. America had sent no supplies to Kolchak, only to the Czechs; but this had now stopped. Clemenceau added that France had sent very little, mainly because England had to supply the ships. The President suggested that though the despatch be given Allied approval, it should be sent by the British Government only, since they alone were in a position to do so. Lloyd George suggested that the difficulty might be overcome by stating that the British Government had
supplied more than £50 million of munitions. The President explained that he was in an awkward position, as both the British and the French had dealt with Kolchak as a de facto government, while America had only looked on, and helped to guard the Siberian railway. His position was thus very anomalous. He would like to consult Lansing about how America could join in this despatch without getting into a still more anomalous position. Clemenceau added that he would like to consult Pichon, and again asked that the abolition of conscription should not be one of the conditions. President Wilson suggested the phrase ‘limitation of armaments and of military organisation’. As both Clemenceau and Orlando accepted this, Lloyd George agreed to alter the draft accordingly.\(^\text{18}\)

On May 24, President Wilson informed the Council of Four that Lansing considered Philip Kerr’s draft despatch to Admiral Kolchak to be right, and that America was justified in joining in. Lansing preferred to withhold the despatch until Ambassador Morris had replied from Omsk, but the President did not agree.

That afternoon, the Council of Four showed the draft to the Japanese delegate. If Kolchak accepted the conditions, the President explained, he would continue to receive Allied support, ‘otherwise he would not’. The Japanese delegate then made gross and fulsome references to Kolchak’s ability, adding that Japan agreed to recognise him, if he recognised Allied ‘legitimate interests’ and debts. Lloyd George then sent for Kolchak’s declaration of November 27, in which this was agreed. The Japanese delegate supposed that each Ally would send supplies to Russia ‘according to their respective capacity’.\(^\text{19}\) Lloyd George replied quickly that as England had up to now supplied most of the material, he gladly adopted this proposal as America would then have to supply the greater part. The President replied as quickly that this was a matter for Congress, whom he might induce to take a share when the whole matter was explained to them. Lloyd George said that ‘substantially’ speaking, the conditions had been read to British trade unionists, ‘who had been satisfied on the whole’.

The Japanese delegate then queried the despatch of Allied volunteers to Kolchak. The President did not understand this phrase to mean ‘Government help’. It was not intended to send Allied troops; the words simply meant ‘such individuals as might volunteer’. Lloyd George explained that the phrase had been inserted to meet the case of England, where there was very strong feeling against sending troops to Russia; and they had had to give guarantees that British soldiers would not be sent. But a good many British troops had volunteered to go to Russia to ‘supply the Archangel force’. President Wilson replied sharply that Lloyd George’s interpretation could not be correct, as it had been agreed that Allied forces should be withdrawn from Archangel. Lloyd George stated blandly that the difficulty in withdrawing the British volunteers was that they were mostly gunners and pilots, who ‘could not well be spared’. If they were withdrawn, both the Archangel forces and Denikin would be ‘in great difficulties’. (Lloyd George was here grossly misleading the President, as the gunners and pilots were mainly with Denikin, not at Archangel.) President Wilson concluded tersely that as this phrase only concerned ‘troops taking part in regular operations’, American and
Japanese troops in the rear were thus not affected. But he suggested that the phrase be altered to ‘such other help as may prove feasible’. But Lloyd George thought it had better be left out rather than amended, and the figure of £50 million altered to ‘at a very considerable cost’. This was agreed. 19

Colonel Kisch then came in and gave a talk on the military situation in Siberia. To counter Kolchak’s efforts to join up with Archangel, the Bolsheviks had withdrawn 20,000 men from their Archangel front, which meant that they had double Kolchak’s 36,000 men near Viatka. They had also counter-attacked on Kolchak’s southern wing, and advanced about 60 miles near Samara. While Kolchak pressed on towards Archangel, he was putting in his last reserves to check this Bolshevik advance, while Denikin was ‘creating a diversion’ by advancing on Tsaritsin. Colonel Kisch spoke optimistically about the Estonian advance on Petrograd, which they might even capture if there was a rising within the city. Kisch then left. 19 (By stating that Denikin was ‘creating a diversion’ for Kolchak, Colonel Kisch, a War Office expert on Russian affairs, attached to the British Mission in Paris, was inferring that communications between Denikin and Kolchak were good, whereas in fact, they were virtually non-existent.)

Lloyd George pointed out that if a satisfactory answer was received from Kolchak, they would have to decide whether to confine themselves to helping him, or whether to recognise the Omsk Government as a local Government, or as the Russian Government. The President hoped to have a report from Ambassador Morris before Kolchak’s reply was received. Lloyd George suggested that someone ought to be sent to see Denikin. The meeting then broke up. 19

Kolchak’s armies, in fact, were at this moment floundering. All May, the Western Army had been falling back from the Volga. Though Kolchak replaced Stepanov (the War Minister) by Lebedev (the Chief of Staff), this brought no improvement. For by now, the left flank of the Siberian Army (under Gajda) on the northern front was uncovered, and its position had become more and more tenuous. Matters could still have been put right if the three Russian divisions, which Knox was equipping, had been held back until properly trained, and then used together. But as Lebedev distributed them piecemeal to three different armies, they were entirely wasted. Gajda, infuriated, demanded that Lebedev’s post be given to him. Though this request was turned down, Kolchak, in despair, then called up the local priests and monks; and soon ‘God’s Regiment’ and ‘Jesus Christ’s Regiment’ were in action, carrying images of saints and crosses together with their rifles, before whom the young Russian peasants, hastily conscripted by the Bolsheviks, fled panic-stricken. ‘Chanting psalms, they advance to the attack’, reported Reuter. Pravda sharply reproved the Bolshevik troops for their base superstition. 20

But the general Bolshevik advance continued. On May 24, The Times cautiously headlined: ‘Siberian Army’s Pause’, after which there was no further military news from Siberia printed in The Times until June.
On May 26, the *New York Times*, under the headline, ‘Britain to recognise Kolchak Government’, printed a report from London that a ‘well authorised’ source considered that British recognition of Kolchak was ‘imminent’.

Walter Lippmann is rightly scathing on the insistence with which the *New York Times* and their foreign correspondents kept on repeating that Kolchak ‘would soon be recognised’, and that Bolshevik Russia would ‘soon collapse’. For, he writes, ‘prophecy was entwined with news—and was utterly false in both cases… In none [of the reports] does the correspondent say that Kolchak should be recognised, or that he might be; he reports that there is evidence Kolchak will be recognised; and in some cases…he asserts that recognition is nothing less than an accomplished fact.’ But constant repetition had its due effect on public opinion.21

That day, *The Times* headlined, ‘Bolshevik blood lust—Martyred Priests of Perm’—a blatant diversion from Kolchak’s retreat.

On the same day, however, a wire reached Paris sent by the American Consul Harris in Omsk on the 21st, stating that he had that day seen Kolchak, who stressed the ‘great necessity’ for American economic aid. Of all the Allies, England had so far done the most, ‘but he hoped America would soon give more assistance’, Harris wired. ‘He expressed best sentiments of good will towards America and stated that the anti-American propaganda was not shared by him or his colleagues in the [Omsk] Government, and…was now practically over.’ In the Far East, he had replaced General Ivanov-Rinov (to whom the Americans objected).22 Kolchak also stressed that he was not asking for Allied recognition, ‘but was leaving this important matter entirely to their best judgment uninfluenced by any statement from him’.

This, however, was the only news which reached the Council of Four on May 26, and was evidently thought satisfactory. They signed the despatch to Admiral Kolchak. Once again an unfortunate document, it opened with the same fatuous air as the Prinkipo proposal by stating that the ‘time has come’, when it was necessary for the Allies ‘once more to make clear’ that the ‘cardinal axiom’ of their Russian policy was not to interfere in Russian internal affairs. They had originally intervened only to assist those Russian elements which wished to fight on against the Germans, and to prevent the Bolsheviks from annihilating the Czechs. Since the Armistice, the Allies had retained troops in Russia, and supplied ‘those associated with them’ at a very considerable cost. Both the Prinkipo and Nansen proposals had broken down, as the Bolsheviks refused a prior cease-fire.

The Allies now wished to ‘declare formally’ that their policy was to restore peace within Russia by enabling the Russian people to ‘resume control of their own affairs’ through a freely elected Constituent Assembly, and along its frontiers by the settlement of boundary disputes through the League of Nations. They were ‘convinced by their experiences of the last twelve months’ that it was impossible to achieve this by dealing with the Bolsheviks. Though their ‘continued intervention shows no prospect of producing an early settlement’, and ‘some’ of the Allies were under pressure to withdraw their troops and cut their expenses, the Allies would continue to help Kolchak and the other Russian groups
to ‘establish themselves as the Government of all Russia’, provided: that they would hold elections for a Constituent Assembly on reaching Moscow, or recall the old Constituent Assembly until new elections were possible; permit local elections for Zemstva within their areas; not revive special class privileges or the ancien régime, but guarantee civil and religious liberty, and leave all ‘internal questions’, especially the land problem, to the Constituent Assembly; recognise the independence of Finland and Poland, and the autonomy of the Baltic and Caucasus States; bring Russia into the League of Nations; and abide by Admiral Kolchak’s declaration about the Russian foreign debt.23

The Allies concluded that they wished to know whether the Russian groups would accept these conditions, and then form a single Russian Government and Russian Command ‘as soon as the military situation makes it possible’.

On May 27, the New York Times published the headline: ‘Allies recognise Kolchak Cabinet’. The report from London stated that it had been unanimously decided in favour of granting ‘recognition in principle’ to Kolchak’s Government. ‘This disposes of rumours current here relative to President Wilson’s opposition.’

That day, the main news summary in The Times was headed, ‘Allies and Russia’, ‘Kolchak recognised’. The text stated: The Allied and Associated Governments have decided to recognise the Kolchak Government on condition that he will call a Constituent Assembly. It has been definitely decided that the Soviets are barred from recognition because they rejected the principle of the Constituent Assembly, and refused to allow the one called to meet’

Under another headline, ‘New Russian Policy’, ‘Kolchak regime recognised’, a report from Paris stated that it had been made clear officially that recognition was ‘not in any way dictated by expediency, but repose on the bedrock of principle’. This decision, in fact, ‘marks the end of what has been a long period of hesitation in dealing with Bolshevism.’ Admiral Kolchak, the Times correspondent pointed out, had shown by his ‘military achievements’ and ‘great executive ability’ that he was one of the men around whom the anti-Bolshevik elements in Russia could rally.

This is perhaps the most odious piece of journalism to appear in The Times during this whole period; but it is only an extreme example of what was appearing almost daily. Under cover of some ‘fine writing’, or at any rate high-flown phrases, the most blatant lies were being unloaded before all the Times readers all over the world. The Allied despatch to Kolchak was simply a despairing attempt to catch the prevailing wind; while the last thing that poor Kolchak would ever have claimed for himself was ‘great executive ability’. The right-wing British press was not so optimistic. The Morning Post favoured a ‘strong but benevolent despotism’ in Russia, rather than constitutional government; while the Daily Telegraph stated that it was impossible for Kolchak to promise immediate democratic reforms, as Russia was not yet ready for them.

But the entire press were wrong. There was not one word about recognition in the despatch. But as the text was deliberately withheld, the press were perhaps deliberately misinformed. On the 27th, the Council of Four added a final
paragraph stating that the Russian groups must agree to the Peace Conference determining the future of Roumanian Bessarabia; and the despatch was then sent off to Omsk.

**London**

In London, the War Cabinet was not united over this initiative by the Peace Conference. On May 28, H.A.L. Fisher (President of the Board of Education) wrote to the Prime Minister that he approved the Allied despatch; but an old friend, who had been with the Hampshire regiment at Omsk, had just returned with a ‘distressing account of the atrocities perpetrated by Admiral Kolchak’s army and of the general revulsion of feeling among the Siberian population’. When the Allies had first appeared in Siberia, they were received with enthusiasm by the peasants, ‘but now the tone is completely altered. Bolshevism is spreading rapidly and this in spite of the fact that Admiral Kolchak’s military position is stronger now than ever before’. Fisher therefore urged that Kolchak be told that British support was conditional not only on his political pledges, but also on the manner in which he waged war.24

But Churchill was exultant. His Russian policy had won the day. On May 29 (the day after the trade unions had decided not to strike over the War Office Secret Circular, sent out back in February, and which the *Daily Herald* had recently published), there was a further debate on Russia, when the House of Commons considered a supplementary War Office demand for a further £50 million (the exact sum already spent on the Russian campaign) for the Army Estimates.

At the start of the debate, Churchill could afford to allow the Labour and trade union MPs to blow off steam about the Secret Circular, knowing that it was harmless.

Then the debate turned to Russia. Colonel Wedgwood (liberal) said from his recent ‘wonderfully enthusiastic’ meetings on the Russian question, he knew of the strong feeling among workers that the British intervention was a ‘direct class war’. Working men thought their ‘worst possible fate’ was to be asked to suppress other workers’ aspirations, ‘however irregularly and desperately they may be carried out’. He emphasised: ‘The feeling against these Russian expeditions is certainly not understood in this House. I do not think that it is half understood in the Press of the country, but it is very deep and very intense at the present time.’

Near Petrograd, the British Fleet in the Baltic was supporting the Finnish White Guards, who had suppressed the Finnish Revolution by the ‘most shocking’ atrocities ever committed. In South Russia, we were supporting General Denikin, who considered the ‘literal decimation’ of the Russian workers to be an ‘absolutely necessary preliminary’ to setting up a Russian Government. (Denikin, Wedgwood claimed, had slaughtered 23,000 workers on taking Rostov.) ‘We have not recognised him yet, but we have recognised Admiral Kolchak’, a ‘fairly honest’ man, but whose subordinates were carrying on ‘hideously
uncivilised’ warfare in Siberia. Lurid descriptions of recruitment were given. He then quoted from the letter of a British officer in Siberia. The fact is that there is a blank sight more Bolsheviks now than there were ever before in Siberia.’ But they were mainly ‘peasants dissatisfied with the present regime…Admiral Kolchak is an honest man, but he is surrounded with reactionaries who face him with faits accomplis…This Government does not represent the wishes of the people, and it is an axiom here that if the Allied troops were withdrawn it would fall at once.’

Colonel Wedgwood went on: ‘The war upon Russia ought to cease.’ Churchill had recently sent out a great number of British troops, because there was a scare about Archangel. He stated firmly ‘Archangel never was in danger… They were sent to extricate the garrison. The garrison is coming back, but the new troops are remaining, and not only remaining, but preparing for a spring forward on Petrograd, a further advance into that wilderness of Russia, that chaos of starvation that exists now… We should clear out of the place, and let them stew in their own juice and fix up their own quarrels.’

Mr Churchill now counter-attacked. In spite of the ‘most deplorable’ events at Odessa, Bolshevik military weakness had become ‘very apparent’ since the last debate in mid-April. ‘Wherever they have been faced with determination, they have been repulsed or driven back… The Roumanian Army, in spite of all its sufferings, is an effective and powerful force, capable of protecting the Roumanian frontier.’

Col Wedgwood: ‘And the Roumanian landlords.’

Mr Churchill: ‘Capable of protecting the Roumanian people. Landlords have a right to live, just as others have.’ The border states had not succumbed, but were driving the Bolsheviks back. ‘Petrograd, of course, is a city of the dead’, but still ‘of great political and military consequence’. Colonel Wedgwood’s remarks about atrocities in Finland were ‘absolutely absurd’. It was, in fact, ‘astonishing that we should see the Bolsheviks recoiling before this poor, thin line of little states and weak peoples’, but the ‘inherent vice of Bolshevism appears to rot simultaneously every part of the social structure of Russia, including even the military tyranny on which alone the Soviet power now depends’. Colonel Wedgwood had also claimed that Denikin had slaughtered 20,000 prisoners. ‘I am confident that it is not a fact.’ Britain had a ‘competent cavalry officer’ (General Briggs) in South Russia; and when a ‘very small number’* were shot some while back, he at once wired the news home. During the last month, Denikin had advanced some 80 miles, supported by ‘rebellions which have broken out among the people who are enjoying what my hon. and gallant Friend would no doubt call the blessings of Bolshevik rule. The effect of British munitions with which we have been
supplying him, and with which we propose to continue to supply him, is only now beginning to be felt.

Col Wedgwood: ‘Poison gas!’

Mr Churchill: ‘Poison gas is used against our troops by the Bolsheviks. I do not understand why, if they use poison gas, they should object to having it used against them. It is a very right and proper thing to employ poison gas against them.’ In North Russia, at the time of the previous debate, there were ‘dispirited and discontented’ British troops, assisted by ‘weak and unreliable’ Russian troops; and the Bolsheviks ‘openly boasted that when the thaw began they would drive us into the White Sea as they had driven the French into the Black. What a change has taken place today!’ Now, a strong British volunteer force, supported by a ‘strong flotilla’, were at Archangel, Bolshevik attacks were ‘everywhere repulsed’, and there were four times as many Russian troops, who had ‘improved enormously in discipline, fighting quality, and morale’. In addition, Admiral Kolchak’s ‘purely Russian’ Army was advancing from Siberia, equipped with British munitions and British rifles, while some troops were ‘actually wearing British uniforms’. He warned. ‘I deprecate altogether exaggerated hopes being formed. Just as things have turned out so much better than we had any right to expect four months ago, so they may now turn out three months hence very much worse than it seems reasonable to hope now. Within the last three weeks a considerable set-back has occurred on the southern sector of Admiral Kolchak’s front.’

Col Wedgwood: ‘Hear, hear!’

Mr Churchill: ‘The hon. and gallant Gentleman really ought to go out to help the Bolsheviks.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘If this is going to be a class war, that is my side.’

Mr Churchill: ‘I hope there is going to be no class war of that kind carried on in these islands, so that if my hon. and gallant Friend is burning to engage in the struggle, I am afraid he will have to make a sea voyage, and I am quite sure that the Bolsheviks would gain a gallant fighter, but I am not sure that Monsieur Lenin might not have some anxiety as to whether the political discretion of my hon. and gallant Friend would be quite equal to his military ardour.’ Though he spoke with ‘great reserve’ about the future, all these events offered an ‘absolutely honourable’ end to an enterprise which threatened the ‘gravest embarrassments’ to us. ‘We hope, therefore, that a juncture will be effected in the near

* In fact, 1,600 prisoners out of a batch of 6,000.
future between Admiral Kolchak’s armies and the Russian Archangel forces. The enemy troops in between are not powerful, and the distance is not excessive. Already communication has been established between the armies, already the Government of M. Chaikovsky, who, I suppose, comes under the general condemnation of my hon. and gallant Friend—”

Col Wedgwood: ‘No, your army turned him out’
Mr Churchill: ‘On the contrary, the policy which we are pursuing has the enthusiastic support of M. Chaikovsky. He has acknowledged the supremacy of Admiral Kolchak’s Government and has worked in the closest cooperation with him.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘Do you deny that he was arrested by your Army?’
Mr Churchill: ‘M. Chaikovsky is a man whose whole life was passed in a struggle against the Tsarist regime.’ There was thus ‘reasonable hope’ that by the end of the summer North Russia would be run on a ‘purely Russian basis’ without a ‘disaster to our troops or the desertion of our friends’. There were those who would have just ‘sailed away, and left all those who had helped us to…stew in their own juice. That is not the British way.’ He went on, ‘I am often asked a question, Are we at war with the Bolsheviks or not? We are not at war with the Bolsheviks in the same way as we went to war with the Germans…Our fundamental principle is that Russia must be saved by Russians…As Byron said to the Greeks, so we say to the Russians, “In native swords, in native ranks, the only hope of freedom dwells”. But, on the other hand we cannot remain impartial as between the two sides in Russia. We cannot treat these Russian forces and leaders who have always been faithful to the cause of the Allies, who were largely—’

Col Wedgwood. ‘Kolchak!’
Mr Churchill: ‘He has been fighting without cessation against the Germans.’

These Russian forces and leaders were largely called into the field by our appeals and by our exertions during the great struggle, and we cannot treat them any

* In fact, Kolchak, personally brave that he was, had done precious little fighting against the Germans—he had had little opportunity. The Russian Baltic Fleet and the Black Sea Fleet (of which Kolchak was given command in June 1916) was more or less hemmed in. In 1917, after he had resigned as naval discipline broke down—he flung his sword into the sea from the quarterdeck—he went on a naval mission to America. On his return, he had offered his services to the British—to fight as a private soldier in France. This offer was declined. He only assumed power at Omsk seven days after the German war ended.
better than we treat those who betrayed us...We are bound to take sides... Neither can we remain indifferent to the general aspect of Bolshevism.

‘Bolshevism is not a policy; it is a disease. It is not a creed; it is a pestilence. It breaks out with great suddenness; it is violently contagious; it throws people into a frenzy of excitement; it spreads with extraordinary rapidity; the mortality is terrible; so that after a while, like other pestilences, the disease tends to wear itself out. The population of the regions devastated by its first fury are left in a sort of stupor. Then gradually and painfully they begin to recover their sanity; they are feeble; they are shattered; and the light of human reason once again comes back to their eyes. Those regions which have been most afflicted by the fury of this storm are the first to recover, and once having recovered—let my hon. and gallant Friend mark this—they are specially immune from all subsequent attacks.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘Would it cure my right hon. and gallant Friend from reverting to Liberalism?’

Mr Churchill: ‘Thus Bolshevism is dying out in all the original centres of its power, and it is keeping itself alive only by finding new areas to ravage and new populations to devour. The locusts are leaving the ravaged plains of the North, and they are swarming south to eat up the fat lands of the Ukraine. That is the present state. After all, in its first stages, Bolshevism offers a considerable attraction to the worst elements in an uneducated people like the Russian masses, especially a people who have been long and cruelly down-trodden. They are able to stop working; they are able to take possession of whatever they can find; they can enter the houses of the wealthy and of the middle-classes and of the classes who can read and write, and take the food and the liquor and the clothing and the furniture; they can trample down every vestige of authority; and they can go off and enjoy their plunder. But this only carries them on for a certain number of weeks. The plunder is soon eaten up or wasted, and the accumulated wealth of years can be consumed or rendered unavailable in a very short time. The truth is revealed that the property of the rich only meets, for a very few weeks, the needs of the poor. Wealth has to be recreated from year to year by patient, organised, systematised labour.

‘But by the time this is discovered the whole machinery of production has been destroyed. All relations between man and man have been poisoned. The whole organisation of society, and all its scientific apparatus, has been destroyed. Thus, great and terrible suffering attends the closing stages of the disease, but this suffering is the prelude to recovery. It is this recovery that we are endeavouring to aid in Russia...

‘Our responsibility, however, cannot end there; it is not enough for us merely to support the anti-Bolshevist forces; we must be on our guard against another set of dangers. Bolshevism is a great evil, but it has arisen out of great social evils. We
do not want these evils to return when Bolshevism has been overcome. We do not want the forces we have aided to succeed only to set up again the old, rotten regime which has brought about the disaster.’

Britain thus wished to make sure that the ‘new Russia…struggling to rise from the ruins of the Tsarist and Bolshevik tyranny’, should be a ‘genuinely national, democratic, modern state, where the people own the Government and not the Government the people’. The Allies thus felt that they should obtain ‘clear understandings and undertakings’ from the White Russian Governments, as a condition of their ‘further support, and of their formal recognition’, that their victory would be ‘immediately followed by the summoning of a Constituent Assembly…from which the power of the future Russian state will be derived’. The Bolsheviks attained power by destroying the ‘infant’ Constituent Assembly. Britain would do ‘everything in [her] power’ to see that the White Russians abided by its decision. ‘I do not believe there will be any difficulty on this point. The national Russian Government at Omsk is supported by Russian politicians of every party, including the most advanced.’

Mr G.A.Spencer (labour) declared that Churchill’s speech was a ‘triumph of rhetoric’, but lacking in statesmanship, since a statesman should not stamp out a disease, but deal with the cause. ‘What are the causes which have led to Bolshevism in Europe, and will undoubtedly lead to Bolshevism in this country? Military aggrandisement, economic servitude, and political bondage…I believe the British Labour movement at the present time has no Bolshevik tendencies.’

Mr Neil M’Lean (the labour member for Glasgow) brought the debate to an end in uproar. Both reasons given for British intervention were false, he stated. It was said that Kolchak and Denikin had helped us in the war when Russia was our Ally. But it was ‘our Allies’ who started the March revolution and dethroned the Tsar, who had stopped fighting; it was they who had broken their obligation. Secondly, it was said that Britain must crush Bolshevism because of Bolshevik atrocities. But this had never before justified British intervention in a foreign country. Why therefore did British troops remain in Russia? ‘The real cause is because there is so much British capital invested in Russia.’

Hon. Members: ‘Hear, hear!’ and ‘No, no!’

Mr M’Lean: ‘It is estimated that there is to-day invested in Russia £1,600,000,000 of European capital.’

Sir C.Hanson: ‘Not British.’

Mr M’Lean: ‘Most of it is British.’

An Hon. Member: ‘German.’

Mr M’Lean: ‘No, not German. But, if it is German, British shareholders are in the same company. I have their names here…The money of the capitalists of this country is being invested side by side with the Germans—the Hun whom you have been denouncing for so many years…—they are investing money in that country and
trying to draw dividends from it; that is the real cause of the intervention in Russia.

‘We find volunteers being appealed for to go to Russia, and responding. I have not yet heard or seen in any paper the name of any gentleman who has volunteered to go out to Russia to fight for his investments. It is the boys who have gone through the War, and who are drawn from the working classes…I find three Gentlemen* who sit on the Front Government Bench with money invested in Russia.’

An Hon. Member: ‘Why not?’
Mr M’Lean: ‘Why not? Then do not let us have it said that we are there for high ideals. Tell us the right reason why you are there: to fight for your investments, as you went to war in South Africa for the gold fields.’

An Hon. Member: ‘We could not relieve our soldiers there.’

Mr M’Lean stated that if Churchill could send a flotilla up the river, ‘you can bring the boys in a flotilla down the river and home’. Why were we still supplying munitions to Kolchak and Denikin? ‘Another evidence of the strength of the armament trusts in this country.’ If Kolchak and Denikin faltered, what guarantee would Churchill give that more British troops would not be sent out to Russia? ‘We have been told we are not at war with Russia. But we are going to recognise Kolchak and Denikin, if they will give guarantees…It is the old reactionary game. The Government of this country does not want to see a Government in Russia that is a Government really of the people…It is the old question over again—the trail of the financial serpent—men who say they cannot find investments in their own country, invest abroad, and when rebellion, civil war, or revolution springs up in that country, they are scared because they fear the loss of their capital…we should come out of Russia—bring our boys back from Russia.’

An Hon. Member: ‘Desert the people?’
Mr M’Lean: ‘The people did not invite you there. We have heard from the Secretary of State for War this afternoon that they went there at the invitation of Admiral Kolchak and General Denikin, not on behalf of the people or at the invitation of the people.’

An Hon. Member: ‘It was!’

Mr M’Lean stated that an opponent of intervention was not necessarily a supporter of atrocities. ‘Bolshevism is a disease; Bolshevism is a fester, so we are told today. What is Bolshevism?…If a man is the least extreme in his language, he

* The Minister of Transport (the Kyshtim Mining Corporation), the First Lord of the Admiralty (the Anglo-Russian Trust), and the Chancellor of the Exchequer (the Russian & English Bank, of which he had been a director).
is a Bolshevik. If he is extreme in his views, he is a Bolshevik… Anyone who disagrees with you… is a Bolshevist. . . . The workers of this country are Bolshevists. . . . So far as Russia is concerned, any intervention by the Government will be opposed by the heads of the Trade Union Movement in this country. You can describe the Trade Union Movement as a Bolshevist movement if you like… The real Bolshevists of this country are yourselves because “Bolshevist” in Russia only means the majority. You are the majority. You are the Bolshevists. We are the Mensheviks… Let us bring the soldiers back in June and July to this country and send no further soldiers out, or munitions either to Admiral Kolchak, General Denikin or even to the Bolsheviks, and let them fight it out until all their war material is used up, and then they will have to stop.”

But Churchill’s trade union opponents were paper tigers; and though Wedgwood’s arguments were mostly right, and his were mostly wrong, Churchill’s star was in the ascendant—and Lenin was in despair. While the debate proceeded, Lenin sent this wire to Kiev, to be read out to all prominent Bolsheviks. ‘Disaster is absolutely inevitable for the Revolution as a whole without a swift victory in the Donbass.’ Everything else must be put aside, ‘and to every rifle three soldiers assigned’. Lenin then sent a similar wire to the Eastern front at Simbirsk. ‘If we do not conquer the Urals by winter I consider disaster to be inevitable for the Revolution.’

Paris and Siberia

After four weeks of arduous work to induce President Wilson to back Admiral Kolchak, Lloyd George now realised, as the Allied despatch was sent off, that his candidate was in retreat. On May 30, the first reaction from a Russian leader reached Paris. The American Consul Poole wired from Archangel that General Miller (the Russian Commander) readily accepted the terms of the despatch, except as regards the border states and the recall of the Constituent Assembly. If Kolchak had the ‘foolish temerity’ to abandon Russian gains of the last two hundred years, he would be swept out of power. Some 40 per cent of the Constituent Assembly of 1917 were Bolsheviks, he added. That day, however, an encouraging wire reached the State Department from the American Consul Harris at Omsk that anti-American propaganda was now over at Omsk, where it was felt that America favoured recognition of Kolchak, and that the despatch of American supplies would follow. Kolchak’s attitude was ‘most cordial’, stated Harris.

The same day (May 30), Sir Charles Eliot, in a letter marked, ‘On the way to Omsk’, was writing again privately to Lord Curzon. Thanking him for his wire of April 21, in which Curzon stated that he was recommending recognition of Admiral Kolchak, Eliot explained that he had just sent Curzon a personal wire, as his position was sometimes rather difficult, since the War Office sent instructions direct to the British Military Mission, and seemed to ignore the existence of the Foreign Office, and of diplomatic envoys in Siberia. Eliot was most anxious not
to create any trouble, ‘and in particular to make it clear that I have no complaint whatever against Knox, with whom my relations have been & continue most friendly’. Also, since Knox was at Omsk, and Eliot was not, Knox was a natural channel of communication with Kolchak; and all wires between the War Office and Knox were sent on for his information.27

‘Still there is a difference between this and consulting me on political matters (as is provided for in the instructions issued to Knox & myself)’, he complained, ‘and it seems to me that the WO lay down what is to be our policy in purely political matters, and that I am practically obliged to support this policy in Siberia, without knowing whether you approve of it.

‘The case which struck me most was that Winston Churchill (for the telegrams shown to me apparently emanate from him personally) instructed Knox as to the policy which Kolchak ought to pursue in order to be recognised by the Powers. At first he suggested a limited monarchy; then he withdrew this suggestion hastily, because he thought the Prime Minister would not approve of it, and told Knox to go in for agrarian legislation and a Constituent Assembly. Knox accordingly consulted with Kolchak and a proclamation was drawn up, though its publication has been delayed for various reasons. I daresay that the proclamation is what you would desire but, even if it were not, you will see that it would be almost impossible for me to indicate disapproval of it, seeing that it has been drawn up in concert with the British Military authorities.’

In late December, Balfour had sent Eliot copy of a telegram to Archangel, stating that the British Government did not wish to make a Constituent Assembly part of their programme, ‘and the advisability of summoning such an Assembly is by no means self-evident’, added Eliot. ‘Even the Americans out here consider that it is entirely a question of how and when. It is quite possible that the Bolshevik Government may collapse not in consequence of Kolchak’s victories but from internal causes. It might be succeeded in European Russia by a very disorderly Government of Social Revolutionaries & it is by no means clear that a Constituent Assembly held in such circumstances would be a good foundation for a stable State. Also the Reactionary and Monarchist party appears to be pretty strong in Siberia, but we do not know what power it possesses in Russia or what its attitude to the Assembly would be.

‘I gather that at present you—or perhaps I should say the Peace Conference—are preparing to recognise Kolchak. In fact Reuter goes so far as to say that you have already done so.’ Eliot hoped it was true. The mere rumour had caused the rouble to rise from 150 to 95 to the pound, which showed how much the economic situation was affected by politics.

The military situation was ‘only moderately good’ at present, but it would soon change one way or the other. ‘A disquieting feature, which may be permanent, is that Kolchak, according to military critics, is too fond of extensive plans without considering whether he has the forces necessary to execute them. They say he has too many irons in the fire, and does not concentrate sufficiently on comparatively certain enterprises.’
Eliot concluded that a wire from the British Embassy at Tokyo stated that the Japanese would send to Omsk not a High Commissioner, but an Ambassador. ‘I hope that if they do, you will give me the same rank.’

On June 1, Kolchak’s answer to Churchill’s earlier request for a liberal declaration reached the War Office. Though he declared ‘ceaseless war’ against the Bolsheviks, his objective was not vengeance or persecution; and those forced into Bolshevik service would receive a full pardon. As he advanced, courts were to be opened and the law enforced; and local administration would restart. When the Bolsheviks were crushed, he would call a general election for a Constituent Assembly, to whom he would hand over his power, and which would decide, ‘without outside interference, the future form of government of the Russian state’. For the current year, he had signed a law which guaranteed to the peasants the harvest which they had sown; and he was intending to transfer the land of the large landowners to the small peasant holders, in return for a ‘just compensation’, and to protect the Russian workmen, and allow them to form proper trade unions. All this just answered Churchill’s plea, but only just.

The same day, the Foreign Office heard that Kolchak’s proclamation had not yet been published. It might impress the Americans favourably, the British High Commissioner Eliot had wired. There were two points to remember. Kolchak’s misdeeds were mostly committed by officials whom he could not control; second, the peasants were called Bolsheviks, and so punished, when they were merely discontented.

London and Paris

In the House of Commons, all Russian questions were blocked. On June 2, Harmsworth refused to tell Colonel Wedgwood what the conditions were in the Allied despatch to Kolchak.

Colonel Wedgwood: ‘Do the conditions include the immediate summoning of the Constituent Assembly in Siberia?’

Mr Harmsworth: ‘I cannot be quite certain as to that. If the hon. Member will put down another question I will answer it.’

Col Wedgwood: ‘It is on the Paper now—“What are those conditions?”’

On the 3rd, Harmsworth refused to give Lt Commander Kenworthy any answer at all about the Constituent Assembly, save that it had been dissolved by the Bolsheviks.

Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy: ‘Are any steps being taken to call it together again?’

Mr Harmsworth: ‘I should like notice of that question.’

Col. Wedgwood: ‘Is it not a fact that it was called together again and dissolved by Kolchak?’
On June 3, another optimistic wire reached Paris, sent by the American Consul Harris from Omsk on May 31, that the question of Allied recognition was keeping everyone in a ‘high state of expectancy’. If recognition was not in fact forthcoming, ‘I trust America will not get the blame’, he added. ‘Opinion concerning us is now changing and a set-back would be fatal.’ He enclosed Kolchak’s recent proclamation.

That afternoon, the Council of Four considered the matter. Lloyd George said he had heard that Kolchak had suffered a bad reverse. Clemenceau retorted that Kolchak had made a speech that went a long way to meet their demands; and his reply would be received in a few days. He had heard that Sazonov (the White Russian Foreign Minister) was strongly opposed to the Allied despatch. Lloyd George said he had also heard this; and as Sazonov was likely to advise Kolchak not to send a favourable reply, he had asked Churchill to wire urging Kolchak not to listen to Sazonov.

Churchill took rather more diplomatic action. On May 31, Sir Samuel Hoare had written to him, congratulating him on the success of his Russian policy, leading up to the Allied despatch. ‘The only hitch that I think is possible in the negotiations between the Allied Delegates and Kolchak is in connection with the Baltic Nationalities’, he wrote. ‘You better than anyone will realise that from the military point of view, the new Russia must have guarantees from Finland as to a frontier that is only a few miles distant from Petrograd, and from the naval point of view it is necessary to the existence of Russia to retain outlets upon the Baltic’, he stressed. ‘I have told Sazonov and other representative Russians that I cannot conceive how either the Allied Delegates or the League of Nations could ever fail to recognise Russia’s necessity in these two vital respects.’

As Hoare had considerable influence with Sazonov and the other Russians in Paris, Churchill forwarded his letter on June 4 to General Spears in Paris. ‘You should read the enclosed letter’, Churchill wrote in a covering note, ‘seal it up and give it personally yourself to M.Sazonov. You are at liberty to use any arguments you like to M.Sazonov in accordance with the sense of this letter, but without committing me directly.’ Spears was, however, to act as a link between Churchill and Sazonov.

‘Secondly, M.Sazonov and the Russian group have apparently got it into their heads that Philip Kerr is hostile to loyal Russia and favours the Bolsheviks. This is quite untrue. Mr Philip Kerr has been most helpful and useful, especially lately. It is a pity that criticisms of him, which must have originated from Russian sources in Paris, should have appeared in a leading article in the Morning Post. The Prime Minister’s attention was drawn to this and he was not at all pleased. Thus difficulties are made at a time when everything counts…

‘Thirdly, Sir Samuel Hoare, MP, is coming to Paris on Thursday [the 5th]. You should get in touch with him and let him put you into relations with the Russian group in so far as that is necessary.

‘I should like you to report to me fully and constantly on these Russians in Paris, always using great discretion not to commit me in any way’, Churchill
underlined. ‘If they put Kolchak off accepting the Allies’ conditions, they will have rendered the worst possible service to themselves.’

General Spears replied the next day that he had just seen Sazonov, who had read Hoare’s letter in front of him. Sazonov had assured him that fears that the Russians in Paris had advised Kolchak to refuse the Allied terms were ‘absolutely unfounded’, wrote Spears. ‘He assured me that the contrary was the case, and to prove this he shewed me a long wire he has sent to Kolchak urging upon him the acceptance of the Allied terms.’ His only reservation was the reconvening of the Constituent Assembly of 1917, which was ‘quite unacceptable’, since it had been originally organised by the Bolsheviks. Sazonov had asked Kolchak to recognise all national minorities in so far as their interests did not clash with those of Russia as a whole. ‘Sazonov, in explaining this clause verbally to me, said that as regards the Baltic provinces, for instance, they could use their own language and have their own universities, elect their own governors, and in short, do everything that does not threaten national unity in the broadest sense. As regards Finland, the above mentioned wire simply states that in all probability the Russian Constituent Assembly would have no objections to the frontiers with the freely recognised state of Finland being laid down by the League of Nations.’ In private, Sazonov stressed that Russia could not allow the treaty with Finland to give Germany any chance of gaining a footing in the Gulf of Finland.

But Sazonov asked Spears to assure Churchill in the ‘strongest possible terms’ that he fully realised the importance of Kolchak accepting the Allied terms ‘with but the smallest exceptions’. He could not understand where contrary ideas had arisen.

As regards Philip Kerr, Spears went on, ‘it is very evident that Mr Sazonov, like the remainder of the Russians I have seen here, looks upon Mr Lloyd George and Mr Kerr as unfavourable to the Russia he represents’. Sazonov had, however, assured Spears that neither he nor any other representative Russian had said ‘anything whatsoever’ that could have inspired the Morning Post article. The Russians in Paris had seen no English journalists; and when in London, Sazonov had seen and approved an article by a Morning Post correspondent, to whom he had given an interview, but this could not have formed the basis of the article complained of. ‘He [Sazonov] has asked me to do everything in my power to dispel the impression created by this article, and I am accordingly going to tell Miss Stevenson [Lloyd George’s private secretary] that, having met some of the Russians here, they expressed to me their deep regret at the Morning Post article, for which they entirely disclaimed all responsibility.’

Spears had done everything he could to stress to Sazonov that Philip Kerr had been most helpful and useful over Russia lately, ‘but I will have to keep on at this question as Sazonov has got it into his head that the least favourable of the clauses regarding Russia submitted to Admiral Kolchak were inserted at Philip Kerr’s instigation; this he says he has got on excellent authority’.

Sazonov had concluded the interview by asking Spears to tell Churchill that he was ‘the most popular Englishman in Russia today, and that it was fully
recognised by all Russians what you had done for their country’. He had wanted to see Churchill in London, but had feared to embarrass him.\textsuperscript{31}

The Russians in London were also aggrieved by the Allied despatch to Kolchak. On June 5 (as Kolchak’s official reply to the Allied despatch reached Paris in mutilated form), the Russian chargé d’affaires Nabokov called to see Sir Ronald Graham at the Foreign Office to complain about the Allied demand to recall the Constituent Assembly. ‘The Peace Delegates in Paris had probably forgotten, if they were ever aware of it, that Lenin and Trotsky and other notorious Bolsheviks had been members of that Assembly’, stated Nabokov. ‘Was it proposed that Admiral Kolchak should summon them and assure them of their safety?’

Sir Ronald Graham urged that Kolchak must accept the Allied conditions; it had taken a long time for the Allies to recognise him under any conditions, and in view of the strong pressure against any British help being given to him, an ‘evasive or unsatisfactory’ reply might mean that he would be ‘definitely dropped and Russia left to fight out her own battles’. Nabokov said that he knew this, but Kolchak and his reactionaries did not. When he was in London, Sazonov thought that the conditions could be ‘considerably modified or even refused without serious risk’. Sazonov had said that the Finns were asking for a great deal, but would have ‘absolutely nothing’. Nabokov would have liked to have warned Kolchak to close with the Allied offer; but Sazonov had wired to Kolchak in quite a different sense.\textsuperscript{32}

That afternoon, the same question was raised in Parliament. Lieutenant Commander Kenworthy asked whether the Allied despatch made any stipulation about the ‘franchise upon which the Russian Constituent Assembly will be elected?’

Mr Harmsworth refused to add anything to what he had said on the 2nd.

\textit{Brigadier-General Croft}: ‘Before any stipulation of that description is invited will Admiral Kolchak be given an opportunity of stating what shall be the terms of the franchise in India after the change that is about to take place?’\textsuperscript{33}

On June 6, although the \textit{New York Times} announced that Kolchak had captured Uralsk on his southern front, \textit{The Times} headlined, ‘Kolchak Army’s Retreat’. It was admitted that Kolchak had lost Sarapul (halfway between Ufâ and Perm) on the Kama river. Further down, \textit{The Times} stated that there was no truth in the suggestion that the Allied despatch to Kolchak contained ‘arbitrary’ conditions for formal recognition. This was correct.

In the House of Commons that afternoon, there was a further short debate on Russia.

* Kenworthy had presumably been shown a copy by Bullitt himself, or perhaps by Arthur Ransome.


Sir Donald Maclean (leader of the opposition liberals) stated that the Prime Minister’s speech of April 16 was ‘based on the experience of history and in line with the best ideals of statesmanship…But if those were his words, what are the facts?…We are ignorant of the policy to be adopted. We are taking part in active warfare against an enemy who is undefined. We really do not know where we are…If it was meant to support Admiral Kolchak because he was winning, then that is backing the wrong horse…It is a huge mistake for us to go on with this indefinite policy of military intervention in Russia’.

Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy insisted that ‘our policy at the present moment is utterly mistaken’. Britain could have put down the Bolsheviks by force, or made peace with them on reasonable terms, ‘but, instead, [has] wavered and wobbled in Russia, and sent weak detachments. You have first of all backed one reactionary party and then another. Now, apparently, you are fostering the Civil War which is being waged by that high-minded patriot Admiral Kolchak…If he gets to Moscow there will be Civil War for at least three years in Russia’. He went on, ‘Definite peace terms have been offered. I have seen a copy of them.* They want to get the matter of peace settled so that they can work out their own programme…I agree with the nationalisation of great monopolies’.

Mr Churchill: ‘What about the suppression of representative institutions?’
Lt-Com. Kenworthy: ‘They have decided that the parliamentary system is unsuitable for Russia. (Laughter).’ One of Kolchak’s supporters in the House ‘objects to the Constituent Assembly in India on much the same lines as for Russia’. It was high time to come to terms with the Bolshevik Government, short of recognition. ‘You do business with a man without asking him to dinner.’

Mr Churchill warned Sir Donald Maclean that he would ‘strongly deprecate making more of what we are doing in Russia than the facts warrant…I warned the House the other day against exaggerated hopes being based on Admiral Kolchak’s advance. I pointed out that a considerable set-back had taken place in the southern sector of his advance. That set-back the hon. and gallant Gentleman [Colonel Wedgwood] will rejoice to hear has become more pronounced in the interval…This is an extremely attenuated form of warfare…The railways are few and far between…Occasionally local concentrations are arranged which produce these changes. This line sways backwards and forwards. It is often a case of easy come and easy go…and I very much deprecate the kind of suggestion that I see in some of the newspapers that he [Kolchak] is likely to be at the gates of Moscow within a short time. He is hundreds of miles from the gates of Moscow.

‘I should like to ask my right hon. Friend: were we right in continuing to supply the Omsk Government with munitions? Consider how they came into being. They were called into being by the Allies at the time of the German war…We called this Government into existence?’ Britain could not throw them over just because the war was over.34

Mr Churchill: The hon. and gallant Gentleman puts more confidence than I do in the promises of the Bolshevik Government. It is very remarkable that a naval officer should be so very trustful of them when we think that, in defiance of every law and of the sanctity of diplomatic agreements, Captain Cromie was foully murdered at the legation in Petrograd by these very men on whose tender mercies the hon. and gallant Gentleman is now urging that we should rely…

‘We are not at all involved in these operations of Admiral Kolchak in any military sense, except to the extent that…it will facilitate our withdrawal from North Russia…Obviously what is going on is on a very small scale, and more in the nature of police work and skirmishing of a petty description…it is practically entirely the supply of munitions…The money value of those munitions is now considerable, but they are all surplus to our prospective requirements…Far more munitions exist than we have any use for. What are we to do with them? The market for them is restricted.’

Colonel Wedgwood protested that anyone who opposed British recognition or support for Admiral Kolchak was considered not only unpatriotic, but ‘supporters of the butcheries which are going on in Russia today’. Wedgwood opposed him because ‘Admiral Kolchak is evidently desiring to restore the Tsarist Government in Russia’.

(At this point, there was a sudden exodus of Ministers from the House, who were not anxious to hear what they knew Colonel Wedgwood was about to say in answer to Churchill’s appallingly injudicious and utterly false arguments—Kolchak, for instance, had only seized power seven days after the German war ended; for Wedgwood now remarked: ‘I regret to see that the entire Government, directly their policy in Russia is criticised, absent themselves’.)

Col. Wedgwood went on that the Czech troops in Siberia had refused to cooperate with Kolchak because he wanted to restore the Tsarist Government. Nor in fact was it Kolchak’s Government that ‘upset’ Bolshevism in Siberia, but the previous Omsk Government (formed by members of the Constituent Assembly, Siberian SRs and Cadets). ‘At the end of that time Admiral Kolchak executed a skilful coup d’état, imprisoned his colleagues, arrested members of the Constituent Assembly, ‘and had nine of them shot’, stated Wedgwood correctly. ‘To call that in any sense a democratic form of Government…’ Directly Allied support was withdrawn, Kolchak’s regime would fall to the ground, as his men did not want to fight. Thus we have seen the 150 miles’ retreat of Admiral Kolchak’s Army.’

He went on, ‘I am sceptical of any promises of any Russians at the present time’. The Bolsheviks would certainly not keep theirs, nor would Kolchak; still less the Russian officers in his entourage, who were promising to summon a Constituent Assembly on reaching Moscow—which they obviously would not,
‘because they will go when it is summoned, unless they can so satisfactorily cook the election’. He concluded, ‘The Red terror is horrible, but the White terror is even more terrible, because it is far more extensive’. We should not be associated with what these ‘rival bands of banditti’ were doing in Russia. ‘When you have these towns changing hands over and over again, unless there is some firm hand kept on the victorious army, you will have reenacted the butcheries which characterised the days of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan’. On June 7, as The Times leaked the Allied conditions to Kolchak (their Paris correspondent adding that, from the mutilated wire, it seemed that Kolchak’s reply was ‘generally satisfactory’, but contained ‘some reservations’ about the Constituent Assembly and the border states), President Wilson read out the wire, sent by Consul Harris from Omsk on May 31, to the Council of Four. The President considered it a ‘very good proclamation’. Lloyd George added that as soon as Kolchak’s full reply was received, it would be very important to publish it with the Allied despatch. Clemenceau said the full wire would be available that evening.

On June 8, Churchill was again writing to General Spears in Paris. ‘Are you in touch with Kerensky. I hear he is in Paris and is making mischief for the Kolchak-Sazonov group. He is said to be declaring that Kolchak is not democratic, and that he [Kerensky] will not work with him. He is now quoted boldly against Kolchak and our policy of supporting him by the extremists in the House of Commons. This is probably only due to the fact that he has been left out. It seems to me most important that all Russians should concentrate, and that no one should be driven away through injured vanity. I am only going on hearsay, but it seems to me probable enough. You should talk to Sazonov discreetly, and if you think it practicable, see if you can establish some sort of relationship between them. Really all Russians ought to unite at the present time to give their country national expression.

‘Report fully as soon as you can.’ On June 10, The Times finally revealed fully to the British public that all was not well in Siberia. Under the headline, ‘Kolchak Army’s Retreat—Underrating the Enemy’, the paper printed a report, sent from Omsk on the 4th, which stated that during the past three weeks, the Siberian Armies had passed through a serious crisis. ‘about which it is now possible to speak quite frankly…The situation may be summed up in a few words. We underrated the enemy’. The Bolsheviks could draw on a population ten times as numerous ‘as our own’, and with the help of ‘fanatical Communists and foreign mercenaries, can force unwilling hordes to enter the fray.’

The report went on. ‘We cannot hope to overthrow an enemy so vastly stronger in numbers unless we are able to set off quantity by quality’. Casualties among officers had been very heavy. There had, however, been sweeping changes in the Russian Command, ‘of which I prefer not to speak more fully at present’. The Bolsheviks, however, were now transferring troops from the Ural to the Petrograd front. ‘The Allied pressure on Petrograd will enable us to tide over
a trying moment with the fullest confidence in eventual victory’, the report ended.

At 5.45 pm on June 11, the Council of Four considered Admiral Kolchak’s reply to the Allied despatch. Lansing had reassured President Wilson that afternoon that it was in order, and could be approved. He had sent the text on June 8 to Polk in Washington, who had replied that day that Consul Harris reported that the Omsk Government only disagreed on the recall of the old Constituent Assembly, whose members were now mostly in the Bolshevik ranks. Harris fully agreed; one might as well keep Lenin and Trotsky in power as turn Russia over to the left SRs. A new Constituent Assembly should be convened.

President Wilson then read out Kolchak’s reply to his colleagues. Kolchak considered the Allied conditions ‘legitimate’ and accepted them (as indeed he would have accepted anything), save for the recall of the Constituent Assembly (for he could not raise the dead). But as soon as the Bolsheviks were ‘definitely crushed’, he would call elections for a new Constituent Assembly, to whom he would hand over, and which would have to ratify all his present decisions, resolve all frontier disputes, and the ‘final solution’ of the border states’ question. Kolchak also accepted the ‘burden’ of the Russian foreign debt, confirmed that there would be no Tsarist restoration, and added some vague assurances about land reform and local elections.

The Council of Four approved this reply, particularly noting Kolchak’s ‘satisfactory assurances’ that there would be ‘no return to the regime which existed in February 1917’. There they left it.  

Next day, The Times had to announce further bad news, but at the same time tried to mitigate the effect of its report two days earlier. ‘Loss of Ufa—High Tide of Red Army’s Offensive’, claimed the headline. But the New York Times, under the headline; ‘Recognise Kolchak Soon’, printed a Havas report from Paris stating that the Council of Four now had the complete text of Admiral Kolchak’s reply. ‘Recognition of the Omsk Government, it is believed, will not be much longer delayed.’

But when the Council for Four met that day, they simply approved a short reply to Kolchak, which stated that they ‘welcome the tone’ of his answer, which seemed to be in ‘substantial agreement’ with the Allied despatch, and to contain ‘satisfactory assurances’ for the Russian people. ‘They are therefore willing to extend to Admiral Kolchak and his associates the support set forth in their original letter.’ It was thereupon agreed to publish this exchange of notes at once.

The Japanese delegate remarked that he would have like to have gone further, and to have recognised Kolchak. Lloyd George replied that the Allies ‘could not yet recognise Admiral Kolchak for the whole of Russia’.  

What did the Allies, particularly the British and Americans, then do to bolster up Kolchak after their promise to assist him and his associates ‘with munitions, supplies and food, to establish themselves as the Government of all Russia’, provided Kolchak gave ‘definite guarantees’, which the Allies had now accepted?
On June 17, under the headline ‘Prompt Help Needed’, The Times printed a report from Omsk admitting that Glazov (halfway between Perm and Viatka) had fallen on the 13th. Brigadier-General Blair (Knox’s assistant) had come up from Vladivostok to take over the Anglo-Russian brigade, which the Hampshire regiment were ‘practically dry-nursing’, it was added. ‘We want the help of the Allies promptly’, stated the Times correspondent. ‘Recognition, to be of real value, must come now.’

The Allies could ‘not yet’ recognise Admiral Kolchak, Lloyd George had stated firmly on June 12. But even the question of Allied support remained vague and undefined. First, there was the question of trade. On the 16th, the DMO had wired Ironside that as there was very little coal in the Urals, the War Office was backing a British company to buy up 40,000 tons of Spitzbergen coal, which must be delivered at Kotlas, if the Archangel route was opened up, to work the Perm railway as far as Ekaterinburg, so as to leave the west-bound trains free to transport grain, and take the Russian troops on to Vologda. As coal supply, not only for Kotlas, but for all central Russia, if and when freed, was of great importance, especially in its ‘bearing on British commerce’, the War Office might buy all the Spitzbergen coal for 1919 and 1920, which British traders, with the help of the DOT, might be able to barter for Russian wheat, wood or flax, if the Archangel Government could provide the necessary tonnage and labour. Ironside should discuss the matter with them secretly.39

Second, on the 17th, the Foreign Office had informed the British High Commissioner Eliot that a British merchant company was sending 7,000 tons of imports that year to Siberia through the Kara Sea, and down the river Ob, to be bartered through the Russian Cooperatives for Russian exports.39

On June 17, the Council of Four considered whether to continue the Russian blockade after the signature of the German Treaty. President Wilson stated that there could be no legal blockade after peace had been made. Lloyd George replied that Germany would get all the Russian hides and flax, which were important to all Europe; which raised the question whether all Russian commerce was to be left to German exploitation. ‘If he were quite convinced, which he was not, that the Bolsheviks could be crushed in the present year, he might be willing to make a special effort.’ This led to a discussion of Bolshevik prospects. President Wilson read out a note from General Bliss that Kolchak’s troops were steadily retreating from the Volga, that there had been an uprising behind Kolchak’s line, and that the fall of Petrograd was not imminent, since the Estonians refused to advance without recognition.

Lloyd George asked how to answer a Parliamentary question about trade with Russia. Was he to reply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’? President Wilson asked if England was at war with Bolshevik Russia. Lloyd George replied that hostilities were going on at Archangel. The President stated that this was not a legal state of war, as there had been no formal declaration. There was thus no legal basis for a blockade; and hence, no legal warrant for estanging trade. Lloyd George asked what he would reply if asked whether British subjects could buy flax and sell boots? If he replied
'No', then the Germans would get the trade. President Wilson said that his reply would be that traders would do so at their own risk. Lloyd George said that an answer must be given. Should a blockade be maintained in the Baltic? They must prevent the smuggling of German arms by sea to Bolshevik Russia.

It was finally agreed that after the signature of the German Treaty, the blockade would cease, but there should be no positive measures or public announcement about a resumption of trade. They should investigate how to prevent German war material being shipped to Bolshevik Russia.40

The War Office was furious at this decision. ‘If this policy goes through’, minuted the DMO, ‘I think it will be deplorable and will have the effect of keeping Bolshevism going for an unlimited period, whereas if the disease is isolated, it must die out’

Churchill passed the file on to Sir Henry Wilson. ‘I think that so long as we are fighting the Bolsheviks it is illogical to raise the blockade’, minuted the CIGS, ‘but in another couple of months or even now I would pour in goods of all sorts into the countries held by our friends, i.e. Archangel, Murmansk, Finland, Baltic States, Denikin, and Kolchak.’

Churchill asked for a memo to show the Cabinet. Before it was ready, a wire arrived from the British charge d’affaires Kennard in Stockholm stating that the Swedish Foreign Minister had just asked him if England was at war with Bolshevik Russia, as many Swedes wished to do business with the Bolsheviks. Kennard had replied that there was neither war nor peace; the Swedes should do business with the Baltic States instead, which might hasten the best solution for all concerned, which was the fall of Petrograd.41

Then the State Department started asking some difficult questions about Kolchak. On June 19, Polk in Washington enquired of Secretary Lansing in Paris whether Allied acceptance of Kolchak’s reply merely entailed the maintenance of present relations with the Omsk Government, or de facto recognition and the extension of all possible support. ‘Press reports from Paris leave public in doubt on this question.’ The Secretary for War also wished to know whether to give further instructions to General Graves (the American Commander). The Omsk Government, added Polk, had an official in Washington, who wanted to purchase supplies on credit. ‘What attitude is Department to assume?’ he asked. Next day, he wired again that Consul Harris reported that the Omsk Government was ‘very anxious’ to know what Allied help to expect. Did the Act of March 1919, which enabled the American Treasury to grant credits to co-belligerent Governments, apply to the Omsk Government? They wanted $164 million of American supplies and 200 railway engines, ‘provided means of payment or credit be devised’.42

President Wilson then committed himself over Kolchak. On the 25th, the American Delegation informed Polk in Washington that the Russian Political Conference had put certain definite questions to the President, who had just transferred certain unused war funds for Russian and Siberian relief, and for the maintenance of the Siberian railway.
1 Did the Allied exchange of telegrams with Kolchak imply American recognition, and ‘regular relations’ with the Omsk Government?
2 Would an American Ambassador be sent to Omsk?
3 Would American credits be granted to purchase American goods?
4 Would the American credits, granted to the Russian Provisional Government before November 1917, now be made available?
5 Would American troops in Siberia now cooperate with Russian troops?
6 How would the Allies help the Omsk Government become the Russian Government?42

The President simply answered ‘No’ to the first four questions, though adding ‘Not at present’ to the second. He would not commit himself on the last two; but wrote ‘Probably’ against the fifth.

At noon on the 25th, Lansing himself wired Polk that the President had confirmed that the Allied despatch did not imply recognition by any Allied Power at present, but only offered such help as each Allied Government could give. Without formal recognition, therefore, the American Government could not grant credits; but any material, for which Kolchak could pay, could be sold to him. On his return to America, the President would bring before Congress the whole question of economic aid to Russia, and particularly for the Siberian railway. ‘He expects to send further military instructions to General Graves’, added Lansing. The President regretted that the press interpretation of the Allied despatch might give rise to false hopes. There the matter was left.42
South Russia: Denikin at Kharkov & Tsaritsin

South Russia

By now—two months after the French debacle at Odessa and Sebastopol—there was much better news from South Russia. On May 31, the Admiralty informed the War Office that the Volunteer Army had retaken Mariopol (on the sea of Azov) on the 24th, and were now advancing west towards the Dnieper; HMS Speedy was supporting them on their left flank. This news was greeted with enthusiasm by the General Staff. ‘Good’, scribbled an officer underneath. ‘This is first class’, wrote Colonel Steel; and Sir Henry Wilson added a large tick.

More reports from South Russia reached the War Office the same day. There had been further progress on the Manytsch front; though both sides had suffered heavily, the Kuban Cossacks were advancing north and west towards the Novorossisk-Tsaritsin railway, in support of General Wrangel, who was marching on Tsaritsin. On the Don, the Volunteer Army had given ground all along the front. In the Donetz the situation was still critical; there had been heavy fighting from the 16th, and Lugansk had been retaken, but then lost again. But on May 31, the Don Cossacks advanced through Lugansk up the Voronezh railway, and captured Millerovo—thus linking up with the Cossack insurgents. On June 2, General Briggs confirmed that the Volunteer Army, with the help of British tanks, were across both the Donetz and Don rivers, and had now retaken most of the Donetz mines and coal-fields; and the Bolsheviks were in general retreat.1

The full gravity of this was not at once realised in Moscow. In late May, Sklyansky, Trotsky’s Chief of Staff, sent a reminder to Kiev that 2,500 horses promised some weeks ago had not arrived. They must be sent within seven days. ‘Supply tanks’,* he added. They are very much needed. Send them to Moscow.’ Where were the workers for the Southern front? Tewer promises, more deeds.’ Lenin added, ‘The main thing is to check that orders actually are carried out.’ Then the dreaded news broke. ‘I am most amazed at your silence at such a moment as this’, wired Lenin to Trotsky, who was then on the Voronezh

* Presumably French tanks abandoned at Odessa.
railway, on May 30. The break-through at Millerovo was ‘almost irreparably
catastrophic’. What was being done? Denikin’s advance into the Donbass also lead
to a flurry of wires. On the 30th, a wire reached Lenin from Kharkov urging that
a special Military Revolutionary Council of the Donbass be set up to direct the
2nd, 8th & 13th Armies, and thus eliminate both the ‘Makhno cancer’ and the
‘slovenliness’ of the supply system, ‘which is leading the army towards total
collapse’. The 2nd Army ‘now no longer exists’.2

Lenin replied, ‘I will consult Sklyansky straight away’. But when Sklyansky
replied to Kharkov that Voroshilov should take over the 2nd Army, an immediate
answer came that it was a question of the joint command of the 2nd, 8th & 13th
Armies, not just of the 2nd Army, which was simply the remains of Makhno’s
band, while Makhno himself was organising another force. The disintegration of
the 13th Army was ‘on a vast scale’, and in two days time, ‘there will be nothing
left of the army in the Donbass…We cannot afford a single minute’s delay’. They
were already taking action as they could, ‘but without Trotsky’s sanction…the
responsibility is too great and it is not known who should assume it’. Voroshilov
was being asked to take over the 8th & 13th Armies. They were standing by for a
‘precise and definite reply from Trotsky and yourself by morning’.

On the 31st, a further desperate wire came from Kharkov: ‘We cannot make
head or tail of Sklyansky’s reply. I insist on a reply from Trotsky.’2 A Military
Revolutionary Council of the Donbass must be set up under the Southern front.
A general conference was being called. The Bolshevik Chief of Staff then
informed the Military Commander of the Southern front on the open wire that
this proposal was undesirable. They should abolish the Ukrainian front, and ‘draw
the fangs’ of the ‘Ukrainisation’ of the Southern front by subordinating the
Kharkov and Orel districts to it. This was agreed. Another panicky wire then
reached Moscow from Kharkov. ‘Supplying unarmed and unfed replacements
amounts to an act of complicity with the Whites.’ Six thousand such reservists
had now mutinied in the rear at Kupyansk, west of Kharkov. ‘Take steps to
remove Antonov at long last. This Supreme C-in-C of ours handed over the whole
of the Ukraine…for plunder and pillage.’ The arms and supplies taken from Ataman
Gregoriev were being ‘hauled off to the Crimea’, they complained. ‘Please press
Lev Davydovitch [Trotsky] to hurry up and give advice.’

On June 1, Trotsky, cut off and misinformed, finally replied from the
Voronezh railway. ‘To take measures requires time, and in the steppes, which
have turned into a sea of mud and in which I have been floundering for four days
on end, time has to be measured in days not hours.’ The Millerovo breakthrough
was not, as far as he knew, ‘catastrophic’. It was entirely the fault of the local
command, who in fact had more troops. It all now depended on what the 8th and
9th Armies could do, ‘and this I am proceeding to find out’. Later, he wired again
that Voroshilov should not be given command. ‘It is not Donetz operational
unity that we need, but over-all unity against Denikin.’ This idea was the result
of ‘Donetz separatism’ directed against Kiev and the Southern Front. It would
only add to the chaos, and be ‘absolutely fatal’ to the direction of military
operations. Trotsky was calling a general conference near Kharkov to enforce cooperation, ‘but without any setting up of a Donetz military republic’. Lenin then issued a reprimand to Kharkov. ‘This habit of calling meetings must at all costs be stopped…Discipline must throughout be military discipline.’ There were to be no more ‘covert devices’ for resuscitating the Ukrainian Front.³

On the 2nd, the Central Committee wired that they formally rejected the proposal for the amalgamation of the 2nd, 8th and 13th armies into an unified Donetz command. They sent two senior Party workers to the Southern Front, and recalled Gusev (an old Bolshevik) from the Eastern Front, and appointed him Bolshevik Commissar to the Chief of Staff at GHQ at Serpukhov (just south of Moscow), ‘provided there are no obstacles to this from Comrade Trotsky’s side’. Sklyansky at once warned Trotsky of this dangerous move; but Trotsky made no reply. The same day, as Lenin wired to Kharkov that the Central Committee had decided the previous day, in entire agreement with Trotsky, against a ‘special unified Donetz command’, Trotsky went to Kiev and abolished the Ukrainian front, dismissed the Military Commander Antonov-Ovseenko, and split up their troops between the Southern and Western fronts.⁴ (The 2nd Ukrainian Armies became the 14th Army on the Southern front. The 1st and 3rd Ukrainian Armies became the new 12th Army on the Western front. The demarcation line between the two fronts was the line Kursk-Balki-Ekaterinoslav-the Dniester down to Kherson.)

Lenin, anguished and feeling out of touch in a fast moving situation, then turned on Trotsky. ‘I am extremely surprised and, to put it mildly, distressed that you have not put through the directive of the C.C.’ Trotsky replied laconically from Kharkov on the 3rd, ‘Reproaches are unfounded’. He had already issued the necessary orders. But some ‘new element’ must take command in the Ukraine. ‘The army simply cannot remain without leadership. That is why delay has occurred in carrying out the C.C.’s decision.’

‘Are you fully informed about the position on the Southern Front?’ Lenin asked Trotsky in some anxiety on the 5th. Lenin was considering sending a man to organise the defence of Tsaritsin. Trotsky replied sharply the same day that the over-accumulation of special delegates, with undefined functions, was ‘extremely dangerous’. The question of supply was much more important. ‘Since the moment when the Southern Front started to totter I had more than once recommended that the Lugansk [munition] factory be handed over to the Southern Front.’ But owing to bureaucratic delays, the evacuation of the factory had now taken place ‘any old how’. Supply was being neglected, especially fodder. ‘Cavalry is essential to us at all costs.’ It was quite possible to find enough oats. ‘All that needs to be realised is that the issue of victory or defeat turns on this.’ As the new personnel had not arrived, the Ukrainian Front could not now be abolished. But the 11th Army was being disbanded, and the troops sent to join the 10th Army at Tsaritsin. Trotsky also directed that various guilty parties be severely disciplined. Owing to the ‘disgraceful conduct’ of their Caspian flotilla near Chechen island in May, a Tribunal should exact punishment on the spot,
‘irrespective of rank’. Those guilty of ‘obtuse separatism’ at Riga should also pay the penalty. ‘We must put an end to this partisan mentality of the national States.’ On the 7th, however, Trotsky wired the Central Committee bleakly that, owing to Denikin’s rapid advance into the Donetz, he was having both Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav (on the lower Dnieper bend) converted into fortified regions.

On June 3, the *Times* correspondent reported from Ekaterinodar that ‘hope is dawning at last, after the long night of desperate struggle. How they dream here and long for the sound of the Moscow church bells! It is good to see the Russian soldiers in British uniform kicking a football on the Cathedral green…The heroic period is not yet past…To Englishmen here it is a matter of pride that we have a share in this enterprise, and Russians are most touchingly grateful…The passage to the front of the splendid Iron Brigade, having 50 per cent of officers in the ranks, and of two cavalry regiments dressed in British uniform, was the first evidence of British aid, and then came stories of the miraculous effect of the Tanks and the generous British supplies of munitions and equipment. Public opinion has become enthusiastically pro-British. The note running through all the Press comments is “This is real help, and done without advertisement.” The effect on the tired troops of being well and uniformly clothed is marvellous. The ‘New English-men’, as they are called, clip their moustaches, smoke pipes, and try to look as English as possible.

‘As to the Tanks, the Bolsheviks never stop to meet them, and the cavalry commanders complain that their horses are worn out in the attempt to overtake the flying enemy.’ The Donetz basin had been freed in less than a week. ‘The gallant Kuban Cossacks of General Shkuro, the “Stewart of Kuban”, as the Russians call him, simply fell in love with the whippets. They flung themselves from their horses and kissed the sides of the baby tanks. Enthusiasm is spreading all along the front and bringing fruit in victory after victory. The speed of the advance is bewildering.’

On June 5, the *Times* correspondent reported again from Ekaterinodar that he had that day seen General Denikin, who spoke of British policy. ‘Again and again he said: “It is so wise, so generous, it will not be forgotten for generations, and will have great effects in world policy and world markets”. Of the recent successes of his Army, he spoke without elation, but with quiet satisfaction.’ Three weeks before, Bolshevik guns could be heard in Novocherkask. Denikin had now taken 22,000 prisoners, 150 guns,* 350 machine guns, 4 armoured trains, and so on. The front now has the oddest configuration, and presents the appearance of a clumsily sprawling camel…Such a front would be impossible

* On June 26, Trotsky wired Lenin from Kozlov: The information collected to date by the Ninth, Tenth and Thirteenth Armies gives 140 guns as lost. This information understates the figures. The overall losses of the Southern Front during the last withdrawal are not less than 200 guns."
under conditions of trench warfare... This time during their retreat the Bolsheviks are destroying with a systematic ruthlessness that suggests German inspiration.'

As Denikin concentrated all his efforts on the Don and Donetz fronts, Wrangel's advance on Tsaritsin was hampered. On June 6, he wired urgently to Denikin: 'I must insist that if the Tsaritsin operation fails or is delayed, all your other operations will come to nothing. You promised me artillery and infantry, and I based my whole campaign on your promise...I insist on having what is indispensable.' But there was no reply, and relations between Wrangel and Denikin deteriorated; angry telegrams were exchanged. But as the Bolsheviks cracked, Denikin refused to split up his reserves. On June 9, Briggs wired that the Red Army was now defeated, and retreating along the whole Southern Front; and Denikin was advancing towards the line Alexandrovsk (on the Dnieper)–Kupyansk—the line of the middle Don–Tsaritsin (on the Volga).

In South Russia generally, much Anglo-French and Russo-French bitterness still persisted after the French débâcle—heightened by the fact that Denikin, the British puppet, was now breaking into the French zone. On May 28, the Admiralty had curtly informed the War Office that it had been agreed, after reference to Paris, that Admiral Calthorpe should now control all Allied naval operations in the Black Sea. General Milne had also wired in late May that many Russian officers at Constantinople were now under the influence of General Schwartz (the former Russian Military Commander at Odessa), who had quarrelled with Denikin, who had refused to recognise those Russian officers who had joined the Franco-Russian force at Odessa in late March. Schwartz, who claimed to represent Kolchak, now had some vague idea (evidently with French support) of transporting all these Russian officers, and those he could lure away from Denikin, to Vladivostok: many such officers, Milne explained, had served with the pro-German Skoropadsky in the Ukraine, and consequently feared going before a Court of Honour; some were now working in German-Bolshevik interests. ‘Schwartz is a sod’, scribbled an officer underneath this wire when it reached the War Office. ‘So are the F[rog]s’, added another. The War Office merely replied that all good Russian officers hanging around in Constantinople should at once be sent to Denikin, if he would have them. Milne should also make up a list of ‘pseudo officers’ working in German or Bolshevik interests, and divide the sheep from the goats. The difficult position of those who had worked with Skoropadsky was fully realised, and their cases would be carefully considered. But it was too costly in both time and money to send Russian officers from Constantinople all the way to Vladivostok.

French action along the river Dniester was also causing concern. But when some Bolsheviks crossed the lower Dniester at Benderi at dawn on May 28, and made a surprise attack with local partisans on the unreliable French troops, Algerian Tirailleurs rounded them up; and after two hours of street fighting, those not shot were driven back into the river and summarily drowned. Further up the Dniester, General Haller’s Polish troops were heavily attacking the Ukrainians, and advancing on Stanislau; and the Roumanians were coming up north to meet
them. General Milne wired on May 28 that relations between Poland and Roumania were excellent; but Franchet d'Esperey (the French Commander at Constantinople, who was also directing French troops in Roumania) admitted that he had no idea what Allied relations were meant to be with Petlura in the Ukraine.

The Council of Four had, in fact, agreed on May 21 that Clemenceau should ask the Polish President Pilsudski whether General Haller (whose Polish troops had recently returned to Poland from France) was attacking the Ukrainians. On the 27th, Lloyd George told the Council of Four that the French Ambassador in Warsaw was believed to be encouraging the Poles. Lloyd George thus doubted if Clemenceau’s wire had ever been sent to Warsaw. Clemenceau thus agreed to a much harsher message to Pilsudski; if attempts were made to settle the Polish-Ukrainian frontier by force, while the matter was under active consideration in Paris, no more Allied supplies would be sent to Poland. On June 3rd, when the Council of Four again considered the matter, President Wilson read out a wire stating that Pilsudski said that hostilities were suspended, and would cease. His only aim had been to link up with Roumania, as the Germans might have cut him off from the Allies. Now that this was done, he had ordered Haller’s troops to withdraw.

But on June 5, when the Polish Prime Minister Paderewski appeared before the Council of Four, Lloyd George complained that a wire had arrived that morning stating that the Poles were still advancing in Ukrainian Galicia. Paderewski explained that the Galicians were not Ukrainians, and were under German influence. Poland, he stated, claimed the whole of Galicia; if there were any changes in territory granted to Poland, he would resign. At this Lloyd George exploded. Even if they lost all the disputed territories, there would still be some 20 million free Poles, who had only got their freedom because of one and a half million French dead, nearly a million British, half a million Italian, ‘and I forget how many Americans’. Paderewski retorted that on leaving Warsaw, a boy in uniform aged 13 came to see him, with four fingers missing, shot twice through the leg, once through the lungs, and with a deep wound in the skull. He had also seen girls in the same state. All had been defending Lemberg. ‘Do they fight for territory, or for oil, or for annexation, or for imperialism?’ Lloyd George would not be drawn. ‘Lemberg, I understand, is a Polish city. They were undoubtedly fighting for a Polish city.’ Lloyd George did not like or trust the Poles, and remained thoroughly suspicious of what they, with their French backers, were up to on the Ukrainian borders.

But as nearly all the wires sent by General Briggs were taking at least ten days to reach London, the War Office remained quite unaware of Denikin’s rapid success in South Russia for some while; and was again bothering about border disputes in the Caucasus. On June 6, they had wired General Milne that Denikin could occupy Petrovsk (on the Caspian), and a new demarcation line would be laid down, starting near Sukhum (on the Black Sea coast), and running along the Petrovsk railway; the Volunteer Army were to keep five miles to the north, and
the Caucasus States five miles to the south. As it would be more difficult to make
the Caucasus States obey, and continue to provide oil and supplies for the Caspian
flotilla, and deny it to the Bolsheviks, the Caucasus States should be told that if
they disobeyed, no action would be taken to prevent the Volunteer Army from
making a further descent on the Caucasus. 8

Once again, this order reached the British Commander at Tiflis first, who
immediately issued orders to the local Russian Commander. Denikin was again
furious that he had not been told first. When the initial demarcation line was laid
down, the British Government had told him that British troops would protect his
rear; as these British troops and the British sailors on the Caspian were now being
withdrawn, it was vital that he should control the Petrovsk-Derbent railway,
which was the only possible way of maintaining contact with his troops near
Astrakhan, and with the Ural Cossacks. The sole reason for this new demarcation
line seemed to be to allay the fears of Azerbaijan; but he had already asked the
British Mission to announce that he recognised their independence, which
message the British Commander at Tiflis had never passed on. On the 7th, some
explanation of this puzzle came from Milne, who wired that General Erdeli, who
called himself the Russian Governor and Commander in both the Terek and
Daghestan, had promised that Russian troops would keep the peace in Daghestan,
and not cross the first line, as laid down in Sir Henry Wilson’s wire of February
1. 8 But a British officer who had talked to the President of Azerbaijan reported
that Erdeli’s action was causing consternation; for if the Russians thought that
Daghestan would put up with this, Denikin would then do the same thing in
Azerbaijan.

On June 8, Churchill decided to consult Curzon privately about the Caucasus:

‘My dear Curzon,

‘I wish to send the enclosed to Gen. Milne in the near future. Inconveniences
arise from the lack of comprehension of our feeling by so many officers. They
become local partisans. Do you agree?’

The draft wire stated, ‘With the recognition* of Admiral Kolchak’s Government
by the Allies, British policy towards Russia enters on a new phase’. It was of the
‘very greatest importance’ to secure a White Russian victory; and in South Russia,
the prime British object was the military success of Denikin, and the interests of
the Caucasus States ‘must definitely take second place’. No British officers should
support their ‘separatist interests’. British evacuation of the Caucasus was being
postponed solely to assist Denikin, and ‘not on account of the interests of Georgia
or Azerbaijan’. 9

* As will be seen, both Churchill and Curzon were certain that the Allied despatch to
Kolchak entailed Allied recognition.
Curzon replied from Carlton House Terrace on the 10th, rejecting this draft ‘on the double ground that it is inconsistent with the policy which we have hitherto pursued and are still pursuing, & that it would be unwise in itself’. No British officers were favouring the Caucasus States against Denikin. ‘Rather it is the other way about.’ In Paris, Balfour had definitely recognised Georgian independence. Further, while Churchill wished to send this wire, the War Office was wiring Denikin in strong terms not to cross a new demarcation line. ‘Should General Milne therefore receive your proposed instructions, I think he would find no small difficulty in deciding on which leg he was expected to stand.’ The only way to secure Denikin’s success was to keep the Caucasus quiet behind him, which could only be done by recognising the ‘separatist interests’ of the small states. ‘They cordially dislike & distrust Denikin & would sooner become Bolshevik than accept his dispensation. The worst thing that could happen to Denikin would therefore be in my judgment that the Republics should be snubbed. For it is on Denikin that they would take it out’ Curzon thus hoped that Churchill would not send his wire, but allow British policy to proceed ‘on its present difficult but not irrational lines’.9

Churchill answered Curzon the next day. ‘I think you underrate the extent to wh the original instructions given to our officers have become obsolete in view of our impending abandonment of this whole theatre. We shd have actually cleared out on Sunday next, but for the interests of Denikin’s operations. Our present date is July 15: after wh the Italians or chaos or both!

‘Let me have my telegram back. I certainly meet soldiers who seem to be toiling to build up “strong independent Republics”; & who think we have a policy in that direction for wh we are going to make exertions & sacrifices. Surely they shd be undeceived.’

At the same time, Churchill minuted to the DCIGS. ‘I understood that it had been satisfactorily arranged that the date for evacuation [of the Caucasus] was provisionally postponed to July 15th, in order that the success or failure of General Denikin’s operations against Astrakhan could be definitely decided. Has this been done…Are you in touch with the Admiralty, and are you making sure that no premature action in regard to withdrawal will be taken on their part.’9

Across the steppe, Wrangel continued his painful advance on Tsaritsin. British and Russian aircraft struck at the Bolshevik positions and supply lines ahead of his column. Relations between the British and Russian pilots were bad. The British pilots called the Russian pilots ‘The Wanderers’, and ‘it was an understatement to say that we flew with them reluctantly…Incapable of keeping formation, their planes would wander off in all directions, and we would have to shepherd them in like a flock of stupid sheep…Sometimes their planes disappeared altogether, and on several occasions we had landed to find them neatly hangered, with the Russians on their third glass of vodka. It wasn’t a question of cowardice…They were merely bored by inconvenience and hard work.’10 (This quotation comes from a fairly light-hearted account by a former British pilot. It nevertheless gives some sort of picture of the slap-happy attitude of the young British officers who
came out to South Russia at the end of the First World War, imagining that they would have some fun with the local Russian girls, while they did a bit of flying for part of the day, and then receive a rapturous reception on their arrival in Moscow. The gradual disillusionment with all things Russian comes out well, and there are vivid descriptions of the final horror of the long retreat to Novorossisk.)

For days, Wrangel recorded, his troops saw no sign of life, or even vegetation, save for convoys of wounded, ‘hundreds of carts drawn by camels, which scarcely seemed to move, so slow was their pace—and they still had hundreds of kilometres to cover, weeks to travel…The grilling sun beat down on the poor wretches lying there in the carts, which were devoid of hoods and springs; the axles were never oiled, and made an unholy din in consequence. And for days there was not a drop of water’. Only the nights were bearable. ‘I remember one night which we spent in the open’, recalls Wrangel, ‘on the eve of a bloody battle. It was a beautiful night, the sky was covered with stars, the steppe with tents. I was lying on my cloak, my saddle for a pillow, and I could hear my soldiers laughing and talking, the horses snorting with fear in the mist, and the firing in the distance. I felt that I was back in the times…when the Commander marched with his troops, slept on the ground as they did, and sometimes lacked water to quench his thirst, even as they.’

On June 10, Wrangel finally arrived at the gates of the city. But his promised support had still not arrived. On the 11th, he summoned his Generals to a Council of War. Should they wait for the railway bridges to be repaired, so that the armoured trains, tanks and supplies could be brought up, or should they try to break straight into Tsaritsin? The Council of War decided unanimously on an immediate assault.

General Holman had meanwhile arrived in Ekaterinodar to take over the British Mission from General Briggs, and to find General Denikin’s Council sharply divided over the Allied despatch to Kolchak. On June 12, Briggs was handed a sharp Russian protest at British recognition of Finnish independence, which had caused a ‘painful impression’ on all Russians; such questions could not be settled before the Russian people had made known their will. But at a farewell banquet to Briggs that night, Denikin announced his verdict; after criticising the ‘treachery’ of the border states, he subordinated himself to Admiral Kolchak, the ‘Supreme Ruler of the Russian State and the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armies’.

This declaration was greeted with enthusiasm, reported Captain Hill, and was by and large widely accepted. All Russian political parties considered Denikin much less democratic than Kolchak, but the agreement on the supreme command had now given the Volunteer Army sway over all other forces in South East Russia. It was essential that relations between Kolchak and the Volunteer Army should be good, and any rupture prevented. Most members of Kolchak’s Government were Siberians, and some were ‘very clever statesmen’. But it was still uncertain what would happen when the two forces met. ‘Dictatorship is
generally understood and agreed upon, but the formation of an administrative organ by the dictator’s side has yet to be decided.’

In South Russia, the military situation was now ‘extremely favourable’, Captain Hill went on. Up to three weeks ago, everything had been very disorganised in Ekaterinodar; but, though the situation in the rear was still bad, there had since been a big improvement. ‘The other day I saw a regiment of about 4,000 men clothed from head to foot in British uniforms. These newly clad troops are affectionately termed “our little Englishmen”.’ British tanks and aeroplanes had caused the ‘wildest delight’, and Denikin was now likely to reach Moscow before Kolchak; which was not apparently what Denikin wished. But further military success depended upon an improvement in the bad economic situation. ‘Having lost a lot over the evacuation of Odessa, the majority of foreign traders are fighting shy of further attempts.’ As there were now three separate trading bodies in South Russia, Hill urged that a proper British commercial attache be at once appointed.

Though there was little hard news of what was really happening in Central Russia, ‘one of the greatest dangers that faces the anti-Bolshevik Commanders today is the sudden collapse of the Soviets. Should the Soviets decide to abscond, the country will be left in a terrible condition, while the unprepared conquerors will have to take over without transport or an organised police force. Optimists, however, declare that the country as a whole will acknowledge a Dictator and strain every nerve to bring aid to the stricken centres’. Hill went on, ‘I have not the slightest doubt of the possibility of the Soviets absconding’.12 Less than a year before, he had been present at an interview between Arthur Ransome and Radek, at which two policies had been discussed: that of Lenin, who urged that the Bolsheviks should go underground again, relying on party funds both in Russia and neutral countries (for which purpose Vorovsky had been sent to deposit Bolshevik funds in Stockholm); and that of Trotsky, who favoured a fight to the end—which policy had won the day. Though present Bolshevik plans were unclear, there was no doubt that reliable Bolsheviks were going abroad with large sums of money. At present, anti-Jewish feeling was very strong, and the Church had an important role to play in the new Russia. Hill was in close touch with Bishop Anastasius, who was ‘extraordinarily sanguine’ about the Russian Church’s future. Religious feeling amongst the Russian people was still very strong; on St Nicholas Day, May 9, the Odessa Soviet had given strict orders that a service was not to be held, but it was held, and was well attended.

General Holman confirmed the local military aspects of this good report in his first wire to the War Office on June 15. The Volunteer Army, which was now ‘almost entirely clothed in British uniforms’, had greatly benefited from British instruction in the use of Lewis guns, which they were now handling with great effect. The British tanks had also delighted them, and panicked the Bolsheviks, a reaction which Trotsky had been unable to check when he came down in his train to Kharkov on June 6.12 Holman strongly urged the despatch of more British tanks and armoured cars to cut the railway lines behind the Bolshevik
front, and thus stop the Bolsheviks destroying the railway bridges as they retreated, since they were vital for Denikin’s further advance.

The DMO, who was well aware of the disorganisation in Denikin’s rear, had in fact drawn the attention of the War Cabinet to it, in particular to the lack of railway engines in South Russia, on May 29. Of the 800 which Denikin had, only 240 were working, stated the DMO. All that was needed was men and material for their repair. But the ‘whole success’ of Denikin’s future operations depended on an efficient railway system; without it, he would be unable to distribute the mass of British supplies which he now had. The DMO asked for £1 million for material, clothing and equipment for the railway workers, and some lorries.

Chamberlain refused to be taken in by the ‘familiar procedure’ of the War Cabinet being asked to finance projects which had been rejected in Paris. ‘The whole burden of fighting the Bolsheviks in Russia was now being borne by Great Britain alone, and the situation was becoming intolerable’, he stated yet again. They were very short of this material in England; perhaps some could be sent from Salonika. The President of the Board of Trade supported him; it would be ‘short-sighted’ in the extreme to help Denikin at the expense of this country, where the issue of transport was causing ‘pro found anxiety’. It was agreed that the War Office should show in greater detail what exactly they wanted, where it might come from, and how much shipping was needed.\[^{13}\]

**The Russian banks**

From the seeds of the French debacle there now arose a gigantic proposal, based on the lesson of Odessa, namely that a successful military advance depended upon simultaneous economic reconstruction. The proposal was apparently first drawn up in Constantinople by Picton Bagge, Reilly, and the Polish financier Karol Jaroszynski (whom Bagge had helped to escape from Odessa, and via whom the War Cabinet, in early 1918, had purchased a controlling interest in most of the Russian banks).\[^{14}\]

On May 15 (while Reilly was in the United States gaining American support for the project), Picton Bagge had put forward his grand scheme to Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland (Head of the Department of Overseas Trade, the DOT, an offshoot of the Foreign Office) for an Anglo-Russian industrial combine, which amounted to a British takeover bid for the entire Russian economy. Before 1914, he wrote, German investment in the Russian banks had made German influence predominant in Russia. After a lapse during the war, it was again predominant at the time of the Bolshevik revolution, and strengthened after the French débâcle. Now that Germany was defeated in the west, and thwarted in her ‘drang nach osten’ towards Salonika, Constantinople and Baghdad, she would in fact again go for Russia and Siberia. But it was important for the British Empire to be able to draw extensively on Russian wealth, and for Russian markets to provide an outlet for British goods. Since it was ‘jejune to expect [that] German energies can be throttled and stifled’, Britain should thus ‘check and control German political and
economic activities, directing them into proper but sufficient channels’. If Britain did this, British manufacturers would find a good market for British goods, with no competition from Russian goods, and Britain would prevent the otherwise ineluctable German-Russian alliance.

Bagge went on, ‘I propose as a solution of the problem before us that Great Britain should secure control of the big banks in Russia, of the big transport companies, and of the insurance companies’. The main objective, however, was ‘far more imperial. Control of the banks should mean both the economic and political control of Russia’. In February 1918, the British Government, through their loan to Jaroszynski, had secured the right to place two directors on a board of four, who would control all his banks. He and Bagge had now worked out a scheme for setting up a Central Bank or Trust, based in London, with two directors only—Jaroszynski and an Englishman—which would control all the Russian banks, which in turn controlled the grain trade, and owned most mining, mineral and timber concessions, and some transport companies; and would thus control all Russian industry—in fact the entire Russian economy. (’The British Director should not be a mere financier, but an imperially thinking man’, wrote Bagge. It is not clear who they had in mind for this job; but it may have been Sir Samuel Hoare.) British industries would be represented on the Russian bank boards by British subjects, who should in fact hold both senior and junior positions in all the Russian banks and industries, since British interests had previously been much prejudiced by Russian or Jewish representation.14 (’As regards the younger men’, wrote Bagge, ‘I would suggest that they be of the public school boy type. They should be made to live…with selected Russian families, with a view to acquiring the language, in which they should be subjected to periodical examinations. They should also be subject to a certain amount of discipline…somewhat necessary in Russia where owing to the breadth of view taken of life and the somewhat careless regard to the morrow, young men, whose moral fibre is not strong, are apt to become rather easily demoralised.’) Prominent local politicians would also be so employed at good salaries, when not actually in office. The Central Bank, he added, would also run an intelligence network, and control the Russian press.

The Central Bank should obtain control of the Russian merchant fleet on the Black Sea, the Volga and the Caspian, and concessions for constructing and operating a Chelyabinsk-Novorossisk railway, and a Volga-Don canal. This would divert to the ice-free port of Novorossisk both the Siberian and the Baltic trade, which was likely to be under German influence; while the Volga-Don canal would provide a cheap means of transporting iron ore from the Urals ‘for British industries’, since the Krivol Rog* deposits would become extinct within twenty-five years. British colonial experts could also assist in the ‘colonisation of

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* Krivoi Rog is just north east of Kherson, i.e. in the French zone.
Siberia’, particularly in the irrigation of Turkestan and improvement of the cotton industry.

Jaroszynski, who was now in Europe, was anxious to go ahead with this scheme at once, but he insisted on prior political approval. ‘Politicians of standing must have a prominent place first’, he had stated. But he could not go into details of his previous transactions with the British Government, as all his documents were buried in the ground somewhere in Petrograd for safety. Bagge therefore urged the British Government to conclude an agreement in principle with Jaroszynski, and help him both to consolidate his position in the Russian banks now under his control, and to obtain control of the Azov-Don bank, the Volga-Kama bank, the Russian Steamship and Trading Company on the Black Sea, and the two large steamship companies on the Volga and the Caspian.

Attached to this paper were three enclosures. The first was a secret report from Stockholm, dated April 4, which stated that the Petrograd and Moscow bank directors had agreed at a recent secret meeting (presumably in Stockholm) that all their banking records up to the end of the Kerensky regime were preserved; and when order was restored, it would only take a short time to put the banks in order again.

The second was a wire from Reilly in New York, dated May 10, which stated that American bankers and industrialists were also looking to Russia both for a market and for raising capital, since ‘in view of diminished purchasing capacity, the intensified production and tendency to minimize imports in Europe, stagnation in the American export trade is bound to come and they rightly hope to find equivalents in Russia’. But though there was active business enquiry from Finland, and they were shipping some goods to Novorossisk and Archangel, American businessmen were in principle waiting for the restoration of order in Russia. The American International Corporation, Armour and Company, and Ford, however, had already made ‘tentative agreements’ with the Russian financier Batolin, who had been in America for some time.

(According to Colonel Raymond Robins, Batolin was an ‘able and competent [Russian] peasant banker, a grain buyer, a sort of embryo Armour, a man who had a fleet of ships on the Volga, some 800 agencies scattered throughout the grain regions of Siberia and the Ukraine, several banks, and an effective organisation’. Colonel Robins states that in August 1917, Kerensky, Savinkov, Chernov and Kornilov agreed to appoint Batolin as a Special Food Commissioner, with a member of the American Red Cross as his assistant, who would then make an appeal to Hoover for food supplies. But Kerensky delayed the appointment until the Kornilov affair, by when it was too late. Batolin presumably went to America soon after. He was obviously a rival of Jaroszynski.)

Reilly thought that the moment was thus ripe for an Anglo-American link to exploit the Jaroszynski and Batolin interests, each country using its own Russian financier. Reilly had discussed this with Samuel MacRoberts, the Vice President and ‘Foreign Minister’ of the National City Bank, who always took the lead in Russian business, was an Anglophile and knew Lord Reading (the British
Ambassador) well, and was eager to start an Anglo-American syndicate. ‘In field so huge there can be no place for jealousy’, he had told Reilly, who wanted to bring in the above three American groups, and Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Dupont and John Ryan as well. Reilly therefore suggested that both Jaroszynski and Bagge should come to New York, if the British Government agreed. Even if Jaroszynski was opposed to Batolin, Reilly thought that they could still go ahead. But MacRoberts particularly did not want the initiative left to J.P.Morgan. New York businessmen would not like this, as Morgan was so closely linked with the British Government. But they could come in with the others.

The third enclosure was a further wire from Reilly, dated May 15. ‘Have seen Richard Martens,* he has most exhaustive information, statistical maps and charts on Russian natural, industrial and commercial resources. I consider that his presence in England would be of great value in connection with any scheme for economic reconstruction of Russia. His cooperation would be especially desirable in the Jaroszynski matter. Please use your influence in obtaining for him permission to go to London.’ That day, Reilly sailed back to England on the s.s. Baltic.

Bagge concluded his long report to Sir Arthur Steel Maitland that Jaroszynski definitely favoured some Anglo-Russian link; and on May 16, Bagge further informed him that Jaroszynski and a colleague had arrived in France, ‘and have telegraphed to me that they will be in London in a few days’.

It is now necessary to look at the development of Jaroszynski’s previous transactions with the British Government. In late 1918, Hugh Leech had emerged in Stockholm. He was the SIS agent, who had been the British Embassy’s PRO in Petrograd. He had also been the intermediary between Colonel Keyes and Jaroszynski in early 1918, when the British Government had made the original loan to Jaroszynski in order to obtain control of the leading Russian banks. And in the turmoil of the revolution, all the money owing to Jaroszynski was still sitting in Leech’s account with the London City and Midland Bank in London.

On 31 December 1918, Jaroszynski’s former financial agent in Petrograd, Isidore Kon (whom Jaroszynski had asked in late 1917 to negotiate a 50 million rouble loan for him on a commission basis, just before the British Government had stepped in—and who had then wangled a promissory letter out of Leech on a London bank, just before skipping the country with the Cheka in his heels) had written to Vladimir Poliakov (former financial adviser to the British Embassy in Petrograd, and now in London) demanding to know why his promissory letter, covering his commission of £30,300 (i.e. 1 million roubles), had not been honoured.16

* Richard Martens was the head of the firm of Martens and Co. in New York, and was generally recognised as a great expert on the Russian economy. He should not be confused with L.A. Martens, who called himself the Bolshevik Ambassador in the United States, where he was interned.
Poliakov passed this letter rapidly to the Foreign Office, which—rather understandably—was by now baffled by all these various cross payments, share transactions and alleged commissions; and had in fact already asked Consul Clive in Stockholm to send a report on Leech. On January 2, Clive had replied that the London City and Midland Bank had just wired £50,000 to a Stockholm bank for Hugh Leech.

This was not at all what they wanted to know. So a Captain Rose, apparently an Intelligence officer, took the matter in hand, and had a long interview with Leech. Leech vigorously denied that he had made any money out of the bank deals himself; but there was an agreement, he admitted, that when control over the Russian banks was finally obtained, he would be given a good position; and he was, of course, able to obtain a very considerable amount of credit through having Jaroszynski’s funds in his account. In Petrograd, he explained, it was not supposed to be known how he had come by these very large sums, so he had spread stories about himself that he was a speculator; and it was these stories that may well have given rise to the unfavourable reports which had come to the ears of the Foreign Office. Anyhow, the British Embassy in Petrograd had shown ‘great lack of business ability’ in these bank deals, particularly in not obtaining physical control of the bank shares which Jaroszynski claimed to have bought.

‘Leech considers that Jaroszynski’, reported Captain Rose, ‘who is now at Kiev and who, he understands, is interesting himself in politics there, should be induced to come to Stockholm, where Leech would be able to make him give up the control of the banks purchased.’ Leech was therefore sending a messenger to Kiev with a cheque for 150,000 roubles to enable Jaroszynski to settle up there, and had promised the messenger 5,000 kroner if he brought Jaroszynski back to Stockholm. But Captain Rose, rather naturally, could not get to the bottom of all this. ‘That Leech hoodwinked the Embassy (if such is the case) is an explanation which is not more creditable to their business acumen than that Leech and the Embassy were hoodwinked by the Russians’, he warned.

Leech told Rose that as he had failed to find the £100,000 needed to buy control, together with the financier Rubinstein, in the Nya Bank in Stockholm, and had also failed to buy control of the Aktie Bank in Helsinki, he had just started up a new bank in Finland (presumably with the £50,000 just arrived from London). S.G.Lianosov (a leading member of General Yudenitch’s Russian Committee) and some Finns were to hold 45 per cent of the shares, while Leech and his friends were to hold 55 per cent. This, in fact, was the British bank started by the SIS in Finland to finance Yudenitch.

Captain Rose concluded that Leech also had 700,000 roubles in an Archangel bank, 500,000 roubles in a Moscow bank, and £150,000 in London. In fact, all the money paid out by the British Government to Jaroszynski was now sitting in Leech’s various bank accounts, and it was difficult to see how it could ever be extracted.

Consul Clive sent this report to the Foreign Office on January 17; and on the 21st, forwarded a long memo from Leech himself (which was largely similar to
Rose’s report), who added that he had ‘heard a rumour that Jaroszynski had already reached Berlin on his way here [i.e. Stockholm], but this is not yet confirmed’.¹⁶ (Jaroszynski, of course, was then in Odessa, in contact with Picton Bagge.) The SIS was thus preparing the ground in the Baltic.

The progress of these banking deals in January, February, March and April 1919 can be traced in certain Treasury and Foreign Office documents, and in the papers and diary entries of Vladimir Poliakov, who—as already stated—had originally advised on the British Government’s loan to Jaroszynski, and had himself drawn up the agreement for Colonel Keyes, on behalf of the British Government, to purchase the Siberian bank shares direct from the Managing Director and main shareholder, Denisov. On both of these transactions the Foreign Office (in the person of Colonel Peel, the financial adviser on the now defunct Russia Committee, assisted by a temporary clerk named Samuel Guinness, who had supervised matters in early 1918) was now refusing to make any further payments.

On January 6, Poliakov had an unsatisfactory meeting with Colonel Peel at the Foreign Office. On his return to his house (No. 10, Queensgate), Poliakov wrote to warn Peel that the position of the Siberian Bank was ‘fraught with responsibilities’ to all parties concerned. On November 28 1918, he had proposed the formation of a temporary committee to direct operations of those Siberian branches, in areas now free from the Bolsheviks. That day, he had gone further and suggested that the members of the old Bank Board, who could be contacted, should be summoned to London to strengthen the temporary committee, which must be formed as soon as possible. ‘Otherwise the accusation that the British interests have not been sufficiently defended will be undoubtedly, and quite justly, formulated’, he wrote.

This letter produced no result. On January 14, Poliakov went into the Foreign Office again, and saw Samuel Guinness, to whom he expressed his ‘considerable resentment’ towards the Treasury and Department of Overseas Trade for persistently refusing to see him about the Siberian Bank affair. ‘He then repeated what he had said to me before’, wrote Guinness, in a note of the interview, ‘that trouble was brewing in the City and that questions would probably be asked in Parliament about His Majesty’s Government’s purchases of the Bank shares…He had heard in the City that the Treasury were offering the shares of the Siberian Bank to various people there, among them Sir Edward Holden (Chairman and Managing Director of the London City and Midland Bank), who had refused to have anything to do with the matter.’ By such action, the Treasury were mishandling the business, Poliakov claimed, ‘as they were merely spoiling the market’, and he strongly hinted that if they wished to dispose of their interest in the shares, they should put the matter in his hands, as he was in fact the only person who could handle the business satisfactorily.

Poliakov’s idea was that the British Government should summon a meeting of the Bank Board in England, as they held a controlling interest in the shares. If this were done, he could produce enough directors to form a quorum. The Board
would then take their instructions from the Treasury. Certain of the Bank’s assets, like the Mongolian Hide Concession, and the Amur Steamship Company, would then be sold to syndicates, which Poliakov could form. ‘The proceeds would be paid to the shareholders, i.e. to His Majesty’s Government, who would in this way get back their money.’

Poliakov did not think there would be any difficulty, because various banks had made loans against the shares. He stressed that it would be quite impossible for the British Government to get their money back without his help; he was obviously the man they should come to, as he had been acting in their interests throughout; besides, he alone had a thorough knowledge of the Bank’s assets and their value, which he had acquired through being placed in virtual control of the Bank in 1917. Poliakov also told Guinness that Denisov had now made up his mind to demand payment of the second instalment, which was due on January 30, in two weeks time.

Once again, this meeting at the Foreign Office produced no result. Two days later, Poliakov wrote to the Under Secretary of State, again pressing for the formation of a committee to deal with the branches of the Siberian Bank in Siberia, at Archangel, and in Odessa.

Denisov himself then appeared on the scene. On January 21, he too wrote to the Under Secretary of State to remind him that, according to his contract with Colonel Keyes, dated 28 October 1917, the second payment for the Siberian Bank shares which had been purchased, was due on 28 January 1919. As paragraph 2b of his contract allowed him to choose the place of payment, and the currency, he asked for payment in pounds sterling at the London City and Midland Bank.

News of this demand evidently stirred the Treasury into action. On the 23rd, S.D.Waley, of the Treasury, wrote to Guinness about the Siberian Bank. ‘The Chancellor of the Exchequer would like Colonel Peel to negotiate with Mr Poliakov on the basis of a commission on anything he may manage to get back for us. Sir J.Bradbury [Joint Permanent Secretary of the Treasury] asks that you will get Mr Poliakov to put himself into communication with Colonel Peel. I am sending the papers to Mr Dudley Ward [Treasury member of the Russia Committee] & Sir J.Bradbury is asking him to speak to Colonel Peel.’

Poliakov’s persistence had paid off. But even now, Colonel Peel made no attempt to contact him. On the 25th, Poliakov was again writing to the Under Secretary of State, referring to his three previous letters, and again urging the formation of a committee. On the 28th, the day that Denisov’s second payment became due, Poliakov wrote yet again to the Under Secretary of State, warning him that the bank shares had been bought by Colonel Keyes in his own name. ‘I take it upon myself to point out that, if the shares continue to be left in the name of Colonel T.Keyes, undesirable complications may occur.’ Both this and the question of the formation of the committee must be gone into.

Cecil Harmsworth (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State) was then drawn into the matter. ‘I had a visit this afternoon’, he minuted on January 31, ‘from Mr
D.A. Miller, Manager of the Overseas Department of the London City and Midland Bank... He referred to the question of the Siberian Bank. He seems to have been in touch with Mr Denisov... It had been suggested to Mr Miller (I suppose by Mr Denisov or Mr Lessing) that we were trying to dodge out of our obligations in this matter, and Mr Miller felt that any charge of the kind was one that he, as a British banker, should be in a position to repudiate. I formed the opinion from his conversation that Mr Denisov would be willing to meet the Government on fair terms, and the same impression was conveyed to me in my recent conversation with Mr Lessing.'

All this activity finally impelled Colonel Peel into action, and he asked Poliakov to come into the Foreign Office on the 10th. After a long conversation, Poliakov summarised their talk as follows: 'You told me today that the Treasury would not pay the sum due to Denisov under his contract with Colonel Keyes. That it was desirable to have a definite scheme put forward by me for the return to the Government of £428,000 paid by the Treasury on behalf of Colonel Keyes, through the London City and Midland Bank, to Denisov.'

Two alternative methods were considered:

1 Colonel Keyes was to be considered to have acted beyond his powers. Thus his acquisition of the Siberian Bank, apart from the legal aspect, could not concern the British Government. The sum of £428,000 would be considered as a personal loan to Colonel Keyes against the security of the shares. 'Therefore the whole matter would be reduced to a conflict between Mr Denisov and Colonel Keyes, the Government having no interest in this private affair whatsoever.'

2 All the British interests in the Siberian Bank should be passed to a committee, representing business and banking interests.

Poliakov stated that he could not advise on the first proposal without consulting the Treasury Solicitor. He was also seriously handicapped in advising on the second proposal, as up to now, the available assets of the Siberian bank had not been investigated; the possibility of coordinating and controlling the branches in Siberia had not been studied; and a central authority for directing such branches of the Siberian bank as were free from Bolsheviks had not yet been created. But in principle he thought the second proposal more advantageous for British interests; he also reminded Colonel Peel that 'Keyes' contract with Denisov is guaranteed by a letter from Lindley, at the time Chargé d'Affaires in Petrograd'.

The plan would thus be for Colonel Keyes, and other principal shareholders, to set up a new board for the Siberian Bank, which could be done very quickly and effectively. This new board would centralise the direction of the Bank's various branches, and, with Poliakov's help and official British backing, prepare a balance sheet, and a statement of the available assets. A representative financial group would then be formed, which would take over all the Treasury obligations under
the Keyes’ contract, and would in fact step ‘into the shoes of the Treasury’. But Poliakov stressed that it would be impossible to sell the British holdings in the Siberian Bank, unless the Bank’s present state could be presented in an acceptable, logical and business-like way; and unless the British Government could give the group all facilities for communicating with Siberia, for sending out representatives, and authorise British envoys in the field to give them the necessary backing.

A committee of three people should also be formed, consisting of Colonel Peel, Poliakov and a Treasury representative, which should have a clear mandate to settle the business, and which should prepare a detailed plan for the financial group to agree, for dealing with Denisov, and for the control of the new bank board. Peel had suggested to Poliakov that he should be allowed a special bonus in the form of a percentage on the business. Poliakov suggested that the bonus should be paid to the three-man committee. He personally was content with his salary as Financial Adviser.

But Colonel Peel went ahead without further consultation with Poliakov, and sounded out the first proposal they had discussed. Next day, S.D.Waley, of the Treasury, was writing as follows to the Treasury Solicitor: ‘Siberian Bank Scheme. H.M. Government desire to repudiate the contract between Colonel Keyes and Mr Denisov for the purchase of Siberian Bank shares. Will you please advise whether the contract is binding?…Could Mr Denisov sue for payment in this country, in any case?’

The same day (the 11th), Denisov’s solicitors, the City firm of Ashurst, Morris, Crisp, were writing to the Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office to remind him that the second instalment under his contract was due on January 30, of which Denisov himself had already reminded the Foreign Office, without a reply. As Denisov had other obligations to meet, the non-payment of this amount was a serious matter for him; and prompt payment was now requested. ‘We may remind you that Clause 10 of the Agreement reads as follows:- “In case of delays of the payments due to me [i.e. Denisov], you undertake as forfeit to pay me the double amount of the over-due instalment”.’

By the 17th, Poliakov was again becoming anxious. It was a week since his conference with Colonel Peel, and still nothing had been done. He wrote again to the Under Secretary of State that under Colonel Keyes’ power of attorney, he had done his best to safeguard British interests with the help of the old Siberian Bank board in Petrograd. Now the last vestiges of the old board had been swept away; and since nothing had been done to create a new central authority in London, as proposed in all his reports since November 28 last, ‘all the bank’s branches in Siberia are running wild, British interests are not defended, and a situation of great responsibility for everyone concerned arises’. If the British Government considered itself to be the owner of a controlling interest in the Siberian Bank, they had a ‘direct responsibility’ for the management of the bank. If they denied that they had a controlling interest, but continued to hold the shares, they still had a ‘very serious responsibility’ towards the old shareholders,
and especially towards Denisov. Poliakov once again pressed for the formation of the committee he had proposed.

This led Colonel Peel to write a note on the Siberian Bank, and how he saw the background to the original purchase. 'It was represented to be a loan of a definite amount to Yaroshinski [sic] on the security of the Siberian Bank shares, and it was expressly stated that the first £428,000 was a final payment. It was really a purchase of shares, and the said payment was only one instalment out of three…Not only was this the case, but the purchase of shares turned out to be (with few exceptions) not a purchase of shares at all, but a purchase of the right to receive shares on paying off the sums for which the shares were mortgaged in certain banks. This is clearly stated in the contract, but I do not know the exact amount which has to be paid, before possession can be taken of the shares.'

It may be remarked here that Colonel Peel can never have had a proper discussion of the matter with Poliakov, who had himself drawn up the sale document, which showed exactly what the amounts were. Nor, even now, did Peel appear to appreciate that the payment of £428,000 was in effect a double operation, since it represented 15 million roubles, which were to be passed to the Volunteer Army in the Don country early in 1918, and a down payment on a controlling interest in the Siberian Bank, which the Germans were about to purchase for themselves.

Colonel Peel, in his note of February 19th, then proceeded to make allowances for Colonel Keyes, who had several times asked for a Financial Adviser, and did not understand finance. In addition, the telegraph lines were congested, and very subject to error, and things generally in Russia were chaotic.

But the contract could not be thrown over on these grounds. 'The only ground on which we can refuse to comply with the contract is that it is not in itself a legal one.' Now that Denisov’s lawyers had put in a demand for the payment of the second instalment, there were several courses open to the Foreign Office. 'The first thing to do is to obtain a legal opinion from the solicitors, as to whether we can resist Denisov’s claim to the second instalment.'

Colonel Peel thereupon left for Paris on business to do with the Peace Conference. Two days later, the Treasury solicitor pronounced: 'In my opinion the Contract is binding and cannot be repudiated on the ground of its having been antedated. Colonel Keyes could probably be sued in this country on the contract, but even if this were not so, a judgment obtained against him in a foreign court could, on appropriate proceedings being taken in the English courts, be enforced against him here.'

This was passed on to the Foreign Office with, it seems, this undated Treasury memo, expressing extreme reserve about Poliakov’s role in the whole affair: 'It should be added that the price agreed upon [for the Siberian Bank shares] was fantastically high and only accepted, even by Colonel Keyes, on the assurance of Poliakov that the Germans were bidding the same amount. It would appear that Poliakov was involved in the purchase of many of these shares at a low figure for
their resale to Colonel Keyes at the above price. Unfortunately, it is impossible under present conditions in Russia to obtain confirmatory evidence.’

The memo went on: ‘Mr Denisov is himself in England, and has already had several interviews with Colonel Peel of the Foreign Office. He denies that he wished to sell his holding in the Siberian Bank to His Majesty’s Government. He points out that he himself was not in Russia at the time, and had given definite instructions to his agent not to sell. In the first instance, he stated that he was prepared to return the £428,571 paid by us, after making certain deductions for sums spent in bribery to Bolshevik officials in connection with the transaction. He later withdrew this offer, and suggested as a compromise that we should lend a further sum to him, retaining as security for the repayment of this and the first instalment the letters of transfer for Siberian shares now in our possession…

‘It would of course be desirable if possible to recover the instalment already paid, and it has now been suggested that this might best be done by putting the matter into the hands of Mr Poliakov himself, who is also in England at the present time…Although what evidence there is available throws much doubt on his honesty, Poliakov is an extremely able man, and with the stimulus given by the offer of a percentage on all sums recovered from Mr Denisov out of the first instalment, would probably be far more successful than any British official could hope to be.’

These three documents—Colonel Peel’s note, the Treasury solicitor’s opinion and the Treasury memo—came to the attention of the Russia Department on February 25. ‘Col Peel wishes the Russia Dept to see this as a matter of record’, a member wrote. ‘We have now the Treasury Solicitor’s opinion that the contract is binding on H.M.G. There is nothing further to be done until Col Peel decides upon the next step, the whole matter having been left in his hands by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.’

‘It is an unfortunate business’, commented another member. Three days later, the Treasury solicitor wrote an addendum to his opinion. ‘As the shares are mortgaged to foreign banks, it seems clear that the second instalment of the purchase money for the shares cannot be paid until the Banks, to whom the shares are mortgaged, are in a position to receive payment of the amounts due to them on the shares, and to give a good receipt for such payment.

‘I understand from you* [Mr Waley] that such payment to the Banks cannot be made till authority for the purpose is received from Russia.

‘Under these circumstances I agree that, even if the Treasury decide to abide by the Contract, payment of the second instalment must be postponed pending the receipt of due authority from Russia.’

At the asterisk, Mr Waley commented: ‘We cannot ascertain this definitely, I suppose, without communicating with London or other available branches of the Banks concerned.’

But the point had been made: there seemed to be a way out for the Treasury at least to refuse to pay anything further on the Siberian Bank shares.16
In addition to the Siberian Bank, there was also some unfinished business regarding the other Russian banks, which Jaroszynski had purchased in early 1918 by means of a British loan; and which now formed the basis of Picton Bagge’s banking proposal of May 15th. For of the two original financial agents involved, Isidore Kon (Jaroszynski’s own agent), and Hugh Leech (the British SIS agent), Kon had never been paid his commission, while all Jaroszynski’s loan was still sitting in Leech’s various bank accounts, principally with the London City and Midland Bank. The development of this situation can again be seen in the diary entries of Vladimir Poliakov, who had himself simply acted over the Siberian Bank, and none of the others.

_February 18th._ ‘Received the visit of Kon [who] spoke about his £30,000 from Leech. Says his solicitors have addressed a new letter to F.O. making them responsible if Leech’s money in L.C.& M. [London City and Midland Bank] disappears before payment is obtained.’

_February 25th._ ‘Leech, Mr H.A.F., visited me this morning. Just arrived from Sweden. Wants to put in order his payments connected with F.O. & Jaroszynski. I told him that I can be of no help whatsoever and that he must go to F.O. to clear up matters…Kon rang up to ask if any news from F.O. Answered that [in] my opinion he would do better to look out for Leech, who is now in London, Burlington Hotel, Cork Street’

_February 27th._ ‘Kon telephone that he has seen Leech who promises every help vis-a-vis the F.O. I again advised him to go for Leech and not the F.O.…’

_March 4th._ ‘Jaroszynski & Leech payments. Seen Guinness at the Foreign Office. Gave him my general report for Under Secretary of State about above named payments. Explained the report verbally to him.’

_March 5th._ ‘Denisov. Rang up to say that he is leaving for a short stay in Paris and asking if any news? I answer that as far as I know nothing new…Siberian Bank. Lessing saw C.Harmsworth today…H. took long note, promised to see if conference of departments interested ought not to be called at once.’

This interview may, however, have reached the ears of the Treasury. On March 6, the Russia Department minuted that as regards the Siberian Bank, the Chancellor of the Exchequer ‘is now considering the matter. When he has decided what should be done, we will be informed. Meanwhile, Denisov is pressing for payment through his solicitors.’ The Treasury took only a week to reach a decision. ‘Sir John Bradbury [Joint Permanent Secretary] thinks that the Foreign Office should deal with this question’, wrote S.D. Waley to Guinness on March 14, ‘as any payments made would have to be defended in Parliament by the representatives of the Foreign Office. At the same time, we should like to be informed of what is going on, and of course Treasury sanction would be required before any further payments are made or promised.’

_March 21st._ ‘Rowlands M.P. I hear that R. has put down a question to President of Board of Trade [asking] if preferential treatment will be given to British firms by Siberian Bank, in which he is informed the British Government have an important interest. Who put him on this?’
March 25th. ‘I hear that Rowlands M.P….has received an answer from Steel-Maitland [head of the Department of Overseas Trade] to say that he would very much like to see the question withdrawn. I hear that R. has put the question down again for Tuesday [April 1].’

The Parliamentary question again precipitated action by the Treasury. On the 25th, the Foreign Office received a letter from the Treasury, acknowledging the most recent letter from Denisov’s solicitors, which the Foreign Office had forwarded on the 7th; and enclosing a reply for them to send, which stated that it appeared ‘impossible to ascertain the rights of the parties until the restoration of communication with parts of Russia now occupied by the Bolsheviks’.

This was referred back to the Treasury, with satisfactory results. On the 26th, the Russia Department minuted: ‘I pointed out to Mr Waley, Treasury, that Col Peel had been handling the Siberian Bank matter on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer & now that Col Peel had dropped out, the Treasury should reply direct to Ashurst, Morris, Crisp, who are pressing for further payments.

‘Mr Waley now tells me that the Treasury agree to deal with the matter.’ Someone else minuted: ‘It is a blessing that the Treasury agree to take over this “damnosa hereditas”, but it clearly is their business.’

Harmsworth added: ‘A blessing indeed!’

March 27th. ‘Rowlands’ question about the Siberian Bank is, I hear, again withdrawn for some time. Reason: Steel-Maitland’s secretary called on R. and said that S-M was ill in bed and therefore asked for question to be withdrawn all the more that object of question is “sub judice”, etc, etc.’

March 30th. ‘I hear that Freshfields, Leech’s solicitors, have presented a large memorandum to the F.O.’

April 1st. ‘S. Guinness, whom I went to see at the F.O., told me that Colonel Peel had found the Siberian Bank business too difficult, and had gone out, and that the Treasury [Sir John Bradbury] were on the job. G. said that the Treasury did not want me to continue as [financial] adviser.’

April 2nd. ‘Re Siberian Bank. In yesterday’s interview, I forgot to note that Guinness showed me a list of missing documents and which were said to be yet in my hands. I protested that everything had been delivered in his presence three months ago in a brown envelope! This made Guinness think and he extracted the envelope with the documents out of a cupboard (unlocked) in his room where it had been probably lying all this time! And with the documents there were real shares in the envelope!

‘Denisov asked me to see him this morning. He wants my advice…I told him that I could not be of any help to him as long as I was financial adviser to the F.O. …and that, therefore, I recommend to him Halpern [former Russian legal adviser to the British Embassy in Petrograd] as a very able man…’

‘Financial Adviser. I have decided to send in my resignation without asking for any notice from these fools in the F.O. I believe I would have been the only man who could have got them decently out of their scrape with Denisov.’
April 4th. ‘Halpern rang up to tell me that a consultation with Sir E. Carson [the former War Cabinet Minister and eminent Counsel] on Denisov’s claim had taken place and that it was found (according with what I had foretold) that the essential question is the amount of mortgage on the shares and not the liability of the Government to pay, which appears indisputable.’

As Poliakov had no reply to his letter of April 2 to the Foreign Office, tendering his resignation, he wrote again on April 22, recalling that his employment dated from October 1917, that he had ‘accepted’ more than £6 million of business in early 1918, on which he had saved the Treasury more than £4 million; which work, he added, was ‘fraught with serious danger personally to myself’.

Isidore Kon was also angry at not being paid. On May 6, his solicitor wrote to the Foreign Office stating that Lindley (the former Counsellor at the British Embassy in Petrograd) had given instructions in 1918 that all other people, to whom Hugh Leech had given promissory notes on Jaroszynski’s behalf, should be paid. This produced no results. On May 26, Kon’s solicitor issued a writ against Leech, thus publicly raising the matter of the British loan to Jaroszynski.

On May 29, Steel-Maitland finally approved Picton Bagge’s new proposal involving Jaroszynski, and forwarded it to the Foreign Office, adding that there were three British banking groups ‘thinking of invading Russian when the way is open’, the most important of which consisted of Lloyds’ Bank, the Loidon County and Westminster Bank, the National Provincial Bank, and the British Trade Corporation. But Jaroszynski should choose the group with which he preferred to deal.

The Russia Department studied it all carefully, but were dubious. ‘It is possible that M. Jaroszynski’s Banks and Companies may be very reactionary…It might be very inconvenient for H.M. Government to find that they had set going, or at least encouraged, a vast combine which was using its influence to restore Tsarism… Mr Bagge, referring to this point of view, said that the restoration of monarchy was inevitable. That may be so, but speaking with much less knowledge than his, I should expect the restoration if it takes place to be abrief one.’

Sir Ronald Graham saw all this on June 4. ‘This is an interesting and very important scheme and, if it is sound financially and commercially, I do not think that we should raise any objection to it on the political ground referred to’, he wrote. ‘The success of the scheme must depend on the establishment of a strong central Govt. in Russia, whether monarchical (& I agree with Mr Bagge) or not.’ The scheme should be encouraged, though without committing the British Government to anything more than a careful examination.16

Lord Curzon saw it the same day. ‘The promoter seems to be sincere’, he wrote guardedly.

(The Foreign Office, however, would give no support whatsoever to any monarchical activities. On May 30, Sir Ronald Graham had even informed Lord Stamfordham (the King’s secretary) that though the British Embassy in Helsinki believed that the Grand Duke Cyril and his family would shortly ask for leave to
come to England, ‘we propose to continue the policy which has hitherto been adopted in the matter of the Russian Grand Dukes, which would involve a reply in the negative’. To this the Royal assent was obtained.

**London**

On June 6, W.H. Selby of the Russia Department took the banking proposals a stage further when he minuted that Allied recognition of Admiral Kolchak meant that Allied policy was now to ‘achieve the overthrow of the Russian Soviet Government at the earliest possible moment’. Allied action must therefore be coordinated. Although the Anglo-French agreement of December 1917 was still in force, and Poland had been allotted to France, who recognised British control in North Russia, there was no agreement about the Baltic; and though the Siberian railway was under the ‘practical dictatorship’ of the American engineer Stevens, the Siberian situation was nebulous, and the various Allied Generals were not cooperating. But the position in South Russia first called for attention. French action in the Ukraine had ‘so embittered’ the Russians that it was ‘inconceivable we shall ever be able to cooperate successfully with them again in those regions’. As the French had admitted on April 4 that the Ukraine could not be independent, it should, when reconquered, come within Denikin’s sphere, ‘and consequently under our control’, and a ‘strenuous endeavour’ be made to modify the Anglo-French agreement to ‘secure the elimination of their activities in those regions forthwith’.

In fact, a violently anti-French theme ran throughout the paper. In Siberia, dual or triple control should be dropped, and a Japanese C-in-C accepted in place of the French General Janin, whose removal would be ‘advantageous from every point of view, having regard to the fact that he has succeeded in embittering his relations with the Russians owing to the preposterous claims he has put forward to command Russian as well as Allied forces’. As the Americans controlled the Siberian railway, they would probably accept a Japanese C-in-C. How could the French be made to agree to these changes? ‘Could not their jurisdiction be confirmed in Poland, where they are more popular than we are?’ They could also be ‘associated’ with us in the Baltic, where we could ‘watch their activities’. An Allied financial board should also be set up, and the Russia Committee (of 1918) revived in London. A British political envoy must also be sent to Denikin to help keep his reactionaries in check. ‘The policy of Admiral Kolchak and General Denikin must attract and not repel; and if there are any inside Bolshevik Russia who are ready to secede’, we must do ‘all that is possible to make the way easy for them’, and see that Denikin and Kolchak ‘do not spoil their own chances’. There were many signs that they were ‘not as far-sighted in this respect as we would have them be’. Selby concluded that Picton Bagge should be sent out to Denikin.

On the 7th, Reilly himself came into the Foreign Office, hotfoot from New York, to see R.A. Leeper of the Political Intelligence Department. There were three cardinal points in the present Russian situation, he underlined. As the Red
Army General Staff had shown ‘considerable ability’, and a large foreign army could not be found, the progress of the White Russian Armies was thus very slow. Bolshevik power must therefore be broken up in three ways from within:

1 *Russian Generals and Officers in the Red Army.* As the senior Bolshevik Military Commanders would not move against the Bolsheviks without a prior assurance of White Russian support, an agent should go to Denikin to find his price for cooperation with them; Denikin would probably agree if they launched a revolt in Moscow first. The agent should then go on to Moscow, discover the right men on the Red Army General Staff, and assure them that Denikin would cooperate as soon as they moved.

2 *The Church.* As the Orthodox Church was the ‘strongest force’ in Russia today, and recent reports from Petrograd spoke of its increasing influence, Britain should show sympathy to its leaders. Bishops Anastasius of Kishinev, Ageyev, Prince Trubetskoï, and Platon of Odessa, who were all at the moment at Constantinople, should all—except for Platon (‘not so desirable’), who could go to America, where he had already spent a good deal of time—be brought to England, where the Archbishop of Canterbury should make a fuss of them, and promise them ‘material support’, armed with which they could go straight into Petrograd on its liberation to stop the pogroms.

3 *The Ukraine.* An agent should go to Ataman Gregoriev to promise him support if he would turn against the Bolsheviks (which he had in fact already done). If Gregoriev agreed, a link could then be arranged between him and Denikin.

Leeper was very impressed. Reilly, he minuted, had been an ‘extremely able and reliable agent in Russia during the last year…and recently did very good work in the South of Russia…He is in touch with all kinds of Russians and is trusted by General Denikin and his staff…If he were successful we should achieve much more striking results this way than we shall ever do otherwise, and I think the venture is worth attempting.’ Selby supported this project, and stated that the Political Intelligence Department approved, and that Reilly was willing to go.¹⁸

But Sir Ronald Graham was not enthusiastic. ‘The unfavourable reports at one time current about Mr. O’Reilly [sic] have been disposed of, but I should say he was rather [?]more intelligent than reliable.’ He was opposed to the proposal involving the Archbishop of Canterbury, but thought that the DMI could be consulted on the other matters. (Sir Ronald Graham seems to be mixing him up somewhat with a troublesome Foreign Office official called O’Reilly, who later had to be removed in great haste from Siberia—mainly for having good ideas of his own—and banished to La Paz in Bolivia. The ‘unfavourable reports’ about Reilly probably refer to his having had to drop in on the German naval base at Reval on his escape from Petrograd by tug in the autumn of 1918. It is not quite clear what ‘material support’ Reilly had in mind for the Russian bishops, probably only much needed food and basic supplies. But though the Church may have been the
‘strongest force’ then in Russia, the peasants regarded the senior clergy as black reactionaries.)

‘I agree with Sir R. Graham on both points, but am no great believer in these obscure intrigues of foreign agents’, added Lord Curzon.

Curzon’s remarks are somewhat foolish. Reilly’s other proposals were sound and imaginative; and it was exceedingly brave of him to offer to return to Moscow, since his photograph had been plastered up everywhere, all his former aliases were known, and his networks had been broken up. Reilly’s first and third proposals were now referred to the DMI. As a wire had already gone off to Denikin about his attitude towards former Russian officers serving in the Red Army, no action was taken on the first. But on June 12, the DMI sent Philip Kerr (Lloyd George’s secretary) a short, tentative paper on Gregoriev, who was causing the Bolsheviks ‘considerable embarrassment’, and hinted that he might be worth supporting. Lloyd George’s response is not known. But on July 3, the DMO minuted that the ‘activities of Gregoriev and other anti-Bolshevik leaders in South Russia continue unabated, and though these leaders, who are merely bandits and do not stand for law and order, will not cooperate with Denikin, they are a cause of considerable embarrassments to the Bolsheviks’. Perhaps some attempt to make him cooperate with Denikin had been made.19

South Russia

On June 14, General Wrangel launched his attack on Tsaritsin; but after 3 days of bloody fighting, he was thrown back. Enraged, he drafted a furious telegram to Denikin, complaining that his promised reinforcements were being deliberately withheld; but his Staff managed to prevent its despatch. News then arrived that an infantry division, 5 artillery batteries, 6 tanks and 3 armoured cars could be sent as soon as the railway was repaired. Wrangel then began an outflanking movement to cut the railway line with central Russia, and to cut the 10th Red Army off from the 8th and 9th Red Armies.20

Lenin was perturbed. On June 14, he wired to the 10th Army at Tsaritsin. ‘It is essential to hold on to Tsaritsin. It has more than once held out against siege… Speed up the evacuation of everything of value that is surplus.’ The same day, he wired to the Southern front at Kozlov. ‘Are you taking every measure to support Tsaritsin? From there they are asking for 15,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry. It is essential to hold on to Tsaritsin.’ This message was repeated on the 15th and 17th. Lenin wired again to Kozlov on the 21st. ‘I have just learnt from the railway people that there has been no rail communication with Tsaritsin since the 18th…Is this true? If so, why do you not report it?’21

On June 17, The Times, under the headline, ‘Denikin’s bid for Kharkov’, printed a statement based on Bolshevik wireless reports, which all admitted Bolshevik withdrawals on the Southern front; it had at last been realised that these reports were on the whole accurate. This was the first real news which the War Office had had of the Cossack rising in the Donetz, strange as it may seem; and an
urgent wire was sent that day to Milne for some information. Would they now join Denikin? Had they up to now been fighting for or against the Bolsheviks?

That day, Milne replied about the unemployed Russian officers at Constantinople. As Franchet d’Esperey had all Russian refugees under his command, Milne could not send them to Denikin, whom—the French claimed—most refused to join; they would thus be sent to Vladivostok to join Kolchak. But Milne thought they would join Denikin, if the French would let them. The root of the trouble was General Schwartz, whom the French had put in charge, and who was against Denikin. ‘Secret’, added Milne. ‘To be quite frank Franchet d’Esperey has no intention of helping Denikin.’

On the 18th, as The Times headlined, ‘Denikin’s Triumph—Tanks’ legendary feats—‘This is real help’, the three main Russian political parties in Ekaterinodar agreed that the time had come to sink their differences and unite; all agreed that dictatorship was necessary until the Constituent Assembly met, and that the peasants must be given small holdings. ‘There was great enthusiasm and each party eulogised Great Britain [and] expressed great gratitude for assistance’, reported Holman.

London

The War Office then received confirmation about the Cossack rising. On June 21, The Times printed a War Office statement that the Cossack rising in the Donetz had begun on April 6. In early May, the Cossacks had sent an airman to Denikin, stating that they numbered 22,500 men. ‘There seems little doubt now that General Denikin’s intention to join up with the insurgents has been accomplished’, stated the War Office. That day, the War Risks scheme for the promotion of Russian trade was announced; and a short fourth leader, entitled ‘Trade and Politics in Russia’, praised it.

Only now was the full tragedy realised of the appallingly bad communications in South Russia; for only in the last few days had the War Office received the report from General Briggs, sent in early May, urgently requesting the immediate despatch of 50 more tanks, and underlining that he could train Russian crews in 3 to 4 weeks. ‘I expect S. of S. would like to see this report’, the DMO minuted to Sir Henry Wilson. ‘It appears that Russian crews operated the tanks which falsifies our previous opinion that it would take months before they could do so. However they would evidently have done better with longer training’, he added. ‘It is a pity we can only at the moment send Mark Vs but we hope to send a proportion of light tanks very soon.’ Churchill was irritated. ‘This is very urgent’, he wrote against the last sentence. ‘Please report exact positions.’ On the 19th, Colonel Fuller reported that 16 more tanks would be sent out in late June, and the despatch of a further 18 was under consideration as a result of Briggs’ report. But matters were being held up owing to the lack of volunteers, for whom the Treasury were still refusing to sanction any extra payment, and to the lack of spare parts, as the Rhine Army had priority.23
On the 21st, Churchill minuted sharply to the General Staff:

1. ‘I think it is more important to find the 50 tanks required for Denikin than to keep the Tank Battalions of the Army of the Rhine at absolutely full strength. Having regard to the enormous results that can be produced by a few tanks in South Russia, I consider that the priority between the Rhine & South Russia should be equal, the best being done for both theatres.

2. Why have you put up with the refusal of the Treasury to sanction the extra payment you recommended for volunteers? I should be prepared to press this matter at once if necessary in the Cabinet.

3. Further efforts should be made to get a little extra personnel, & the despatch of tanks to Denikin should be pressed forward as a matter of the highest importance.’

This advice was confirmed on June 23, when The Times printed a report from Ekaterinodar, dated the 10th, and headlined ‘Denikin successful on all fronts’, which stated that the Bolshevik rout was due to Bolshevik internal decomposition, and to the moral stimulus of British support, ‘of which the tanks are the most vivid evidence. It is incontrovertible now that if it is desired to stop the civil war in Russia at the minimum sacrifice of human life, the most effective policy is to send a copious supply of tanks and aeroplanes to the reorganising and liberating forces. If in January tanks had been sent instead of Prinkipo proposals, the Don Cossacks would never have lost heart, General Denikin would long since have joined up with Admiral Kolchak on the Volga, and thousands of lives would have been saved.’ This report was printed in the New York Times on the 24th.

Churchill also made a personal intervention in the Caucasus by wiring both to Milne and to Holman that the British Government strongly disapproved of General Erdeli calling himself Russian Commander of Daghestan; and in view of his previous behaviour, Denikin’s choice of this officer to succeed Liakhov was distinctly unfortunate. It was hoped, however, that the new demarcation line would stop Denikin attacking Daghestan. The first line dated from the time when Denikin was attacking the Bolsheviks in those parts, and Erdeli’s recent reference to it was therefore merely a quibble. All this should be passed on to Denikin tactfully.

On June 24, the War Office finally received a long delayed answer from Denikin about using former Red Army officers. In a wire sent on the 2nd, he stated that the War Office request was based on misinformation. Since July 1918, only half of 1 per cent of all Russian officers had had to appear before a Tribunal. A special committee of senior Russian officers considered all appointments to the General Staff and the Russian High Command, whose permission depended upon the officer’s activities during the revolution; any Russian officer, whose action had not been directly harmful, or who had served with the first Rada, the Hetman or the Directorate in the Ukraine, was usually accepted (which was quite untrue). Most of those who had ‘stained their reputations’ during the revolution, and were thus
not allowed into the Volunteer Army, were simply asked to leave South Russia. Denikin also declared that on April 11 he had issued an order that Red Guards who surrendered were not to be shot. But Bolshevik prisoners, who had held responsible positions in the Red Army, which were only given to active communists, whether officers or rank and file, were handed over for trial; as were those persons who had ‘done work for the benefit of any kind of separatist organisation’ which was ‘calculated to harm Russian interests.’ Denikin therefore saw no need for any change.\(^{25}\) (Unfortunately, the word ‘trial’ in this context was a polite euphemism for immediate execution either by the barrel or the butt of a rifle, either singly or in groups; or by being buried alive; or even by being drowned in the local sewage.)

Thus, the last of the three useful ideas which Reilly had put to the Political Intelligence Department on June 6 was rendered null and void.

**South Russia**

Reilly’s successor in South Russia, Captain George Hill, now sent in two further despatches. The first enclosed a copy of a letter from the ‘National Centre’ party in Ekaterinodar, dated June 4, to the Russian Ambassador Maklakov in Paris, which answered a letter from Maklakov brought out by Hill. Though Russian officers and refugees, it stated, had become violently anti-French and pro-German after the French debacle at Odessa, they spoke warmly of the help from the British, who ‘had not demanded confessions of our democratic leanings nor have they forced their policies on us’. This British help was the best safeguard against German orientation; though they feared that Poland ‘may appear among the number of Russia’s enemies’. All agreed that the ‘cordon sanitaire’ must be abandoned; and Maklakov should also protest against insistent French advice about Russian federation, since the idea of reorganising Russia from the bottom to the top was mere theory. French policy seemed ‘stricken with some organic disease of near-sightedness…IIn order to obtain lasting peace, the route to Kiev must lie through Moscow and Petrograd’.\(^{25}\)

In a final despatch in late June, Hill reported that the Bolsheviks were already said to be printing foreign currency, and might go underground again. Their foreign propaganda was greatly improved; and Hill pressed for the Allied Powers to make a definite statement condemning Bolshevism. Since the French evacuation, the centre for Bolshevik propaganda and espionage had been Constantinople, where there was now a strong British counter-Bolshevik group; but similar Volunteer Army groups were ineffective, and there was little coordination between them. The Germans were slowly but methodically continuing their work in South Russia by backing the separatist movements. Major von Kochenhausen (the former German political envoy to the Don Cossack Ataman Krasnov) was thought to be in charge; while the German transport expert Grüner was still at Kiev. There was also some German influence in the Muslim Soviets in Central Russia.\(^{25}\)
All eyes were now on the Volga. As Wrangel awaited his reinforcements before Tsaritsin, news came that a Bolshevik cavalry leader called Budenny was coming to drive him off. While the Kuban Cossacks remained closely drawn up in a square, the British pilots swooped and dived onto the Bolshevik cavalry, whose terrified horses bolted. Ataman Shkuro’s ‘Wolves’ then charged, and Budenny was driven off.

Second, the Admiralty informed the War Office on June 24th that Admiral Calthorpe had wired the day before that Denikin’s attack on Astrakhan, for which the Caspian flotilla had been preparing since early June, was now imminent. A number of Bolshevik ships were reported to have gone up the Volga beyond Astrakhan, which had been bombed several times by British aircraft, which had also sunk several other Bolshevik ships at Fort Alexandrovsk. Holman confirmed this, adding that British aircraft had also ‘carried out five succesful raids on Tsaritsin, sinking armed craft’.25

Third, on the 26th, the Ural Cossacks, with the help of arms and supplies received from Denikin, captured Nikolaevsk (just east of the Volga, midway between Samara and Saratov), thus threatening the southern group of the Bolshevik Eastera front, which had been weakened by the withdrawal of Bolshevik troops elsewhere.

The danger of a link-up between Denikin and Kolchak now began to cause serious concern in Moscow. On June 27, Lenin wired to the Eastern front at Simbirsk that the ‘successes of the Cossack insurgents in the area of Nikolaevsk are extremely alarming…examine whether it is not possible to send here from among the Siberians who deserted to us from Kolchak a dozen or so of those who have been wounded and are in any case unfit for fighting who could give us help here with conducting agitation for the war against Kolchak and Denikin?’

All in fact seemed to be going well on all South Russian fronts. Holman wired that in the Crimea, ‘Simferopol and Djankoi junction [were] occupied and Reds were retiring in disorder’. Everything, however, remained vague in the Ukraine. On the 26th, the War Office sent wires to Paris, Warsaw and Bucharest, which quoted Bolshevik wireless reports on operations near Kamenetz, and asked who the Bolsheviks were fighting; how strong Petlura was, and who he was fighting; and for a summary of Polish operations since June 1. But the only reply was a short, staccato message, via the British Mission in Berlin, stating that the position on the Polish front ‘seems to be less warlike’.25

But in the Donetz, the Bolshevik retreat continued; and on June 26, the Volunteer Army took Kharkov.

On the night of June 29, Wrangel’s long-awaited reinforcements and supplies arrived, and the real battle for Tsaritsin began. On the 30th, Holman wired, ‘Outer defences of Tsaritsin pierced aaa fighting in southern districts of the town, aaa…’ Next day, he wired again: ‘After heavy fighting tanks and British aeroplanes cooperating Tsaritsin occupied 30th over 10,000 prisoners enemy cavalry retreating north west driven back on Volga.’ All the 10th Red Army’s supplies had also been captured, all the Bolshevik river craft, and three million roubles in
cash. Though the White Russian column on the Astrakhan steppe had retired slightly, Denikin was now advancing on all other South Russian fronts, including the Crimea. Admiral Calthorpe the same day confirmed this. ‘Melitopol and Chenichesk [on the sea of Azov] captured by Volunteer Army Sunday, June 29th. Perekop also captured and Crimea clear of enemy.’ The War Office was delighted but baffled. ‘The Bolos put up less resistance than the Frogs’, wrote one officer.

Sir Henry Wilson had already sent a personal message, of a somewhat anticipatory nature, via Holman to Denikin on the 28th. ‘Please accept my most hearty congratulations upon your magnificent successes including the capture of Tsaritsin’, he wired. But as Denikin had now reached and even passed the line for which he was making, save for Astrakhan, Sir Henry Wilson sincerely trusted that he would now consolidate his gains; for in view of the British intention to withdraw from the Caucasus and the Caspian, it was vital that the Bolsheviks should not retake Tsaritsin, and Astrakhan, if he captured that also. Sir Henry Wilson underlined this point in view of Kolchak’s reverses, which were due to incompetence in the Russian Command; no proper reconnaissace; over-ambitious plans without the means of carrying them out; and the immediate commission of all reserves, on the first day of battle, thus leaving supply lines unprotected. Sir Henry Wilson, however, was sure that the Bolsheviks were alarmed at Denikin’s offensive; but when they thought that they had hit Kolchak hard enough, they would certainly return their attention to the Southern Front. Kolchak’s first objective was to link up with the Archangel forces; and as these prospects were not now good, it would much assist Kolchak if Denikin could ease Bolshevik pressure on the Eastern Front. The War Office knew that the best way for Denikin to consolidate was by economic means; and as the British Government were promoting a special insurance scheme, the War Office hoped that British goods would very soon arrive in South Russia.

Churchill then received a report on the tanks. There were in South Russia 6 Mark Vs and 6 Whippets; 16 Mark Vs were now being loaded in London, and 16 Mark Vs should have been loaded in France on June 25th. Eighteen Mark Vs would be ready for loading in France by July 9th, and 12 Whippets in France by July 31st. ‘This is all we can do and comes to 56 Mark Vs and 18 Whippets’, wrote Sir Henry Wilson underneath. ‘Good’, added Churchill. ‘But let me have a return of all our tanks of every mark wherever they may be.’

London

Churchill wrote a further minute. ‘A conference should be held tomorrow at the War Office on the Trade possibilities in the Denikin area. Sir Auckland Geddes [President of the Board of Trade] should be invited to attend; also the Head of the War Trade Department [i.e. the Department of Overseas Trade] and representatives of the Shipping Controller & the Treasury. The G.S. [General Staff] will be responsible for making the case.
a) that the permanency of Denikin’s gains depends upon good trading conditions springing up behind his front, and
b) that if this opportunity is seized, British manufacturers may obtain a market in South Russia of great & lasting importance.

Colonel Steel is very familiar with this branch of the subject, in which he has taken a special interest.28

The Jaroszynski proposal for an Anglo-Russian banking combine was thus getting under way.

On July 2nd, as The Times headlined, ‘Red Army’s Rout—Denikin sweeping the South—Bolsheviks demoralised’, a report from Ekaterinodar, dated June 17, was printed, which stated: ‘The front of General Denikin’s armies is now a sort of irregular bulge which continues to swell out in all directions. The Bolshevik Hindenburg line is broken.’

At the War Office meeting, Churchill said that if Denikin was to hold the great area which he had won, the people there must be more prosperous than those under Bolshevik rule. There was thus a tremendous opportunity for Manchester, Sheffield, Leicester and other British towns to gain an entirely new market; there were millions of Russian people to be held for generations to come, and now was the time to act and gain the trade. Colonel Steel added that the General Staff had long realised that the economic situation was vital in the areas won; and as soon as the Black Sea was open, they and the DOT had done their best to restart trade in the ports. From reports, and ‘very indirectly from the Foreign Office from Mr Bagge’, said Steel cuttingly, they had in fact realised that military progress was entirely dependent upon the provision of the necessary supplies; now was the time to make it a ‘national affair’. General Briggs (former head of the British Mission in South Russia) said that a man with a ‘clear business head’ was wanted out there. General Denikin had asked him to take the matter up, and had said ‘that if he had tanks, corn and clothing, he could capture the whole of Russia’.28

It was then agreed that the special insurance scheme was not enough. But Geddes proved obdurate: was the idea to promote trade, or simply for the British Government to make a grant? After some inconclusive discussion, Churchill concluded the meeting by stating that for the present, three things were necessary; the right people on the spot; a committee in London to meet once or twice weekly; and suitable propaganda to encourage British companies that were interested. It was agreed that the departments represented (and the Foreign Office was not) should meet once a week.

Picton Bagge, who had represented the DOT, went straight off to inform Steel-Maitland (Head of the DOT, and Colonel Steel’s younger brother), adding that Jaroszynski, who had now come to terms with the Russian directors of the Volga-Kama bank, previously outside his control, insisted on prior political sanction before proceeding any further with his big Anglo-Russian project. Later that day, the DOT wrote to Colonel Steel at the War Office, emphasising that they thoroughly supported his suggestion for the formation of a committee, with
executive power granted by the War Cabinet, as the existing committees were powerless; and as his brother Steel-Maitland could act for both the Foreign Office and the Board of Trade, he should obviously be the Chairman. It was hoped that Colonel Steel would impress all this upon Churchill, who would in turn impress it upon the War Cabinet. Steel needed no urging; and Churchill at once asked two senior permanent officials at the War Office (Sir Reginald Brade, the War Office Secretary, and Sir John Stevenson, the Surveyor-General of Supplies) to take the matter up straightway with Steel-Maitland.28

Jaroszynski was now installed at the Ritz Hotel. On June 27, he had written two personal letters, in a fine flowing hand in Russian, to Lord Curzon. Picton Bagge provided a translation. ‘I have the honour to request you to give me the opportunity of getting better acquainted with the documents’, he wrote, ‘from which I could ascertain the exact amounts which were paid by His Majesty’s Government to Mr H.Leech on my account in accordance with my agreement with Colonel Keyes acting on behalf of His Majesty’s Government’ This was simply passed to the Treasury. No reply was sent to the Ritz.28

Jaroszynski’s second letter concerned the Siberian Bank. As he had had to leave all his documents in Petrograd, he was ‘not well acquainted’ with all the conditions of the agreement. But Bagge had told him that a second payment of 25 million roubles should have been made to Denisov in January, and a final payment of the same amount was due in July. As he had had to flee from the Bolsheviks, and move successively from Petrograd to Moscow, then Kiev, and finally Constantinople, he had up to now been unable to contact the British Government, and fulfil his obligations under the Siberian Bank deal. ‘I take advantage of this, my first opportunity, to ask you that the original agreement and all documents regarding the purchase of the shares of the Siberian Bank may be shown to me’, he wrote.

If, in fact, he did owe the British Government two sums of 25 million roubles, he would be obliged, owing to ‘temporary difficult circumstances’, to ask them to come to some arrangement with him. But if the British Government insisted on his making the payments, he was willing and ready to fulfil his obligations ‘in the shortest possible time’, in spite of the inconvenience which this would cause him. ‘I hope, however, that His Majesty’s Government will give due consideration to the present difficult circumstances, and will see their way to act in this matter in the spirit of those intentions and suppositions, which served as the basic reason for the conclusion of the above mentioned agreement, to wit, will look at the whole matter from the point of view of high policy, and not regard it as an ordinary financial transaction.’

This also was passed to the Treasury.28

Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland presided at the first committee meeting attended by Colonel Steel and Picton Bagge, W.H.Selby and a colleague from the Russia Department. They went straight into the Jaroszynski scheme for an Anglo-Russian industrial combine. Steel-Maitland stated that Jaroszynski said that financial interests which were ‘not friendly’ were trying to edge their way into
Kolchak’s and Denikin’s areas. The way to fight these people was to back Jaroszynski (who, Selby had minuted that day, ‘does contemplate going out to Russia to see Gen. Yudenitch, and does contemplate having a decided influence on politics, but on moderate liberal lines which would suit us’), and have Sir Charles Eliot in Siberia, and the British Mission in South Russia place the right men in the right places; Kolchak and Denikin should not at first be told what was happening, nor should Jaroszynski be given a direct commission by the British Government. His link with the British financial group would be sufficient credential. Selby replied that there was considerable opposition to any ‘Anglo-Russian regime’ in Siberia, and that England had an understanding with America that Siberia was in the American sphere as regards currency. But Selby agreed about South Russia. A British High Commissioner should be sent out to Denikin; this idea, he reminded, had previously been turned down. Bagge then explained Jaroszynski’s ideas for Russian currency, for which Treasury approval must be obtained. Colonel Steel stressed that Denikin had agreed to cease requisitioning food and supplies. Thus, the ‘ice had been broken’ about inducing the peasants to accept a system of barter; he would ask Churchill about obtaining a British credit for Denikin so that the Russian peasants could exchange their grain for British goods. It was agreed to hold a ‘meeting of merchants’ on July 11 to tell them about transport and insurance, and to assure them that Denikin would not requisition anything more. Steel-Maitland promised to speak to both Curzon and Churchill, so that the matter might be brought before the Cabinet. He would also do his best to improve transport and distribution in Denikin’s area. The meeting then broke up.28

Steel-Maitland went straight off to discuss the matter with Sir Ronald Graham, who approved. ‘If the scheme is economically sound’, he minuted to Lord Curzon, ‘it should be worth supporting and may help to form a barrier to the economic penetration which the Germans are already organising.’

Curzon now knew that he was under some pressure to pronounce. Yanoshinski.

‘Sir R.Graham. What strikes me most about this scheme is that with the exception of Mr Bagge we have no one to speak with recent & necessary authority & experience about Mr Y or about his plans. I have a recollection of Mr Y as having been a complete failure in some earlier transaction. Could we not ask Sir G Buchanan or someone who knows? Again how is this network of banks & societies to be set up in a country in a state of chaos & in the hands of murderous ruffians. The scheme postulates a certain degree of order. I have an instinctive distrust of gigantic schemes which are presented at the point of the bayonet, & the promoter of which must positively have an answer because in a day or two he has to be going.’

Curzon’s handwriting was so bad that Sir Ronald Graham had to provide a translation for Steel-Maitland before passing it on. ‘Please see Lord Curzon’s minute’, he wrote underneath, ‘the point of which is that he must be satisfied as to the financial aspect of the scheme and the status of Y before giving it his blessing.’
Steel-Maitland then discussed the matter with Stevenson and Brade of the War Office. On his return to the War Office, Stevenson [the Director-General of Supplies] minuted to the General Staff that though he approved, the War Office was concerned first with the military necessity of enabling Denikin to provision his army; the question of supplying his rear was a secondary matter. The War Office should therefore press the War Cabinet on the first point; and merely support the second, which was political and economic (a somewhat short-sighted view).

Steel-Maitland himself then wrote to Churchill confirming that he had seen both the two officials and General Briggs, who had wandered off rather incoherently into a lot of other matters. Steel-Maitland felt that the whole position of Denikin needed going into comprehensively, and someone should interview Briggs thoroughly, and drag a really coherent report out of him. ‘I gather’, wrote Steel-Maitland tentatively, ‘that you think that Denikin ought to be sufficiently helped if possible to give him a chance of re-establishing a decent Government in Russia.’ Churchill replied by return that he was ‘going carefully into the whole matter’ as promised.

Churchill thereupon circulated to the War Cabinet a paper by Litvinov-Falinsky, one of Jaroszynski’s men, strongly urging British economic help for Kolchak and Denikin. ‘If England will not give this assistance, Kolchak and Denikin will perish, and then Germany will step in’, he warned. All that was needed was British backing for the formation of a powerful organisation to restore the Russian economy. ‘Owing to the nature of the activities of our banks (very different from those of English banks) all the nerves of our economical life are centred in the banks’, he wrote carefully. They regulated all Russian industry and commerce, and were thus the ‘only apparatus’ whereby the economy could begin to be restored. To prevent German control, it was thus in the British Government’s interest to help combine the Russian banks into ‘one powerful organisation’. No help was needed from the Treasury; but the British Government must, ‘with a full knowledge of the political importance of such a measure’, give their ‘direct protection’ and support to this group, to enable it to obtain the necessary private finance. Then, Kolchak’s and Denikin’s cause could be ‘considered safe’.29

No mention whatever was made of Jaroszynski either in this paper, or in Churchill’s covering note to the War Cabinet. He simply said that Litvinov-Falinsky was a former Tsarist Assistant Minister of Commerce, had had ‘great influence’ over the Tsar and the Grand Duke Nicholas, had helped create the Russian war industries, and was a ‘strong man and absolutely nonparty’.

* Very different indeed. He added: ‘Many of the Russian banks were owned by the Germans, others were dependent upon them, and through the banks the Germans exercised their powerful influence upon Russia.’ It must again be stressed that pre-war German control of or influence over the Russian banks was always open to much exaggeration.
Meanwhile, back at Tsaritsin, the wretched inhabitants at last began to emerge from their ruined houses, as General Wrangel entered the city on July 1, and went straight to the Cathedral for a special service of deliverance; during the Te Deum, the bishop and all the clergy wept. Wrangel thanked each of the British pilots, surprising them by knowing their names. When they wandered round the town, with the smell of rotting corpses hanging in the air, they were shown some Bolshevik leaflets stating that if any of them were captured, they would be crucified. That evening, when Denikin arrived by train, Wrangel stressed the danger of widening their front until they had the necessary reserves and a well-organised rear; they should for the moment entrench on the Tsaritsin-Ekateronoslav line, with their flanks on the Volga and Dnieper, while troops could be detached and sent to Astrakhan, and the cavalry concentrated in the centre near Kharkov. From there, they could go on to Moscow, when their rear was properly organised. Next day, Denikin reviewed the troops, and then summoned Wrangel and his Chief of Staff to his railway carriage. With his Chief of Staff, General Romanovsky, at his side, he instructed Wrangel to march on Saratov; and then on to Moscow, via Nizhni-Novgorod. The Don Cossacks would march on Moscow via Voronezh and Ryazan; while the Volunteer Army would march on Moscow via Kharkov, Kursk, Orel and Tula.

For this ‘Moscow order’, Denikin has been much abused, and compared to Don Quixote, tilting at Russian windmills, etc. But he well knew that the morale of his troops was poor, the supply system worse, and much of the rear in chaos—as in Bolshevik Russia. He also knew how unreliable his Allies really were after the French debacle in the spring, the Prinkipo proposal and the Bullitt mission to Moscow; and now the British were about to pull out of the Caucasus, and undermine his base. With military events now swinging towards him, he clearly saw that his only chance was to capitalise on the Bolshevik defeat—and race the Russian winter to Moscow. With a proper base and reliable Allies, he should certainly have consolidated. Without either, he had to gamble.

Wrangel was dismayed, but he obeyed. In a chateau on the banks of the Volga, he held a banquet to celebrate the capture of Tsaritsin. He proposed a toast to the British pilots (‘My Cossacks of the air’), there was wild Cossack dancing, shouts of ‘To Moscow, to Moscow’, and General Holman received a large blob of caviar slap in the eye. Moscow Wireless fully admitted the various reverses. ‘After severe fighting our units under enemy pressure left Tsaritsin’, it stated on July 2; and an article from Pravda was read out. ‘We have lost Kharkov. The Cossack hordes continue to advance but this does not frighten us. The universal trend of events is daily becoming more unfavourable to our enemies. The crisis in Europe is growing. We shall conquer!’ But a leading article from Izvestia, which was also quoted, stated that ‘Denikin’s advance threatens the whole of the Ukraine. Denikin’s success is due to our weakness. The Red Army in some parts of the Don front has shown unsteadiness. Demoralisation cannot be permitted in the
army, we must reinforce our rear.’ A despairing message was also broadcast from Tashkent. ‘Fort Alexandrovski is in the hands of the British. The British are masters in the Caspian Sea.’

This good news coincided with a further wire from Milne on the old subject of what to do with the Russian officers hanging around in Constantinople. Franchet d’Esperey had now agreed with Denikin to intern in a fortress all fit officers who refused to go either to Novorossisk or to Vladivostok. Milne now said that he also agreed.

On July 3, Churchill instructed the DCIGS to attend a conference at the Admiralty that afternoon on the Caspian flotilla, ‘as the matter may be one of great importance. Attention should first of all be given to the extraordinary transformation in Denikin’s position which has taken place in the last 2 months. The capture of Tsaritzin must almost certainly entail the fall of Astrakhan and the consequent opening of the Volga from Astrakhan to Tsaritzin. From Tsaritzin there is a direct railway communication which will soon be in working order with Ekaterinodar and Novorossisko [sic] on the Black Sea. If, therefore, the British Naval personnel is allowed to remain on the flotilla, and if the flotilla can be re-based on Tsaritzin in the course of the next 6 weeks, they would have a perfectly clear and safe line of retreat to the Black Sea by rail and would be in direct communication with us.

‘Secondly, the CIGS informs me that the evacuation of the Caucasus will now be delayed till August 15th, but that ships have been ordered to assemble to enable it to be rapidly effected thereafter. The Admiralty can therefore count on having the Baku-Batoum line open to their men up till August 15th, and before that time it is not at all unlikely that the Tsaritzin-Ekaterinodar-Novorossisko line will be in working order.

‘Thirdly, General Dietrichs, the new Chief of Staff of Kolchak’s armies, is hoping to move South-westward on Samara and regards the Vyatka movement as one of secondary importance. Thus it may well be that the Volga will become a vital factor in the junction of Denikin’s and Kolchak’s armies during the course of the present year. The naval command of the Volga will be of the most enormous importance, and that command can certainly be obtained if the Admiralty will continue to allow their trained and organised personnel to work in the Caspian Flotilla or such portions of it as can ascend the river…We are therefore in the position of being able to watch events develop and take a decision a month hence, which may be highly advantageous.’ The DCIGS should therefore ask the Admiralty to carry on for another month, and help clear the Volga up to Tsaritsin. He should give an undertaking that British troops would not leave Baku until British sailors had been brought away, or until the Tsaritsin-Ekaterinodar-Novorossisk line was in working order. If there was any objection to this, the discussion should be adjourned; and the matter referred to Churchill and the First Lord.

At the Admiralty, the First Sea Lord said that he was quite prepared to carry on clearing the Volga up to Tsaritsin until August 15; but he would not allow British
sailors to remain after British troops had left Baku. He would ask Commander Norris (the British Naval Commander on the Caspian) about the Tsaritsin–Novorossisk railway, but would not commit himself further.

The DMO therefore wired Milne and Holman that as Denikin might soon take Astrakhan, the Caspian flotilla would be handed straight over to Denikin. British troops in the Caucasus, however, would now embark for home on August 15, and not July 15. ‘Good’, wrote Churchill that evening. ‘It is understood that the Admiralty hold on for at least a month.’

On July 4, Churchill minuted to the DMO ‘I approved the telegram you agreed with the Admiralty to send yesterday about the Caspian Flotilla. I did not, however, see in it any direct orders to the Flotilla to co-operate in Denikin’s movement on Astrakhan or permission given to them to ascend the Volga. I observe in the Admiralty summary that they state positively that the Bolshevik Flotilla is cut off by the capture of Tsaritsin. If this is so, it seems to me that at a certain stage aeroplanes should drop messages over the enemy flotilla assuring them, on the faith of the British Government, that their lives will be spared if they hand over their vessels intact instead of sinking them, or some offer on these lines. Pray consider this. I am inclined to think that the Volga may play a most important part in the operations of this summer and autumn.’

So the DMO sent a further wire to Milne and Holman that the Admiralty would continue to control the Caspian and allow British sailors on the Caspian Flotilla to help clear the Volga from Astrakhan to Tsaritsin until British troops left Baku. He also summarised the conclusions of the Admiralty meeting, and asked for comments on Churchill’s suggestion about dropping leaflets.  

London

Meanwhile, the War Office were having difficulties with the Treasury. On July 4, the General Staff minuted that Denikin had now been provided with arms and supplies for 250,000 men, the equivalent of 12 British infantry and 4 cavalry divisions. But as the Treasury had only approved the issue of surplus stores, not those requiring replacement, the General Staff wished to know what to do about maintaining the artillery, the tanks and the aircraft, which only had six months’ spare parts; the motor transport was definitely the most urgent matter, and required replacement. Were Denikin’s 250,000 men to be maintained, in fact, at full efficiency; or at a much lower standard?

Churchill replied: ‘Obviously we have not supplied Denikin with so much equipment in order to see it wasted for want of a few spare parts or replacements that are required from time to time. I am quite prepared to go to the Cabinet to ask for the rescinding of the present Treasury ruling. Before I do so, however, I must have an estimate showing the amounts involved. I certainly have not contemplated that we should keep Denikin’s force going on the same scale as we kept British Divisions in France, but a moderate supply of spare parts and of other articles which we cannot consider surplus to our own requirements should
obviously [“certainly” crossed out] be made. I hope, however, that the issue of non-surplus stores will be kept within the narrowest limits. Make, therefore, a budget for Denikin’s force for the six months from 1st August inclusive, and let us see what is involved.’

Churchill then received the return on the tanks. In Germany, there were 188 Mark Vs and above, in France 216, in England 556, in Ireland 32, in North Russia 6, and in, or earmarked for, South Russia 74. ‘Mark IV tanks should be included’, wrote Churchill underneath. ‘I presume that all shown on the list are in working order. Is this so? What is the need for keeping 216 tanks in France & Flanders? What is the position about the construction of the new fast tanks for our Army? Has the expenditure been sanctioned by the Treasury? What dates of delivery are indicated?’

But Colonel Fuller (the tank expert) replied that all Mark IVs had either been scrapped, or else given away, and were now sitting on village greens. Save those in Germany, and a very few in England and Ireland, none were really workable; for they had been left lying around in the open almost derelict for months, and there were now very few personnel even to try and get them going again. As for the new tanks, no expenditure had been sanctioned by the Treasury, and hence there were no delivery dates. The position was very bad, in fact, especially as regards repair, and getting worse. Churchill simply had to accept this. The figure of 74 tanks for South Russia was not, of course, correct; the majority were still en route.

The same day, the DMI commented on the Russia Department’s violently anti-French paper of June 6 on Russian Policy. He agreed that Allied action in Russia should be coordinated. But a definite policy should first be adopted. The Allied despatch to Kolchak had been too vague—there should be full Allied recognition. But to allot the Ukraine to England would certainly increase French bitterness over their failure at Odessa, and French ill-feeling towards the Volunteer Army, ‘and General Denikin personally’. He was anyhow now pushing rapidly into the Ukraine, where it was unlikely that the French would dispute our right to control him; and the appointment of a Japanese C-in-C in Siberia in place of the French General Janin was also rejected as ‘futile’. The War Office, in fact, was not as anti-French as the Foreign Office. But the General Staff, the DMI went on, would welcome an Allied Council for Russian Affairs, which they had already proposed; had such a body existed, ‘many of the set-backs to Allied policy in Russia might have been averted’. At present, there was the greatest difficulty in concerting economic and military policy. The Allied Council should be based in London, since England was playing the greater part in the ‘restoration of Russia’. The despatch of a British political envoy to Denikin was ‘most desirable’, and British relations with Kolchak’s delegates should be placed on a ‘more regular basis’ to check the Russian reactionaries. The DMI was especially concerned about the administration of Petrograd, if it fell. At present, General Yudenitch was intending to appoint his own entourage; but if the Allies were in ‘direct and official’ relations with Kolchak’s delegates, some person like Chaikovsky could
form a Russian Government, which would ensure a ‘moderate and democratic’ regime in Petrograd. Since the DMI and the Russia Department were thus more or less in agreement, there now seemed a good chance that the formulation of Russian policy would properly revert to the Foreign Office.  

**Moscow**

In fact, Denikin’s ‘Moscow order’ and the War Office’s increasing concern for the South Russian front in London, coincided with Trotsky’s resignation as War Commissar over his difficulties with the Eastern front in Moscow. For the disagreements over Bolshevik military policy on their Eastern and Southern fronts had now come to a head. On June 22, the C-in-C Vatsetis had urged that the 8th, 13th and 14th Red Armies on the Southern front should attack across the Donetz basin. This was not approved. But on July 2, when Vatsetis told Kamenev (the Military Commander of the Eastern front) to strengthen the Saratov-Uralsk railway (east of the Volga), as the fall of Tsaritsin threatened his right rear, the Central Committee received a message next day from the Eastern front at Simbirsk that they were prepared for the ‘greatest sacrifices’ to contain Denikin’s attack, and planned to transfer 3 divisions to the area just west of Saratov (and the Volga), after reinforcing them with the 4th Army, as their attack against Uralsk developed. If they also had 2 more divisions, and a brigade, ‘we guarantee to inflict an annihilating blow on Denikin’s flank and rear’. If these 2 divisions were used on the Southern front near Kursk and Voronezh, they would be routed. ‘This striking force should, of course, be in our hands.’ Bolshevik troops on the Kursk and Voronezh sectors should withdraw until the Eastern front’s attack went in. They would close their flanks south of Krasnoufimsk (between Perm and Ufa). ‘But in return we demand the right to move ahead without halt and we hope, taking Kolchak’s state of collapse into account, to succeed perhaps in finishing him off even with our reduced strength.’

On July 3, the Central Committee discussed the military situation in detail. Trotsky, who spoke at length and backed Vatsetis, was particularly angry that military policy on the Eastern front was again being settled through political pressure in the Central Committee, and not by his Military Revolutionary Council of the Republic: he attacked those Central Committee members who backed the Party members in the Red Army against the ‘military specialists’, and did his best to protect the Red Army from undue interference. But Trotsky was then strongly criticised for his disregard of these Party members, even for the severe measures taken against them at Kazan in 1918, and for not implementing the secret resolution of the 8th Party Congress in March—which was to strengthen Party influence in the Army—and which was now approved. When the meeting continued on the 4th, Vatsetis simply urged that stronger defensive measures be taken on the Eastern front; and Trotsky argued that the Eastern front’s attack would have to be launched against strong resistance over territory
held by local Cossacks, while Vatsetis’ plan for an attack in the Donetz could count on support from local workers, and better communications.36

But the Central Committee approved the plan submitted from Simbirsk, appointed Kamenev as C-in-C in place of Vatsetis, and decided to transfer GHQ from Serpukhov to Moscow. Several of Trotsky’s supporters were dropped from the Military Revolutionary Council of the Republic, which was now reduced to six people: Trotsky and Sklyansky (his Chief of Staff), the C-in-C Kamenev, Gusev and Smilga (both also from the Eastern front), and Rykov (an old Bolshevik, a member of the Central Committee, and Chairman of the Council of the National Economy), who was given dictatorial powers over military supplies. Mobilisation of Party and trade union workers, and the mass despatch of Communists to the front, was to be stopped, and supply and political workers obtained from the rear. It was agreed that Zinoviev would draft a letter for Trotsky’s approval with instructions on the rights and duties of Military Commissars in the Red Army, as provided for at the 8th Party Congress.

Thus defeated over Kamenev, the political influence of Communists, and strategy on both the Eastern and Southern fronts, Trotsky resigned and left the meeting, slamming the door behind him. Vatsetis was then arrested. (Stalin may have been behind this, to try and discredit the military specialists. It was alleged that a man who shared an apartment with Vatsetis was involved in a counter-revolutionary plot. Vatsetis was soon released. On July 12, Pravda stated: ‘It became abundantly clear from the materials of the investigation that the White Guardist leaders had lured into their organisation a mass of people who had not the least suspicion about them.’)

Before the next meeting, Sklyansky minuted to Lenin. ‘Trotsky will not be coming—he is confined to bed.’ Lenin replied diplomatically: ‘Trotsky’s illness is a real stroke of bad luck at this present moment’ Sklyansky must speed up the despatch of the two divisions from the Perm area, and keep an eye on the Southern front. Lenin then gave Trotsky an advance endorsement for any order he might give, by writing in red ink on the bottom of a blank sheet. ‘Comrades! Knowing the strict character of the instructions issued by Comrade Trotsky, I am so convinced, supremely convinced that the instruction issued by Comrade Trotsky is correct, to the point, and essential for the good of the cause, that I wholly support this instruction.’

On the 5th, the Central Committee decided unanimously that they were ‘totally unable to accept Comrade Trotsky’s resignation’, and would do ‘all in their power’ to provide for the Southern front, ‘the most difficult, dangerous and important of the fronts at the present time’, on which Trotsky should concentrate. But Trotsky remained in high dudgeon.36

London

At a War Cabinet on July 4, Churchill, at the Prime Minister’s request, described the military position in South Russia. Things, he said, were ‘swaying rapidly to
and fro’. Two months previously, Denikin had packed four good divisions, and excellent cavalry, into position just north of the Black Sea, where they had plenty of room to manoeuvre. The Bolsheviks attacked, but Denikin scattered them, and broke through. He then marched on Tsaritsin and Astrakhan, and was shortly after joined by the Cossacks, who rose up against the Bolsheviks. A special feature had been the success of some British tanks near Kharkov, ‘where they had occasioned widespread terror’. Denikin had thus taken Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav, completely cutting off the Crimea, which was rapidly evacuated by the Bolsheviks, who had not long before driven the French there into the sea. In the great expanse between Kiev and Odessa, there were large bands of anti-Bolshevik ‘banditti’ under Gregoriev, ‘a man of most unsavoury reputation’, who had surrounded Odessa, and would shortly take both it and Kherson.

As a result of his success, Denikin could now launch a powerful westward thrust, and the Bolsheviks would soon lose control of all the Black Sea ports, with which England should restart trade at once; at present, she was the only trusted and respected foreign nation, ‘and the sooner we laid out our trading claims the better’, he urged. He was in ‘constant consultation’ with the Board of Trade about this.

On June 30, he went on, Denikin had taken Tsaritsin, and expected shortly to be in Astrakhan; he had already taken the railway junction to the north, and the Bolshevik supply lines were being threatened by the Ural and Orenburg Cossacks, based on Guriev on the Caspian. It was hoped that the gap between Astrakhan and Saratov would shortly be closed, whereupon the most important stretch of the Volga would pass into ‘friendly hands’. (In fact, into the friendly hands of Jaroszynski himself, since he controlled all the trade—mainly in grain—along the Volga.) Denikin had taken a mass of guns and prisoners, and 2,000 locomotives. Briggs, the former head of the British Mission, who was now in London, stated that the stories about Denikin’s atrocities were ‘without foundation’, and that Denikin was a man ‘of high character, who conducted warfare on humane lines’. (This was indeed a rash remark, since the DMO himself had strongly reproved Denikin, via Briggs, when the latter had wired nonchalantly that Denikin had just shot 1,500 out of the 6,000 prisoners that he had taken after a small operation.) The Volunteer Army’s growth was ‘really remarkable’, Churchill stated. A year ago, it numbered only 4,000. Today, it had 600,000 men.

The First Sea Lord said he trusted that the British sailors on the Caspian would not be left ‘in the air’ [sic] when British troops withdrew from the Caucasus. ‘They would, of course, render all possible assistance to General Denikin in his operations towards Astrakhan’, he added. Neither Churchill nor the Prime Minister replied to this; and the meeting came to an end.
In the Baltic, the Poles now held the Lithuanian capital of Vilna. To their north, German troops in Latvia held the port of Libau and the capital Riga. Further north in Esthonia, all Russians—both Red and White—had been ejected from the country by the Esthonian Army, who had also seized the Russian town of Pskov, south of Lake Peipus, while the Russian Northern Corps (still nominally under Esthonian command), to its north east, was now poised on the Luga river line to put the Golovin master-plan into operation, and launch a major Baltic offensive to link up with Allied forces in North Russia and Kolchak in Siberia, and thus seize Petrograd and Moscow. But to link this up to the Kotlas operation required Allied supplies, some 30,000 Russian prisoners, food for Petrograd, Finnish and Esthonian help, and British naval support. Some of these needs had been met; but more Allied supplies, Finnish & Esthonian support, and Russian prisoners had to be provided—at present, Russian prisoners in Germany were joining the pro-German Russian units in Latvia.

While Colonel Stephen Tallents (the British High Commissioner) went straight to Riga to deal with the German problem, General Gough (Head of the British Mission) now arrived in Helsinki, where his orders were simply to report on Yudenitch’s prospects of taking Petrograd, and to enquire if he might move to Murmansk; second, to make the Finnish troops near Olonetz halt their advance, unless they undertook to withdraw again later; and third, to see that Petrograd was not taken by Finnish troops alone, but jointly with Russian troops.

Gough found the Finnish Cabinet sharply divided about a Finnish advance on Petrograd, as half the Finnish people were socialist, as was half the Finnish Army, which was ‘not a very reliable machine’. Only General Mannerheim (the Finnish Regent) and his personal entourage were set on advancing. On May 28, Gough wired that Mannerheim’s conditions were that the Russian Baltic Fleet should be disarmed, and Kronstadt and the Finnish forts demolished, and a neutral zone agreed between Petrograd and the Finnish frontier; that the port of Petchenga (near Murmansk) and a narrow strip be ceded to Finland, and a plebiscite held in Karelia. He also wanted Allied tanks and aircraft, supplies and about £10 million, and food for the Petrograd district, which was to be administered by Finnish troops until Yudenitch had assembled enough Russian troops in Russia proper—he could not do so in Finland. On the 30th, Gough wired again that the Finnish
Chief of Staff was directing the Finnish volunteers near Olonetz, and that Mannerheim had not given the required assurance that any Russian territory seized would later be returned. All this was obviously unacceptable.¹

Gough then saw General Yudenitch, who had no troops in Finland, and could only raise 1,500 if allowed, of whom half were officers; he was thus relying on at least 5,000 Russian prisoners from Germany (which would form the necessary force in Finland, under the Golovin master-plan, if the main attack were launched from Estonia). Yudenitch dithered about the Finns, first saying that they would advance, then that they should stay in Finland, while he concentrated in Estonia; but in a second interview, he said he would shortly state his conditions for Finnish support, of which he still had hopes. Did England approve in principle of Finnish cooperation? Gough strongly advised the War Office against it. If Yudenitch operated only in Estonia, he wired, and all Russian troops now under Estonian command reverted to him, they could advance on Petrograd if sent supplies for 20,000 troops at once, and for 50,000 troops later, and for both the Russian population and Russian troops now east of the Narva–Pskov line; and provided the Estonians allowed Allied use of the port of Reval and the Reval–Narva railway to transport them up to the front. If this could be arranged, the Estonians could support the Russian right flank and rear, while the British Squadron protected their left flank. (These figures, and dispositions, closely corresponded to the Golovin plan.)¹

There was still considerable naval activity off the Estonian coast. On May 31, Admiral Cowan spotted a Bolshevik destroyer coming west with the battleship Petropavlovsk and some small craft. As he chased off the destroyer, the Petropavlovsk opened heavy fire, and a Bolshevik aeroplane dropped some bombs. As the destroyer fell back, Fort Krasnaya Gorka, flying a kite balloon, also opened up, as the battleship manoeuvred behind the minefield, keeping up steady fire on HMS Walker, which was hit. Cowan then stood up and down the edge of the minefield; but after a short further exchange, the Bolshevik ships retired. But though Admiral Cowan was outgunned by the Bolshevik Fleet, he knew what was happening at Kronstadt.²

It was from Stockholm that Major Scales (the Assistant Military Attache at the British Embassy) controlled the whole British intelligence network in the Baltic, whose chief agent was S.T. 25 in Petrograd. This was Paul Dukes, an Englishman who had been studying music in Petrograd before the war. In 1916, he had joined the Anglo-Russian Commission under Harold Williams (the Daily Chronicle correspondent), for whom he checked the Russian press, while also doing work as a stringer for Arthur Ransome (the Manchester Guardian correspondent). After a spell at the Foreign Office, he had then returned to Russia, and spent early 1918 roaming the country gathering information. In June, he was ordered to return to London, where he was engaged by ‘C’ (the head of the Secret Intelligence Service). After the Allied intervention in August, and the failure of Reilly’s coup, he was sent via Archangel to Stockholm, where he met Major Scales and Arthur Ransome, to whom he ‘did not hesitate to reveal...
design’. (This may not have been very wise. Though Ransome was also a paid agent for British Intelligence, his equivocal attitude towards the Bolsheviks did not exactly please his masters; and certainly infuriated the Foreign Office.)

On November 24, Dukes set out for Petrograd from Viborg in Finland with a former colleague of Captain Cromie (who had been murdered in the British Embassy in late August by the Cheka) to resuscitate Cromie’s network. After three weeks disguised as a Cheka agent, during which he contacted another White Russian group (not Cromie’s), he came out again via Terrioki, and reported back through Stockholm to London. Scales was then instructed to ‘supply S.T. 25 everything he wants and convey thanks’. In late December, armed with false papers showing him to have incurable heart trouble, which exempted him from military service, Dukes returned to Petrograd, where he managed to acquire a naval plan of Kronstadt, showing all the Bolshevik minefields, which he managed to smuggle out safely (a very considerable coup). In February, with the Cheka close behind him, he left hurriedly over the ice to Finland in a fast sleigh. Scales now came over to see him in Helsinki; owing to trouble with the pro-German Finnish Commandant at Terrioki, he was told, ‘very special measures’ would now be taken to keep in touch with him in Petrograd. Dukes then again returned—this time through the difficult country north of Terrioki on skis.

During March, he obtained much information from the anti-Bolshevik Russian sailors, shipyard and factory workers, at the sailors’ lodging house where he lived (much of which was incorporated in the White Paper on Bolshevism of early April); and from a former Russian General, he acquired all Trotsky’s plans for countering Kolchak, which he concealed in a trusted friend’s family tomb in Volkovo cemetery. He also met some Russian Naval officers, who were running a pipeline for Russian officers to cross into Finland or up to Archangel, and who claimed to be preparing a mutiny at Kronstadt. Otherwise, except for the National Centre party, he avoided White Russian movements and plots; and left a General, who claimed to represent Yudenitch, well alone owing to his very bad security. On a visit to Moscow, he arranged a courier service down to Petrograd, via which he received regular reports on Bolshevik internal policy, and on the special reports submitted to Trotsky on the Red Army. Though many of his couriers were caught, these came out intact.

When news arrived of clashes between the British Squadron and the Bolshevik Fleet, it was rumoured that Finland, with British backing, was about to advance overland on Petrograd. (‘This was one of the greatest anxieties of the Bolsheviks throughout the spring and summer of 1919’, Dukes later records. ‘They had little to fear from the “White” Russians alone…But the Finns were different…everyone in the Northern capital [i.e. Petrograd] expected its occupation [by Mannerheim], and at the time the vast majority of the populace would have welcomed it eagerly.’ This was not the view in London.) In late April, a Russian Naval officer told Dukes that a mutiny was being prepared on a large Bolshevik warship, and he confirmed that another mutiny would follow at Fort Krasnaya Gorka or Kronstadt, which was already weakened by the loss of Fort Ino in
Finland. But they must first have support, or a prior assurance of support, from outside. When Dukes replied that he knew nothing of British plans, the Russian officer urged speed; sentiment within the Bolshevik Fleet was changing, and Trotsky had just abolished the Bolshevik Commissars and reinstated the Russian officers; the moment was now ripe. Dukes at once passed this news on to Finland, but there was no reply.3

When Rodzianko’s offensive began on May 13, and the Cheka took over the defence of Petrograd under Stalin’s direction, and intensified their hunt for White Russian conspirators, Dukes moved to a doctor’s flat on Vasili island. When it was raided, he burnt all his various identity papers, and just induced the Cheka to leave him alone by assuming an epileptic fit. In late May, when Lenin and Dzerzhinsky issued a proclamation called ‘Beware of Spies’, and foreign Consulates were searched, and compromising documents found, Dukes spent the short summer nights first in a marshy copse; and then in Volkovo cemetery—inside the family tomb.3

In Paris, in the last days of May, the Council of Foreign Ministers and their military advisers, if not the Council of Four, had found compensation for Kolchak’s retreat, in the apparently increasing possibilities for the capture of Petrograd.

There were the usual wild press headlines, and wild press reports. On May 24, the New York Times printed a report from London that the ‘entire Bolshevik structure in Russia appears to be crumbling’. According to reports brought to Copenhagen by travellers from Petrograd, and forwarded by the Exchange Telegraph, the evacuation of Moscow had begun.

There was evidence, though, that Petrograd was being evacuated. On the 25th, the New York Times had this wild headline: ‘Petrograd afire as fall impends.’ But The Times correspondent in Helsinki (in a report printed on the 28th) wired that throughout the 25th, ‘big explosions went on at Kronstadt and in the Peterhof region. As the British warships were not in action, it is thought that the Bolsheviks were blowing up their magazines in readiness for flight’ That day, Lenin ordered the cumbersome rouble printing presses to be evacuated from Petrograd.4

On the 26th, General Rodzianko, on Yudenich’s orders, addressed a manifesto to the Petrograd population announcing that liberation was on the way. That day, Balfour wired to Bosanquet, the British Consul in Reval, that the Allied Foreign Ministers had decided that ‘all areas of Russia not in Bolshevik hands should be supplied with food. This would cover Petrograd if recaptured, and troops operating in non-Bolshevik areas.’ But Bosanquet was not to commit the Allies specifically to the relief of Petrograd, as the Allies ‘do not want to be in any way responsible for military operations against that city’.4

At the War Office, the General Staff decided on the 27th that the Russian Northern Corps should advance no further until food supplies were assured for Petrograd. But Gough’s demands for arms and food for the Russian troops could be provided from British Army surplus stock, if the War Cabinet agreed; it would
however take three to four weeks to ship it to Reval. At 7.30 pm, this message was telephoned to Colonel Kisch in Paris, who showed it to both Churchill and Sir Henry Wilson, who agreed in principle; food supplies had already gone to Reval in American ships, which were entirely in Hoover’s hands. But he agreed that further supplies of food and material should be sent straight to the Russian Northern Corps.⑤

On May 28, the *New York Times* had this startling headline: ‘Foreign Reds oust Bolsheviks’, ‘Chinese, Letts, and Finns control Petrograd after several days of fighting’. That day, the main *Times* leader stated sombrely that the ‘zeal of the Bolshevik chiefs, like that of the Jacobin leaders, may be quickened by the consciousness that for them there is no pardon. Their crimes are inexpiable, and, when they cease to govern, the kindred of their countless victims will demand that they shall cease to live.’

On the 28th, Churchill scribbled a quick note to the DCIGS in London. ‘The food question is being explored in Paris. We must not proceed apart from Mr Hoover. Following material, all of which is available, should be dispatched in the first instance.

Arms and equipment for 7,500 men.
Boots and medical supplies for 10,000 men.
Sixteen 18-pounder guns (with 2,000 rounds each).
Eight 6-inch howitzers (with 1,000 rounds each).
Twenty lorries.’

‘Prime Minister has no objection to this’, Churchill scrawled in red ink underneath.⑤ That night, the War Office sent General Gough a rough estimate, and asked whether it should be sent to Reval.

On the 29th, Colonel Kisch wrote to Colonel Steel that a colleague the day before had discussed with Hoover the question of a ‘continuous supply of provisions for the population of Petrograd if it falls to the non-Bolsheviks’. But Hoover had stuck to what he had told the Allied Foreign Ministers, that ‘relief will be supplied to the populations as they become non-Bolshevik’. Hoover would however send 35,000 tons of food, and some clothing, into Viborg or nearby ports; if the channel to Petrograd was blocked, supplies could go in from Viborg by barge. American food ships were being sent to Reval to await further orders, and the *Lake Dancey* had already arrived. Kisch added, ‘This is the best I can do…re food supplies for Petrograd, should the city fall. Personally I do not think it will fall…on the other hand, I know C.I.G.S. shares the view that the more we can draw Bolshevik troops towards Petrograd, the better.’⑤

This was quite true. That day, Sir Henry Wilson sent the Prime Minister a cutting from a Moscow Wireless broadcast, dated May 22, emphasising that the Petrograd front was now of great importance. ‘During the last few days great success has fallen to the lot of the White Guard Regiments operating against Petrograd’, it was admitted. ‘An unexpected attack shook the nerves of our
detachments...Red Petrograd is in great danger...Soviet Russia cannot surrender Petrograd even for the shortest space of time, the town must be defended at all costs...Now the whole of Soviet Russia must hasten to the aid of Petrograd.’ Reinforcements were to be sent from different areas.

‘I hope this is true’, minuted Sir Henry Wilson to Lloyd George, ‘for it will help to ease the situation in the North & opposite Gajda’s movement on Viatka.’

The Golovin master-plan was now, for the first time, having its due effect.

On May 31, Consul Clive wired from Stockholm that Tereschenko (the last Foreign Minister in the Russian Provisional Government of 1917) had told him that Petrograd would be taken before long, whereupon there would be grave excesses; the world must be prepared for this, for the Bolshevik leaders would have to pay the penalty. It was better that these should be carried out by an irresponsible force rather than by Kolchak, who could appear later as the liberal saviour from the excesses of the reactionaries; but if he arrived first and executed the Bolsheviks, there would be howls of indignation from Labour opinion in both England and America.*

This was brought to Churchill’s attention. ‘We cannot acquiesce’, he minuted firmly. ‘Any force which we support even indirectly must proceed according to the recognised laws and customs of war & be guided by humane considerations. Let me have a draft of a telegram to General Gough on these lines. This message will do us harm in our own councils if it is left unchallenged & unexplained. Wholesale executions are unpardonable in policy as well as on moral grounds.’ A wire therefore went off at once to Gough; and the DMI wrote to the Foreign Office that Yudenitch was being told that the Bolsheviks must be given a fair trial, there must be no counter-terror, and particularly no anti-Jewish pogroms. Gough was also told that Balfour insisted that the Allies must not in any way become responsible for military operations against Petrograd; great care should even be taken to avoid committing them ‘specifically’ to the relief of the city.

On June 3, the War Office sent Gough a fuller wire, approved by Churchill, that they could partially meet his first demands for the Russian Northern Corps (presumably for supplies for 20,000 troops), which they would ship about June 16. But they could not possibly equip 50,000 troops, nor negotiate with Finland and Esthonia, though they would continue to support the Esthonians, if they complied with Allied policy. ‘If at the same time, these stores enable the Russian Northern Corps to capture Petrograd, we will then be prepared to consider further assistance.’ But in view of their heavy commitments elsewhere, they could only provide rifles and a little equipment. The War Office thus completely

* Margulies had news of other American support. ‘This evening Z. dropped in; he is convinced that the American free-masons are exerting strong influence on the Bolsheviks; the five-pointed star on the forage cap of Bolshevik soldiers was the masonic symbol of one of the Quaker lodges. He had been told that in October 1918 the ikon of Our Lady of Iversk in Moscow had been draped in red and the same sign placed over it’, he recorded on June 3. Margulies was prominent in the Russian masonic movement.
misunderstood the Baltic position, and now seemed totally to reject the Golovin
master-plan, whose basic requirements were arms and supplies for 50,000 men,
and negotiations with Finland and Esthonia. Meanwhile, the press assault on Petrograd continued. On June 4, *The Times*,
under the headline, ‘Lenin’s fears for Petrograd’, printed a report, sent from The
Hague on the 3rd, and which had originated in Vienna, that Lenin had told the
Hungarian Bolshevik Government that Petrograd was ‘entirely surrounded and
that the fall of the city is inevitable. Lenin adds that the loss of Petrograd will not
affect the cause of the Russian proletariat.’

That day, the *New York Times* published this wild headline: ‘Report Petrograd
taken by Anti-Reds’, ‘Estonian and Finnish forces have entered Russian capital,
Copenhagen hears’.

On June 4, Stalin wrote to Lenin from Petrograd enclosing a document taken
from the Swiss consulate, which, Stalin claimed (quite falsely*), showed that not
only the Bolshevik General Staff, but also the Military Revolutionary Council of
the Republic, and the Chief of Staff himself, were working for the White
Russians. The Central Committee must act. ‘Has the C.C. sufficient force of
character and resoluteness?’ asked Stalin. ‘Examination of the evidence continues
and new “surprises” are coming to light. I would give more details but have not a
minute free.’ Stalin added that the present Military Commander (a former Tsarist
General) would wreck the Western Front, and complained sharply about Party
workers who urged the ‘military specialists’ on against the Commissars, ‘the latter
being dejected enough as it is’. Lenin urged Stalin to reconsider the matter.
When this evidently drew an angry reply from Stalin, the Party worker in
question was recalled.

But Rodzianko’s advance was now hanging fire, and his relations had worsened
with the Estonians, who were again supporting the Ingermanlanders on the
coast, who had again started up their propaganda. As more and more (though
unreliable) Bolshevik troops appeared on the Narva front, his northern column
thus had to withdraw from Kaporje, as he had no officers to lead all the various
volunteers, prisoners and deserters. At Pskov, the Russian partisans were in league
with the Estonians; but when Rodzianko asked Laidoner (the Estonian
Commander) to stop them and the Estonian soldiers from looting the town,
Laidoner replied curtly that the Russian Northern Corps was no longer under his
command. When the British Mission then descended on him, Rodzianko was
thus hard pressed; he had them received with the ‘maximum of pomp’, and was
‘as nice to them as possible’, he records, ‘but frankly they wasted a great deal of my
time’.

But on the 4th, Gough wired Sir Henry Wilson that after talks with the
Estonian Prime Minister and the local Russian Command, it had been agreed

* On June 18, Lenin replied to Stalin: ‘I am glad that your information has proved untrue.’
that the Russian Northern Corps should now be independent, and under General Rodzianko be responsible for both military operations and administration east of the Esthonian frontier; and that the Esthonians would allow supplies, for the sole use of the Russians, to be unloaded at Reval. A small British Staff was thus needed to distribute them on arrival. But for political reasons, neither the Esthonians nor the Russians wanted Yudenitch there for the moment. Nor did the Russians want any Finnish help during the advance on Petrograd, as this would only encourage the Bolsheviks to resist, instead of surrendering as hoped. Gough confirmed that the Russians did want to advance on Petrograd; and if they had arms and supplies for all available men, were confident of success. They claimed to have 13,000 troops now under arms, and wanted arms for 12,000 more; and supplies for both these 25,000 men, and 400,000 local inhabitants.10 (But this was far less than the number stipulated in the Golovin plan, which also insisted on a Finnish advance, which Rodzianko now rejected.) Gough added that German troops and the Baltic Landeswehr, who were still obstructing the Latvian Government, were advancing north and north east from Riga, and had instructed the Esthonian Army to halt. As the Esthonians had refused to comply, a clash was probable. Gough urged that the Germans be ordered to evacuate Latvia without delay.

The War Office now approved Gough’s demands for the Russian Northern Corps, but could not obtain any special Russian three-inch ammunition. When the French Military Attache was asked if the French Army had any, there was no reply; and the ship (due to sail on June 16) was kept waiting. Meanwhile, the War Office sent Gough further instructions. He was also to advise the local Baltic governments how to raise volunteers to defend themselves against both Bolsheviks and Germans, and promote Allied and neutralise German influence, and control German troops. Gough then based himself in Finland, which he considered to be the ‘vortex of Baltic politics and military tendencies’.11

But though General von der Goltz (the German Commander) had also—to Gough’s mortification—established himself in Helsinki, many German activities, like the British, were also channelled through Stockholm, where hopes of an early Bolshevik defeat ran high. All the big Russian Jewish bankers were installed in the Grand Hotel, and active business—though strictly forbidden—was conducted every morning in the lobby between 10 and 11 am: divided into two main groups (the first unmistakably headed by ‘Mitka’ Rubinstein, the second by a German Jewish banker called Levinson-Levine), they were quite sure that the rouble was going to fall even lower, and that there was much money to be made.12

But on June 1, the British Consul in Libau wired that as the Germans did not expect Kolchak to reach Moscow that year, they were negotiating with the Bolsheviks to induce them to remain neutral if the Germans attacked Poland. On the 4th, he wired again that he had intercepted a Bolshevik message ordering the local Dvinsk Soviet (in Latvia) to provide railway carriages for a German Mission travelling to Russia. German policy, he stated, was to deal with the Bolsheviks
while they held power, and to establish German control in the Baltic through support of the local Baltic Barons.

There was some truth in all this, for there was more than one German policy in the Baltic. After von der Goltz’s arrival in the Baltic (with Allied approval) in early 1919, August Winnig (the German Commissioner in the Baltic) wished to support the independence of the Baltic States. When the German High Command refused, Winnig proposed a German union with Latvia and Lithuania. But General Groener (the German C-in-C) decided he must secure the friendship of the new Russia to counterbalance the new hostile Poland—and he guessed it would be a White Russia. But when the Allies refused active German support, he decided that von der Goltz must stay put, and simply wait and see. General von Seeckt (the German Commander on the north east front) agreed; but pointed out that this would entail defending the Baltic States, and supporting the Allied cordon sanitaire in the Baltic between Germany and Russia. Von Seeckt urged a German withdrawal to the Libau-Kovno-Grodno line, thus allowing a Bolshevik advance along the Baltic coast. Von der Goltz thereupon defied the German High Command, and seized Riga; whereupon Winnig approved the formation of pro-German Russian units to keep off the Bolsheviks and repress the Latvians. But though Groener continued to supply von der Goltz, he resolutely refused him the reinforcements and material needed to invade Russia. Now, the German outcry over the severity of the Allied peace terms had resulted in the despatch, despite Groener, of an industrial mission to Moscow with vague ideas of a German-Bolshevik alliance to fight the Allies. But Groener insisted that the Peace terms be signed; otherwise Germany, in the ensuing war, would be totally destroyed.

On June 10, General Gough issued a summary ultimatum to von der Goltz to stop his advance; which von der Goltz, knowing full well that Gough could not enforce it, refused. Gough’s irritation was increased when he heard that Colonel Tallents (the British High Commissioner) and a French Colonel had that day been trying to arrange an armistice at Wenden (near Riga) between the Baltic Landeswehr and the Esthonians, which had also failed. Gough went straight over to Reval to see Tallents. ‘He knew as yet even less of the situation on our side of the Baltic than I did’, recorded Tallents (who had been entirely engaged up to now in trying to stop the Baltic Landeswehr from massacring all their prisoners at Riga; in strict German fashion, they were executing 33 men and 7 women each morning, and more after lunch). But on return to Helsinki, Gough sent Tallents a ‘surprisingly fierce’ telegram rebuking him for interfering in military affairs; the Wenden terms were anyhow quite unacceptable. That night, Gough also wired Sir Henry Wilson that things would become unduly difficult if he constantly had to consult Tallents about politics; he should be appointed British High Commissioner in the Baltic, and Tallents should be his political officer. Rank, in fact, came before Bolsheviks or Germans. But Churchill refused Gough’s request.

After the naval engagement of May 31, which had impressed him with Bolshevik firepower, Admiral Cowan held a Council of War to determine how to deal with
a far superior force, based on the best protected naval fortress in the world. Owing to the various shoals and minefields, which inhibited movement, it was decided that the whole British Squadron (save for submarines and depot ships) should move further east, and base itself on the Finnish coast at Biorko sound (just north of the main Bolshevik minefield protecting Kronstadt), to counter any enemy sortie more rapidly. ‘If, as seems likely, their heavy ships intend keeping behind the minefields’, Cowan informed the Admiralty, reporting on the engagement of May 31, ‘it seems an ideal opportunity for action by Coastal Motor Boats and torpedo-carrying aeroplanes, as the Bolshevik ship was only attended by one destroyer and two other small craft…The fact that they are now employing aircraft, and the well disciplined rapid fire the Bolshevik battleship kept up, shows that their naval efficiency should be taken seriously; the next development will probably be the appearance of their submarines.’

Between June 2 and 4, as the British Squadron moved up to Biorko, the Bolshevik destroyers Gavril and Azard, supported by the battleship Petropavlovsk, engaged British destroyers across the minefields; and just after Admiral Cowan himself reached Biorko on the 5th, Gavril sunk the British submarine L.55.

Cowan’s move to Biorko set off a chain reaction. On June 5, The Times, under the headline, ‘Street fighting at Petrograd—Strike of munition workers’, printed a report, sent from Helsinki on the 3rd, that the ‘last days of Petrograd under the Bolsheviks are being marked by almost complete strikes in the munition factories’. On the 7th, The Times printed a report, sent from Helsinki on the 5th, that as a result of a general Bolshevik attack, the Finnish Commander had ordered Fort Ino to bombard Kronstadt at 4 am that morning, and that the bombardment had lasted all morning; while Kronstadt had also exchanged fire with Fort Krasnaya Gorka. The battleship Petropavlovsk had taken a prudent part in the action at the eastern end of Kronstadt.

On the 9th, The Times’s main news summary was misleadingly headed: ‘Finland at War.’ The accompanying text, which was quite inaccurate, went on to state: ‘Finland has declared war on Bolshevik Russia as a result of the attack by the Red Army on the Finnish frontier posts. A state of panic prevails at Petrograd in consequence of the threat from both sides, though on the south west the Estonians are not much nearer the capital.’

That day, Stalin wired that in view of desertions, he must now have more troops from the Archangel or the Eastern front to defend Petrograd. Lenin minuted to Sklyansky, Trotsky’s Chief of Staff: ‘I hope you have already issued instructions (vital! emergency!): \( \frac{1}{2} \) or \( \frac{3}{5} \), i.e. 2 regiments from the Archangelsk Front and 1 from the Eastern Front’ He added: ‘The taking of hostages from the bourgeoisie and from officers’ families must be stepped up in view of the increased frequency…of treason. Arrange matters with Dzerzhinsky [Head of the Cheka].’ The Eastern front were thus informed that more and more troops would have to be withdrawn in view of the ‘serious deterioration’ of the Petrograd front and the breakthrough in South Russia. Everyone must be mobilised in Siberia, told to capture the nearest large factories, on promise of release when done.
‘Assign two or three men to each rifle and call upon them to drive Kolchak from the Urals’, wired Lenin.

After a further attack that day by the Bolshevik destroyers *Gavril* and *Azard* on the British Squadron at Biorko, Admiral Cowan advised the Admiralty that owing to the minefields, and his own light vessels, chances of taking offensive action against the Bolsheviks were limited, and ‘the initiative remains with them’. The remedy was to reinforce him with: long range monitors; or coastal motor boats; or aircraft carrying bombs or torpedos; or minelayers. These would confine the enemy, and not allow him time to prepare to break out and bombard both shores of the Gulf of Finland, ‘thereby assisting the Prussian invasion of the Baltic which is now in full swing’. It could not be assumed that Bolshevik naval forces could be contained all through the summer, ‘unless their ardour is cooled and their plans interrupted by offensive action on our part, or an effective minefield is laid to keep them in’. The Admiralty replied that present British policy precluded any such offensive action; but it was hoped that the mines being sent out would ease the situation. ‘In the meantime it must be realised that any departure from the policy laid down may seriously embarrass the Government’, Cowan was warned. He wired back that he had not taken offensive action. ‘Reference to questions in Parliament 27th May [may I] point out that Bolsheviks fired first.’

All this coincided with the arrival from England of the ‘very special measures’ to maintain contact with S.T. 25 in Petrograd, in the shape of a young British naval officer called Augustus Agar, with a small crew, and a pair of specially constructed, fast motor boats, which could skim in over the minefields. On the evening of June 10, he was giving his boats a trial run at Biorko, before leaving for Terrioki, from where he was to take a courier into Petrograd to contact S.T. 25, when news suddenly reached the British Squadron that Fort Krasnaya Gorka had mutinied. Both coastal forts, protecting Kronstadt on either side, were now in anti-Bolshevik hands—and Petrograd lay wide open.

When the Bolshevik Commander at Fort Krasnaya Gorka launched his revolt, which thus laid both Kronstadt and Petrograd wide open, and called urgently for help from the Russian Northern Corps, the Estonians had said nothing to General Rodzianko (the Russian Commander); but, as Bolshevik landing parties were sent from Kronstadt to put the revolt down, the Estonians simply sent up some Ingermanlanders in support. For the Estonians did not want to see the Russian Northern Corps in control of Krasnaya Gorka; and though Rodzianko had earlier told General Gough that he knew that both the Fort and some of the Bolshevik Fleet wished to defect—to the Russian Northern Corps, and not to the British or the Estonians—the British Mission appear to have connived with the Estonians, when the mutiny took place, to keep Rodzianko in the dark until the Ingermanlanders (who wanted to form a little republic of their own in those parts, and whom the Estonians supported) were in control of the Fort.

For the Finnish Government had now come to terms with Yudenitch’s Russian Committee for a Finnish advance on Petrograd. There would be ‘unconditional’ Russian recognition of Finland, self-determination for Karelia,
and semi-autonomy for the Ingermanlanders and various religious groups. Finland also required a preferential trade agreement with Russia, and access for Finnish vessels to Lake Ladoga, which must be closed to all warships; and though Finland and Russia would cancel their debts, Finland would retain all Russian military supplies in Finland. General Mannerheim (the Finnish Regent) would direct the whole operation against Petrograd. Yudenitch’s Russian force could assemble in Finland when Finnish troops mobilised, and would be allotted a definite sector; Russian officers could also be attached to the Finnish Command, and cope with Bolshevik prisoners and administration. Once in Petrograd, the Finnish White Guards would help the Russians maintain order, and operate the Murmansk railway (and thus of course seize Karelia), until Yudenitch could replace them. All other Russian territory would be occupied by Russian troops. In view of the decrease in the Finnish demands, General Gough now asked the War Office if they agreed to these joint operations. There was no reply.\(^{16}\)

On June 10, Agar told the Finnish Commandant at Terrioki (who thought that Agar was simply engaged in reconnaissance work for Admiral Cowan), that he wished to reconnoitre Kronstadt that night. As he feared that Bolshevik warships would come out to bombard Krasnaya Gorka next day, the Finnish Commandant allowed Agar to go, provided he told him what was happening; and that night, Agar in fact went in through the Kronstadt forts, with a local smuggler as pilot, and dropped the courier Peter at the northern mouth of the Neva river in Petrograd. By chance, Peter found Paul Dukes in the little garden of the Winter Palace. Peter’s explanations were jumbled. (‘There was a lot about some mysterious kind of motorboat—Terrioki and other places in Finland—Krestovsky island—skiffs—the British Consulate at Helsinki—other names unknown to me—military preparations—British warships—Kronstadt’, records Dukes.) But Peter showed Dukes a letter from London stating that as his reports were of great value, he should stay on in Petrograd, if he could; or he could leave with Peter in two days time (when Agar returned to fetch him) if he wished. But if he stayed on, Agar warned that he could not come in again until mid-July, because of the ‘White nights’ (a period of 28 days during which there is no complete darkness at night, which cover the 14 days up to and from June 22, the longest day of the year); and Agar offered him three different dates. But though Agar’s arrival in the Baltic made Dukes think that British naval operations would soon begin in earnest, Peter had no further information; and merely handed over a parcel of money. Dukes then returned to Volkovo cemetery, and crept back inside the family tomb for safety. On his way back to Terrioki, Agar saw two large Bolshevik warships and destroyers in position to bombard Krasnaya Gorka from the rear, but protected by the minefields from attack by the British Squadron.\(^{17}\)

On the 11th, the *Times* correspondent in Helsinki wired that the Finnish Government had strongly protested to Moscow about recent Bolshevik aggression on the Finnish frontier. ‘Large fires and many explosions have been observed along the roads to Petrograd’, he added. In fact, Kronstadt too had revolted against the Bolsheviks. That afternoon, a tug flying a white flag came out from
Kronstadt towards Fort Ino in Finland to beg Admiral Cowan for immediate support.

The desperate events taking place in the Baltic were not appreciated in London. On June 11, the First Sea Lord had simply informed the War Cabinet of the loss of a British submarine (L. 55) in the Baltic with all hands. ‘The Bolsheviks had been boasting of having sunk one of our submarines by gunfire, and as we had received no news of her for six days, it must be assumed that she was lost’, he stated. Churchill warned that awkward questions would be asked in Parliament about what the British Navy was doing in the Baltic. Curzon stated that they could say that British warships were protecting Allied movements in North Russia.18

On the morning of the 12th, two Bolshevik battleships, Petropavlovsk and Andrei Pervozvanii began to bombard Krasnaya Gorka from the rear, and the ‘deep boom of heavy guns coming across the Gulf could be heard’, records Agar. For Dukes, crouching inside the family tomb in Volkovo cemetery, this was indeed a welcome sound. But for Agar, anxiously scanning the horizon from a church steeple at Terrioki, it presented a crisis of conscience; should he attack the Bolshevik warships that night with his torpedoes, or go into Petrograd to bring out Peter? That afternoon, as another tug flying a white flag came out from Kronstadt towards Fort Ino, the Finnish Commandant kept on asking Agar if the British Squadron would attack. Agar said they would not, as no one knew what was happening; it might be a trap to lure the British warships inside the minefield. He decided that his duty to S.T. 25 came first. That night, Agar went in again and picked up the courier Peter, with all S.T. 25’s reports, off Krestovsky Island. Dukes would stay on another month, and come out on one of the nights specified by Agar. He confirmed that there was a plot brewing in Petrograd designed to synchronise with the Krasnaya Gorka mutiny; but they had moved too soon. ‘All was not lost, however, if either the Kronstadt garrison mutinied or Krasnaya Gorka held out’ But it was clear to Agar that it must fall in a few days if the Bolshevik battleships continued their bombardment; if, however, they could be made to withdraw, the mutiny might continue, and the Kronstadt garrison surrender. ‘I decided to attack [the two Bolshevik warships] the time being 2 am’, stated Agar in his official report to Admiral Cowan, ‘but, when only 4 miles away, the engine failed and revolutions dropped below torpedo firing speed, so I had to turn 16 points and return to my base, arriving there at 3.15 am.’ At 4 am, however, the former Bolshevik Cominander at Krasnaya Gorka, who had launched the revolt, managed, with the help of the Ingermanlanders, to disarm the Bolshevik sailors sent to put down the mutiny, and arrested all other Bolsheviks in the Fort. At this, Bolshevik troops at other forts—Gorky, Seraya Loshad, and another—also revolted; and contact was made with a Bolshevik vessel to see if it would join them.

Later on the 13th, General Gough again wired the War Office that Mannerheim was now ready to march his Finnish White Guards on
Petrograd with or without Allied support. He had to move at once, or he might lose the coming Finnish election. Again, there was no reply from London.

Gough, while coping with the Esthonians, Finns and Russians, was also doing his best to control the Germans, advancing north from Latvia—a subject of much greater interest to the War Office, it seems. On the 12th, Colonel Tallents had sailed over from Reval to Helsinki to see Gough, who now approved his peace proposals between Estonian and German forces; and Tallents returned that night with ‘peremptory orders’ to the Estonian Army and the Baltic Landeswehr to stay put until further notice; which, to Tallents’ surprise, both sides accepted. On the 14th, Gough therefore wired the War Office that if his recent ultimatum to von der Goltz was approved, the Peace Conference should bring pressure to bear on the Germans.19

The DMO agreed. ‘It will strengthen Gough’s hands’, he wrote at the bottom of the wire, ‘if Marshal Foch would issue a notice to the Germans that Gough is the instrument of Allied policy in the Baltic.’ Sir Henry Wilson also agreed. The DMO then again raised Gough’s request to have Tallents attached to his staff; the present arrangement, he minuted, was bound to lead to trouble. ‘We cannot afford to show any lack of confidence in Gough without giving the Germans a tremendous fillip’, he wrote.19 The Foreign Office should send a ‘really big man’ to the Baltic. (On June 14, Gough was writing to Churchill from Helsinki that Tallents ‘is not much of a man. He lacks force & experience & is very much in the hands of French, or Germans, whichever are nearest him at the moment. He means well however’, he added. ‘I think we ought to firmly insist on maintenance of local Governments, & probably anyhow for the present, of total exclusion from these Governments of the German Baltic Barons. They are in reality nothing but German Agents. It is in handling them that I think Tallents has shown most weakness & lack of political sense.’)

‘I certainly consider Gough should be put over Tallents; but I do not like the title of High Commissioner’, replied Churchill to the DMO, ‘which will, I expect, not be favoured by the Prime Minister.’

A day or so later, the DMO minuted. ‘C.I.G.S. told me last night that F.O. are sending Findley from Stockholm (I think).’ Churchill initialled this.

But no one else was sent to the Baltic.

On the 14th (the apparent date), as the mutiny at Krasnaya Gorka continued, Brigadier-General F.G.Marsh (Gough’s Chief of Staff) suddenly arrived at Reval with Yudenitch’s Russian Committee, and summoned the Estonian Commander, the other Allied Missions, and Rodzianko himself, to a conference (probably to keep Rodzianko isolated, since news of the Ingermanlanders’ success at Krasnaya Gorka had not yet reached Reval). Marsh gave Rodzianko a sealed paper stating that all Allied aid would be put exclusively at the ‘personal disposal’ of Yudenich; that the Russian Northern Corps should be properly grateful for Estonian support; that Rodzianko himself was the sole commander of all Russian forces on the Estonian front; and that the Allies insisted on a democratic regime. But when Rodzianko asked the Russian Committee if some of the Russian
officers in Finland could be sent over, he received an ‘extremely vague’ answer, and was told nothing of what was happening in Finland; and when he asked if the Russian Flotilla on Lake Peipus could be returned to him, he received an ‘evasive reply’ from both Marshal and the Esthonians. In fact, this very brief meeting ‘produced no substantial results’, wrote Rodzianko. ‘They could easily not have called the conference and circulated a message instead, which would have saved my time for more important matters.’

That evening (as the *Kitoboi*, a small vessel which had bolted from Kronstadt, surrendered to the British Squadron, with charts of the Bolshevik minefields and the one swept channel into Kronstadt on board, thus enabling some British warships to advance and attack it), Rodzianko finally heard of the defection of Fort Krasnaya Gorka. ‘Deeply regretting that that useless conference had kept me away from the front at such a moment’, Rodzianko hastily left for the front, where the local Russian Commander on the Yamburg sector told him that for nearly two days the Ingermanlanders had not only failed to inform him of the defection of Krasnaya Gorka, ‘but had actually concealed the fact by every possible means’. Rodzianko told him to contact the Bolshevik mutineers at once, and help them hold the Fort. He then hurried back to Narva, and wired Admiral Cowan for help.

That same evening (the 14th), two Ingermanland officers and a surgeon arrived at Krasnaya Gorka with the news that the Russian Northern Corps had been informed of the mutiny, and that the British Squadron would bombarding Kronstadt at 2 am next morning (the 15th). Thus heartened, the garrison carried on a brisk gun fight with the Bolshevik warships and with Kronstadt itself. On the 15th, the *Times* correspondent in Helsinki wired excitedly: ‘Kronstadt is burning.’ He had just had the news from the Russian Northern Corps in Reval. ‘Seven Bolshevik warships, having hoisted the white flag, have left the island fortress and are steaming west towards the British Squadron’, he stated with much exaggeration. ‘Several of the forts have also hoisted the white flag.’

Did Cowan ever receive Rodzianko’s request for naval support? Who told the two Ingermanland officers that the British Squadron would bombarding Kronstadt at 2 am on the 15th? Did they really mean the bombardment of the Bolshevik warships off Krasnaya Gorka—and at 2 am on the 16th by Agar’s torpedo-boats? Whatever the truth of the matter, at 1 am on the 15th, Admiral Cowan left Biorko hurriedly to confer with General Gough at Reval; from where he later that day merely reported to the Admiralty that the two Bolshevik battleships were engaging Krasnaya Gorka, which had surrendered to the Ingermanlanders, who were supported by the Esthonians. ‘The bombardment by the Bolshevik ships and Kronstadt forts has continued with little intermission until the time of writing’, he stated. No mention was made of any request for naval support from either Rodzianko, or the Ingermanlanders themselves.

But on the evening of the 15th, as Admiral Cowan returned to Biorko (being misinformed by the Estonian Admiral Pitka en route that the Ingermanlanders at Krasnaya Gorka were being ‘interfered with’ by the Russian Northern Corps),
Rodzianko heard that the Fort had been lost. For when they heard the Kronstadt guns replying, the Ingermanlander officers at the Fort went off with their own men and their Bolshevik sailor prisoners (some 200); abandoned the former, shot the latter, and then escaped in small boats. Later on the 15th, the dispirited garrison (who had originally launched the revolt), by now very tired, and seeing no sign of the British Squadron, or any other form of support, abandoned Fort Krasnaya Gorka, which was now badly damaged. However the Bolsheviks dared not enter for some while, fearing that it had been mined.

On the 16th, the two Bolshevik battleships kept up their bombardment all morning and afternoon on the Fort. Fresh Bolshevik troops finally entered it in the early evening. This was quite unknown to Agar, who set out that night with his two motor boats to torpedo the two battleships; but one boat broke its propeller on a dud mine, and both had to return straight to Terrioki.

On the morning of the 17th, there was no bombardment; but columns of smoke indicated that the two battleships were on the move. Late that afternoon, they disappeared, and were replaced by the cruiser Oleg. At Terrioki, there was great uncertainty. The Finnish Commandant, discussing the matter with Agar, thought that either the battleships had simply gone back for ammunition and would shortly reappear, or the Fort was now back in Bolshevik hands. But as the Oleg fired a few salvoes that evening, ‘we concluded that the fortress was still holding out’, recorded Agar; and that night, he went in alone after the enemy cruiser. But after he had passed through the destroyer screen, one of his crew accidently misfired the torpedo. As the little boat rolled about in the choppy sea, uncomfortably near the enemy vessels, with the first streaks of dawn about to appear in the sky, the charge was painfully reloaded. Agar then went full tilt at the Oleg, and fired. As he sheered off at high speed, the destroyer escort opened rapid fire on him, and the Oleg blew up. He raced back to Terrioki, galloped down to Bjorko on the nearest horse, and from the cockpit of a Finnish aeroplane with German markings piloted by a Swedish volunteer, soon saw the Oleg lying on the bottom—and the two red flags which had replaced the white flag over Fort Krasnaya Gorka. He had been too late. Admiral Cowan was delighted at the sinking of the Oleg, but relatively unconcerned about the loss of Krasnaya Gorka; that was a tragedy, ‘but it was not his purpose to capture Petrograd for the White Russians’, he told Agar clearly. Rodzianko then had a furious interview with the Ingermanlander commander; and thereupon went to Kaporje, where the garrison troops who had escaped from Krasnaya Gorka ‘welcomed me and expressed their complete readiness to fight against the Bolsheviks’. Rodzianko congratulated them, and had their arms returned to them. A Bolshevik regiment then deserted on the Russian right flank; and the Bolsheviks at once withdrew the whole brigade, in case it also went over.

Admiral Cowan sent two reports to the Admiralty. The first outlined the information which had been gathered from the crew of the small Bolshevik vessel Kitoboi, which had deserted to the British Squadron, and which was ‘regarded as reliable, and in a large measure confirms previous reports’, stated Cowan.
**Mines & Swept Channels.** ‘It is confidently stated that no mines have been laid this year by the Bolsheviks. It was intended that the minelayer Narova should proceed to lay mines in the Kronstadt channel but, owing to the unreliability of the crew, this project was abandoned.’ A tracing of minefields and swept channels, found aboard the Kitoboi, was attached. These compare remarkably well with previous reports in our hands.’

**Intentions & Actions of the Fleet.** ‘It does not appear so far to have been the intention of the Bolshevik Fleet to conduct operations in the open. They came out on 18th and 31st May with the object of cutting off parties landed by the Estonians in Kaporje bay, being unaware of the presence of British men of war. The destroyer Gavril engaged on 18th May is stated to have returned to Kronstadt undamaged.’

When this report reached the Admiralty, DOD (H) minuted: ‘The enclosed tracing only shows one swept channel into Kronstadt’

‘It seems likely’, added the DCNS underneath, ‘that some change will have been made in the swept channels on Kitoboi’s defection becoming known.’

When Cowan officially reported the sinking of the Oleg, he recommended Agar for the Victoria Cross. ‘It was an instance of most conspicuous, cool and disciplined gallantry, and achieved a great result at a most opportune time’, he stated. In a private letter, Cowan wrote. ‘Nobody knows what got her: they all think a submarine, but it came at a lucky time as they [the Bolsheviks] were all bragging about our submarine we lost; and were also filling the air with wireless propaganda in English telling our men not to fight, but to join the world revolution, and that they would pay dearly if they didn’t, etc.’ Cowan also had ‘very strong reasons’ for thinking that he had got a Bolshevik submarine on an Estonian minefield, laid across the exit from the Bolshevik swept channel, just after the Oleg had been torpedoed. The Times encouraged the mystery about the Oleg, stating on June 21: ‘A Bolshevik wireless message states that on June 18 a British submarine sank the cruiser “Oleg”, near Tolbuchin lighthouse.’ The Times commented: The “Oleg”, we understand, was not attacked by a British submarine, but may have struck a mine laid by the Bolsheviks, as she has been seen very badly damaged and in a sinking condition.’

After the loss of Krasnaya Gorka, Rodzianko’s spring offensive came to a definite end. ‘But even at the most hopeful moments we had no thought of occupying Petrograd because our army was too weak in numbers and we knew only too well that if we took Petrograd the army, once in the city, would have melted away. When it became clear that the British Fleet was not going to give us any support at all, and did not even wish to maintain contact with us, all hope of advancing on Petrograd collapsed’, wrote Rodzianko.

The fall of Krasnaya Gorka had a terrible effect on morale both outside and inside Petrograd. General Mannerheim (the Finnish Regent) called off his advance, and General von der Goltz (the German Commander in Latvia) resumed his attack on the Estonians. While the Cheka swooped on supposed counter-revolutionaries within Petrograd, Stalin restored order at the forts around
Kronstadt. ‘After Krasnaya Gorka, Seraya Loshad was likewise liquidated’, he wired to Lenin. The guns there are in complete order.’ All the forts were now being reinforced. The ‘naval specialists’ assured him that it was impossible to take Krasnaya Gorka from the sea. ‘All I can do about it is to weep over so-called [naval] science.’ It had only been retaken because he and ‘other civilians’ had cancelled military and naval orders, and issued their own.

In fact, the affair was a classic failure of British naval power, due apparently to complete lack of coordination. Admiral Cowan says remarkably little in his report. Nor is the mystery cleared up by a study of Agar’s accounts, since in his two books Footprints in the Sea (London, 1959) and Baltic Episode (London, 1963), he manages to give no less than three different, and conflicting, versions of these events. In the first, he states that he prepared the chapters on the Baltic partly in 1928, and partly in 1936, for the purpose of giving certain lectures; and that the Admiralty allowed him ‘full access’ to all their official documents; but refused permission for publication at that time. In the second book, he confirms the above statements, adding that he had also had access to Admiral Cowan’s papers, and that the account in his first book was abridged. ‘The complete story is now rewritten entirely in this [second] book’, he writes, to which the Admiralty had now given ‘full clearance’. He includes his official report to Cowan, dated 24 June 1919, in this second book as an appendix; but this in no way tallies with the expanded account in the text—the dates are all muddled and different, incidents are changed, and so on. There is no mention in the text that his first attack on the Bolshevik warships occurred early on the morning of June 13, on returning from Krestovsky island with the courier Peter, and all S.T. 25’s precious reports. (It would appear that Agar must have first returned that morning to Terrioki, and then gone out again to attack at 2 am. It would have been madness to have risked losing the courier and reports in such an attack. But his official report is imprecise on this point.)

Agar also gives two entirely different versions in the two books of how he acquired his torpedoes, and who gave him permission to use them (an important point, since he was on an intelligence mission, and had been told in London to avoid all hostile operations). In the first book, he clearly infers that Cowan suggested that he take a pair; and when he wished to attack, he went down to Biorko, where Cowan sent a signal for him to the Admiralty; that he waited in Cowan’s cabin for an answer, which stated that his boats were to be used for intelligence purposes only; he should take no action, ‘unless specially directed by S.N.O.Baltic’. Cowan, he claims, said that he would cover him. In his second book, he states: ‘I asked to be provided with two torpedoes’. Cowan, he adds, ‘did not immediately take to the idea’. When he wished to attack, Agar states that he himself sent a signal to the Admiralty, through a British agent, from Viborg; he never left Terrioki, and never even consulted Cowan. It would appear that the 1959 account is the truer account, and the 1963 account, ‘rewritten entirely’ as he admits, is false; but why is his official report in the appendix (which tallies with
the original in the Admiralty records) attached to it; and how could the Admiralty give 'full clearance' to this sort of thing?

Agar got his V.C. for torpedoing the *Oleg*. It was a very gallant personal effort. But it did not achieve a 'great result at a most opportune time', as Admiral Cowan claimed to the Admiralty. It was a botched job, and achieved very little—save the deaths of some 600 Russian sailors. If Agar had managed to torpedo the two battleships on his first or second sorties, that would indeed have achieved a great result at a most opportune time, since it would certainly have entailed the success of the mutiny at Fort Krasnaya Gorka, the key to Kronstadt and Petrograd; while the loss of one or both of their capital ships would probably have ensured a successful mutiny at Kronstadt itself. Cowan was to appear unconcerned at the loss of Krasnaya Gorka. But later in the year, he realised its importance full well—and came to blame its loss in June on the Russians, having all along been misinformed by the Estonian Admiral Pitka, who loathed the Russians, on what had then actually happened; though some of what happened Cowan chose to ignore.

The whole thing was a sad tale of non-cooperation between supposed Allies; and it is hard not to sympathise with Rodzianko (the Russian Commander). The Bolsheviks were now able to conduct deadly propaganda to the effect that the 'Allies, while provoking trouble, never support their friends', which resulted in 'terrible further disillusionment of Petrograd', especially with the British. A few days later, *The Times* had the headline: 'Petrograd Terror—Despair at Allies' delay—Wholesale executions'.

In the Baltic, all future Russian operations depended upon Finish support. In Paris, Balfour finally replied to the earlier Finnish terms on June 19th. If both Kolchak and the Finnish Cabinet approved, General Mannerheim could receive British support, since Kolchak would never sanction a Finnish advance without a satisfactory prior assurance regarding a Finnish seizure of Karelia. Kolchak would also be responsible for declining Finnish support On the 21st, Balfour replied to the modified Finnish terms; before British approval was given, Kolchak must agree in writing. 'Subject to his approval I have no objection', stated Balfour. 'C.I.G.S. agrees.'

In Helsinki, Mannerheim had now in fact received an urgent appeal from Kolchak. But there were no concessions to the Finns; this was 'not the time for doubts and wavering, connected with any political questions', Kolchak stated. As instructed by Sir Henry Wilson, General Gough duly informed Mannerheim on the 24th that the British Government strongly supported Kolchak's appeal. Next day, Gough wired that the message had made a favourable impression; but while Mannerheim wanted to deal directly with the local Russians and Kolchak, the Finnish Cabinet wanted a prior agreement with the Allies. 'ZThe Finns are unwilling to trust any Russians', Gough explained. Thus, as Mannerheim's position weakened as the Finnish elections drew near, the chances of Finnish support declined.
During the ‘White Nights’, Agar remained with the British Squadron at Biorko, where Admiral Cowan was now planning a full scale torpedo attack on the Bolshevik Fleet in Kronstadt; and Cowan had asked the Admiralty for the immediate despatch of a whole flotilla of motor boats, an aircraft carrier, and several minelayers. After the attack (planned for the second or third week in August, when the moon was on the wane), a heavy barrage of mines could seal off the main channel into Kronstadt, and part of the British Squadron could then return to deal with the German troops holding the Latvian ports, while part could support General Yudenitch (the Russian C-in-C) as he advanced along the Estonian coast towards Petrograd (a plan, admits Agar, ‘about which [Admiral] Walter Cowan had many misgivings’).

On June 21, the Times correspondent reported that ‘certain unfortunate obstacles’ were still hampering the Russian Northern Corps on the Petrograd front. Asked why he had not yet moved up to the front, Yudenitch replied: ‘When I reach the Army the soldiers will first ask, “Give us bread”. I have no bread. They will ask for pay. I have none. They will ask for cartridges. I have no munitions.’ In fact, the Times correspondent remarked, Allied promises of support seemed ‘roseate dreams’. Meanwhile, the German envoy at Helsinki had been replaced by a ‘more clever man’ (perhaps a dig at Gough).

Yudenitch, however, had now strengthened his Russian Committee. S.G. Lianozov, the Russian financier and oil magnate, who was in partnership with Hugh Leech (and the Secret Intelligence Service) in the new bank in Helsinki, became his financial adviser, (whereupon the pro-German Russian faction in Helsinki at once formed a strong opposition group). But food was becoming scarcer than ever, as Hoover’s six-month American credit was coming to an end on July 1, and $7 million of supplies were needed per month as a minimum for the Petrograd district. The Russian Committee offered to pay for further American supplies in Kerensky roubles, secured against the large Russian state forests near Gdov, and in bonds signed by Yudenitch. When Hoover refused to accept this, his envoy in the Baltic suggested that the Russian Committee should obtain some of the Russian gold, which the French had taken from the Germans, who had taken it from the Bolsheviks after the Brest-Litovsk Treaty; or deduct what they needed from any Allied credit opened with Kolchak.

This coincided with some general but minor hostilities. On the 21st, as the Bolsheviks attacked the Estonian and White Russian forces, fighting also broke out between the Estonians and the Baltic Landeswehr. But by the 25th, a strong new Bolshevik attack had been launched near Volosovo (on the Yamburg-Gatchina line), and another Bolshevik division from the Eastern Front was reported in the Gatchina sector. By now, the Russian Northern Corps had committed all its reserves, and was now stretched in one thin line along the Narva front.

Admiral Cowan, though now deeply prejudiced against the Russians because of the loss of the crucial Fort Krasnaya Gorka (about which he had been completely misinformed by the Estonians), gave what naval support he could.
On the nights of June 21 and 22, 6 Bolshevik destroyers and minesweepers came west to within gunshot of the British naval force at Biorko, exchanged shots with them over the minefields, and then retired. Each night, therefore, Cowan moved out with 2 cruisers and his remaining destroyers; but on the 22nd, 2 destroyers severely damaged their propellers, and had to be sent back to Copenhagen.

On the 23rd, at the urgent request of the Russian Northern Corps, Cowan shelled and set fire the Bolshevik positions at Dolgaya and Kernovo in Kaporje bay, ‘but, as I have pointed out to the Russian Command’, Cowan reported to the Admiralty, ‘the driving back of their left wing and the loss of Krasnaya Gorka is entirely due to their interference with, and disarming of, the Ingermanland troops, who have held this flank for over a month, and had also advanced twelve miles to Krasnaya Gorka.’

Cowan went on: ‘This whole Russian Command, both Army and Navy, is so sapped and soaked in plotting and intrigue (chiefly against the Estonians and Finns, and also the Letts, whose independence they are all against), that I feel they are far from worthy of support; and particularly as there is no doubt German influence is working amongst them through the Baltic German element. They are also quite incapable of making and keeping to any definite plan of action either on land or sea, always some unworthy intrigue is in the background. In my view, nothing will prevent them falling under German domination once Petrograd is again in their hands, and also they will ever be antagonistic to any independence of Finns, Estonians or Letts.’

On the 26th, in answer to a further urgent request from the Russians, Cowan again shelled Kernovo, Dolgaya and the Rekopesh glass works in Kaporje bay; but would not continue such action, save under ‘very special circumstances’, he reported, as there was ‘not enough definiteness’ in the Russian Command’s plans to justify the expenditure of ammunition, or entry into shallow waters; also, the innocent suffered more than the Bolsheviks. Next day, however, the Russian Admiral Pilken arrived from Helsinki, and told Cowan that he had been appointed the future Russian Naval C-in-C by Yudenitch, and Commander of the Kronstadt fortress, ‘if and when that and Petrograd falls’. It was thus agreed that any Russian warships falling into British hands would remain under Cowan’s orders, to be conveyed through Pilken, ‘until the Russian Government is stabilised or other orders from the Allies are received’.

Yudenitch then came over from Helsinki, and withdrew his troops on the Estonian front. But he gave them ‘not the slightest news’ of the position on the other Russian fronts, ‘nor even of the situation in Finland’, records Rodzianko. In fact, his brief visit only aroused ‘worried dismay’; when Rodzianko’s officers asked him questions, assuming Yudenitch had briefed him, ‘I could tell them nothing’, stated Rodzianko. ‘I found his stubborn silence utterly incomprehensible and it produced the most disturbing impression on all of us.’

But as the Estonians were soon driving the Baltic Landeswahr back, Colonel Tallents (the British High Commissioner) induced Gough to hold his hand until he could dictate terms to their German Commander. On the 26th, Tallents heard
that as German troops had withdrawn from the port of Libau on learning that the Peace Treaty was about to be signed in Paris, the Baltic Landeswehr had invited in part of Prince Lieven’s pro-German Russian force (entirely dressed in German uniforms, distinguished only by a Russian cockade) to enable them to retain their position in Latvia. But Prince Lieven now agreed to take his troops to join the Russian Northern Corps at Narva. When the German troops outside Libau heard of this, the situation became almost ‘red hot’. This was the crucial moment. Tallents now reinstated the Latvian Government, which the Germans had ousted, and the Latvians, supported by British warships in the harbour, regained control of Libau.

On the 27th, the War Cabinet had a short discussion on the Baltic. The First Lord asked that an Admiralty paper might be deferred for a few days; another paper was in preparation, and would soon be ready. Churchill remarked that the Germans were playing a ‘very astute game’ on the Polish frontier, where we seemed to have no power to enforce the decisions of the Peace Conference. Chamberlain asked what power Marshal Foch did in fact have to restrain German aggression. Sir Henry Wilson replied that the Council of Four had told Foch a week ago to order General von der Goltz to stop his operations (the order was held up for some days in Clemenceau’s office). This was the third time that such orders had been given to von der Goltz, who paid no attention. The only way for Foch to bring pressure on the Germans was to advance on the Rhine. In Paris, Sir Henry Wilson had urged that such pressure should be brought to bear before the end of the Armistice. The Peace Treaty, he understood, could not be ratified before July 21, until when the Armistice would continue.

On the 28th, General Gough and Colonel Tallents arrived at Reval in HMS Galatea to stop the fighting between the Germans and Esthonians. At the front, General Laidoner (the Esthonian Commander), who was driving his opponents back towards Riga, said the Germans facing him were regular troops, many of whom had recently come up from Mitau. The only way to resolve the situation was for him to attack again that afternoon.

Having given Tallents the terms on which an armistice should be made, Gough at once sailed back to Helsinki, and wired the War Office (mistakenly) that night that the Russian Northern Corps planned to attack Petrograd on July 10. They would not in fact enter the city, but merely call on the inhabitants to rise up and expel the Bolsheviks. Mannerheim would not enter Petrograd either, but would outflank it to the south and east. But Gough warned that Mannerheim could not force the new Finnish Government to attack on the terms of his agreement with Yudenitch alone, as their policy was peace and reform. They would only sanction a Finnish attack if convinced that an advance on Petrograd would kill Bolshevism, and stop the unending conflict on the Finnish frontier; and if the Allies would supply Finland, and guarantee that Russia restored would not go back on any agreement they made with Yudenitch. Gough thus asked whether to support the Mannerheim-Yudenitch group, whose plans did not have the Finnish Cabinet’s consent; or the Finnish Cabinet, who required Allied guarantees and
Allied support from Murmansk; or neither, but say that Britain had no objection to a Finnish advance, and let Mannerheim and the Finnish Cabinet settle their own differences.27

‘The Finns won’t go to Petrograd; they have begun to ask for guns, maxims, clothing etc!’ recorded Sir Henry Wilson. ‘No business doing!’

But on the 30th, Gough revised this, Yudenitch, he wired, had just given him an appreciation of the latest position on the Narva front. The Bolsheviks had brought up strong reserves; and if the Russian Northern Corps did not get some guns and ammunition soon, they would be in a critical state.28 As the British munitions expected about June 28 had not arrived, there could now be no attack on July 10. The Estonians, he added, were engaged in ‘furious fighting’ with the Baltic Landeswehr by the lakes north of Riga, but had more than held their own against well-equipped and well-led troops, and General Laidoner was confident; the relative position of both forces was now the same as before the local armistice of June 9. Relations between Estonians and Russians were ‘somewhat improving’, and Yudenitch was now enquiring into the Ingermanlander affair at Krasnaya Gorka, which was due, alleged Gough, to ‘want of tact and uncompromising behaviour’ of the Russian Command.

On July 1, the DMO replied briefly to Gough, ‘We were told that Mannerheim wished to advance on his own account’. Though Kolchak’s approval had been obtained to a Finnish advance, subject to Yudenitch’s participation, the British Government declined all responsibility for an attack on Petrograd, and could not supply the Finns. ‘We should be glad to see it done’, and if successful, food would be supplied for the Petrograd population. Gough should thus state that while the British Government had no objection to a Finnish advance, Mannerheim and the Finnish Cabinet must settle their own differences.

‘Yudenitch seems to be getting thrashed by the Bolsheviks’, recorded Sir Henry Wilson on July 2. Churchill agreed; and next day, wrote sharply to the Shipping Controller. ‘A most unfortunate event has occurred which may entail disastrous consequences. A ship with munitions for the North Russian Corps was to have begun loading on the 20th June, but from one cause and another delays have occurred, in spite of our repeated protests, which render it impossible for this ship to begin to load before Monday, the 8th July. Meanwhile, the North Russian Corps, which is in continuous action with the Bolsheviks, is being defeated for want of this very ammunition on which they had counted. You will see from the wires of which I attach copies how grave the situation is.

‘I beg your personal cooperation to terminate the delays.’28

Gough replied to the DMO on the 3rd that he had duly advised the Finnish Government, but the military situation in the Baltic had completely changed since his arrival. Bolshevik forces were now pressing back the Russian Northern Corps, ‘whose collapse is imminent’, while the Bolshevik success against the Finnish force near Olonetz (between Lakes Onega and Ladoga) was due to ‘German organisation’ in Petrograd; and Mannerheim thought a Bolshevik attack on Finland was probable. As the Finnish Government and Yudenitch had come to
terms, there was no objection from either side to a Finnish move; and the Finns were only asking for an immediate Allied loan of £15 million to buy war material, which would arrive too late for their first move, but would be essential as the operation developed.\textsuperscript{28} This was the one Finnish condition. If the Allies did nothing, they must be prepared for surprises in the Baltic. ‘German domination is only alternative’, warned Gough. But in the early hours of that morning, Colonel Tallents had finally arranged an armistice between the Germans and the Estonians, who were not to advance beyond their present positions: all German troops and the Baltic Landeswehr were at once to leave Riga, where an Allied Governor would take over; all Germans were to leave the Baltic Landeswehr, and all German forces were to leave Latvia as soon as possible, and in the meanwhile, attack only the Bolsheviks.

On July 4, the War Cabinet considered the general Russian position. An Admiralty paper on the Baltic was first discussed. This called for a review of the situation on the signature of a Peace Treaty with Germany. At present, British warships were protecting the flanks of ‘our friends’, but if the Germans managed to occupy the Baltic States, these flanks would no longer exist; and the withdrawal of the British Fleet must be considered. At first, it seemed likely that the Germans only wished to control Latvia and Lithuania; but the arrival of more German troops might herald the overthrow of the Estonian Government. If successful, the Germans would then control the whole area from East Prussia to Petrograd. British warships could not prevent this. The Admiralty thus requested the War Cabinet to direct that the Bolshevik naval forces ‘should be suppressed’. They had repeatedly tried to attack Esthonia, and had opened fire on the British ships. The Admiralty, in fact, urged that the Peace Treaty should not be ratified until German troops were out of the Baltic States: that the blockade be continued until Petrograd was occupied by ‘our friends’: that British supplies be ‘re-doubled and hastened’; and that the Admiralty be given a ‘clear lead’ by the War Cabinet.\textsuperscript{29}

The First Lord stressed that general uncertainty about British policy was hampering naval officers in the Baltic. Churchill remarked that political and military aspects were much confused in this area. The War Office could take no responsibility for the capture of Petrograd; they had simply given a few guns and some ammunition to the North Russian Corps, which had developed considerably in the last two months, its ranks swollen by Bolshevik prisoners and deserters. Unfortunately, a British ship carrying supplies had ‘sprung a leak’ (in fact, through sabotage), and the delay entailed might have ‘serious results’. Curzon remarked that the position of the North Russian Corps appeared ‘very precarious’. Churchill retorted that it had been raised simply to fight the Bolsheviks. In Finland, Yudenitch was engaged in a ‘great deal of haggling’ in trying to persuade Mannerheim to support him; only in the last few days had Kolchak instructed Yudenitch to make terms with the Finns. Meanwhile, there was a new Finnish Government, ‘and Mannerheim’s wings had been clipped’; both were now asking us to ask—and support—they to march into Russia, as Yudenitch’s support was insufficient. Churchill had wired Gough that we could
under no circumstances initiate such a ‘highly speculative’ enterprise. ‘Our diffidence in this matter might be adversely criticised’, he admitted, ‘but undoubtedly it was the wisest policy.’ But the threat to Petrograd certainly relieved Denikin in South Russia. Though Kolchak’s delay in coming to terms with the Finns, and Mannerheim’s reverse, made the capture of Petrograd unlikely, the War Office hoped that the War Cabinet would sanction the continued supply of arms and munitions to the North Russian Corps, and direct the British warships to remain and guard ‘our flanks’.

Curzon agreed with Churchill, but did not think he had sufficiently stressed the ‘precariousness’ of Mannerheim’s position; the Finnish Government might change again any day, and Mannerheim himself be superseded. The difficulty about Yudenitch was that he was an ‘admitted reactionary’; and British support, followed by his ‘possibly successful appearance’ at Petrograd would much distress the Estonians. If these various forces did capture the city, who would be in command? ‘The situation was chaotic’, and we must proceed cautiously. However, a wire had been sent the day before from Paris to Mannerheim, encouraging him to go ahead, but stating that we could not participate.

In reply to the Prime Minister, the DMO said that the German position was rather obscure; but they were out of Libau, which was now held by some 1,500 Latvian troops. The intention was to repatriate them as soon as possible by sea; they had just suffered a severe defeat by the Estonians.

Churchill remarked that even if Mannerheim, Yudenitch, and other little forces—including some ‘efficient’ German troops—did reach Petrograd, ‘no great harm would be done’, he thought. ‘Our own opportunity would then arrive’, as we could direct matters through the control of food. ‘It would be for us to appoint a good Governor of the City, who would be acceptable to Admiral Kolchak, and then politely inform the Germans and the Finns that there was no longer any need for them to remain.’ Petrograd was a purely Russian capital, and should be left to the Russians; the Finns, moreover, had never laid claim to the city. (In view of the fact that Churchill was painfully aware of British powerlessness on the Russian scene generally, he was definitely misleading the Cabinet here. Only the despatch of a substantial British force would have dislodged the Germans from Petrograd.)

The Second Sea Lord stated that the naval and military positions differed. Britain had 6 cruisers, 10 destroyers and 5 submarines, and a vessel with seaplanes was going out. But the Bolsheviks had 2 battleships, which could maintain a ‘well-disciplined and sustained’ fire. The Admiralty did not wish to send out more ships, but simply wanted a direction to engage the Bolshevik Fleet, if it put out; Britain’s tactics would be to retire, draw them on, and leave them to our destroyers and submarines. But both the Admiralty and British naval officers on the spot wished to know: ‘were we, or were we not, at war with the Bolsheviks?’

The Prime Minister replied candidly that ‘actually we were at war with the Bolsheviks, but we had decided not to make war’. In other words, we had decided not to put great armies into Russia to fight the Bolsheviks.
The First Sea Lord pressed the point home. The War Cabinet should give the Admiralty authority to take ‘any action they might think necessary’ in the Baltic. As had been said, bigger forces would not be sent out; but naval officers were anxious to engage the Bolshevik Fleet, if they attacked. In reply to Curzon, he stated that, as far as he understood, Britain was no longer maintaining a blockade there. But the First Lord interrupted that the British warships were protecting themselves by laying mines across Petrograd bay.

(The Admiralty, of course, was surreptitiously seeking blanket cover for a big attack on Kronstadt, a definite aggressive operation. What they really feared in the Baltic were the minefields, and the effect of Bolshevik propaganda on the British sailors, if events dragged on too long.29)

Curzon stressed that we must proceed with caution, as there was a strong element in Parliament against intervention. The First Lord disagreed; the last time that Wedgwood had raised the matter, he had received very little support. ‘Supposing the Bolshevik Fleet came out, could our ships engage them at once, or would we have to let them shoot first?’ he asked.

The Prime Minister remarked that when Russian policy was discussed in Paris, President Wilson had stated that there was no legal state of war, as there had been no declaration of war. England and Spain had been in a similar position in years gone by. But Bonar Law supported the First Lord; in a naval engagement, it was impossible to say who had started the fight. The War Cabinet thereupon decided that: ‘In fact, a state of war did exist as between Great Britain and the Bolshevik Government of Russia’, and therefore ‘our naval forces in Russian waters should be authorised to engage enemy forces by land and sea, when necessary’. The Admiralty, if not the War Office, was thus at war.
North Russia and Siberia

In North Russia, the first Relief brigade had now reached Archangel, and the second was on its way. But instead of simply replacing the tired British troops, as the House of Commons and British public had been led to understand, Churchill, with the backing of the General Staff, was planning to use them to break through to the Siberian troops advancing west from Perm, so that Admiral Kolchak could then base himself on Archangel, and not have to rely on the ramshackle Siberian railway.

Lloyd George had agreed with this move: there was no objection to Ironside moving on Kotlas, he had told the CIGS, if General Gajda reached Viatka, and then pushed forward from there; but he insisted on the War Cabinet giving their approval to the operation as well.

General Ironside’s proposal to break through to the Siberians, now known as the ‘Kotlas operation’ (from the name of the Dvina river port and railhead to Viatka), was based on a guarantee that Ironside had given the War Office in late March, namely that he could take Kotlas provided:

1 5,000 ‘good fighting men’ came out from England;
2 Bolshevik troops elsewhere in Russia were ‘thoroughly employed’;
3 there was a ‘certainty’ of successful cooperation by the Siberian forces;
4 the British flotilla on the Dvina river was ‘adequate’.

The first two conditions had been met. Of the other two, the development of the Siberian advance remained to be seen. But Churchill had never informed the Admiralty in time of this proposed advance to Kotlas; they had simply been planning for a withdrawal of British forces from their winter positions back to Archangel; and the level of the water in the Dvina up-river was now at the last moment known to be generally low in June and July. The monitors and the gunboats already at Archangel would be unable to get up to Kotlas. On May 28, the Admiralty had sent an urgent wire (no. 35) to Captain Altham (SNO Dvina river), asking him what vessels he now proposed using, in the upper reaches of
the Dvina, for offensive operations and minesweeping. To this, there had as yet been no reply.

On the Eastern front in late May, the Bolshevik southern group was pushing steadily forward towards Ufa on the Belaya river, which Kolchak’s Western Army should have been able to hold. But as General Gajda (the Northern Army Commander) saw that nothing was being done to halt the Western Army’s further retreat, which would completely uncover his left flank, he demanded that he be made Chief of Staff in place of Lebedev. On May 30, Kolchak and General Knox left suddenly for Perm to settle the quarrel. Though Gajda’s ‘request’ was a grave breach of discipline, Knox urged that he be given the job. Kolchak refused; the Russians, he said, would never work under a Czech. An uneasy compromise was reached as General Dietrichs (a former Russian QMG, long attached to the Czech Legion) became Kolchak’s Chief of Staff.¹

On June 1, Trotsky wired the Council of Defence on general policy. In view of the ‘enormous importance’ of the supplies and industry in the Urals, and that Kolchak was the head of the counter-revolution, and Allied recognition was imminent, ‘the Eastern Front continues to retain decisive importance’. There had therefore to be a ‘sustained offensive’ on the Eastern front, which must not be weakened* in favour of the Southern and Petrograd fronts. Lincoln Steffens (the American journalist, who had accompanied Bullitt to Moscow, and whom Trotsky knew) was quoted as saying that the ‘League of Nations has “flooded” Siberia with Entente troops, American ones among them’. This must at once be verified by reconnaissance up to an agreed ‘strategic defensive line’, as ‘we cannot at present advance to Vladivostok’, he admitted. They had thus to build up ‘strategic lines [switch-position lines]’ in the Volga basin and the Urals. Any withdrawal on the Eastern front would only encourage recognition of Kolchak. ‘Once committed, the Entente would go on and on’, he warned. The Eastern front was thus the most important front. This was a just appreciation of the Bolshevik military position and of Allied intentions.²

On June 3, however, Gajda retook Glazov, half-way between Perm and Viatka. ‘I am extremely disturbed’, Lenin wired to the Eastern front next day. Trotsky was delighted with the Third Army. What has happened to it?²

On the 6th, however, Lenin warned the Eastern front that the position on the Southern front was ‘so grave’ that their troops that had been withdrawn could not be replaced. They must mobilise every man, and collect all rifles. ‘Punish concealment of rifles by shooting’, Lenin added. ‘I regard the possible advance by Kolchak on Viatka for the purpose of achieving a break-through towards Petrograd to be the greatest danger.’²

After the reappointment of Kamenev as Military Commander, the Eastern front had submitted a plan on June 6 for a major attack by their northern group

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¹ During May and June, more than 40,000 Bolshevik troops, 100 guns and 500 machine guns were transferred from the Eastern front to other fronts.
on Krasnoufimsk (halfway between Perm and Ufa, due east of the River Kama), whose fall would gravely affect Gajda at Glazov. Relations between Kamenev (who still thought the offensive against Kolchak could be maintained, even if Bolshevik troops were transferred to their Southern front) and the C-in-C Vatsetis (who strongly disagreed) remained strained; and in view of the difficult position on the Petrograd and Southern fronts, Vatsetis turned this plan down. On the 9th, as the Bolsheviks retook Ufa, from where Kolchak’s March offensive had been launched, the Eastern front protested to Lenin that Kolchak would be able to regroup if their initial success was not pushed through.2

But there was little chance of this.

On his return from Perm, having settled the change in command, Kolchak was handed the Allied despatch—while Knox wired bluntly that the Western Army’s failure entailed reconsideration of all future plans. He hoped to have most British supplies up at the front by mid-July; and if all went well, the Kotlas route might be open by late August, which would leave six weeks for a further 100,000 sets of equipment to be passed through to Gajda to reorganise his forces near Viatka. Knox underlined that this was now all the Siberians could do; and that the local population would not fight through another winter. As the main Allied objective was to prevent Russia coming under German economic domination, which it certainly would if left to decay under Bolshevism, Knox urged that the Allies should first state that Bolshevik Terror must cease, and then either:

1 Send enough Allied troops to Archangel to enable the Allied force already there to meet the Siberian Army half-way, and also land 50,000 Allied troops at Narva to take Petrograd and strike at Moscow. If this was done, the Bolsheviks, who owed their continued existence solely to Allied disputes, would probably collapse very quickly, if not after the first battle. Or
2 instruct both Bolsheviks and White Russians to agree to an armistice, with a neutral zone between the lines, and then hold elections throughout Russia, supervised by Allied inspectors, whose safety could be guaranteed by hostages, for a Constituent Assembly. This, Knox admitted, would be opposed equally ‘by Jew Commissary and by the useless bourgeois, but 90% of the population would welcome it’.3

On the 5th, however, he explained that it was now impossible to send British troops into action with the Anglo-Russian brigade, as there were no interpreters nor proper medical services. But the British Mission and the Hampshire Regiment were now training some 2,000 Russian troops, and hoped to train gun crews at Ekaterinburg, which the Russian officer cadets could gradually take over. Knox wanted a special bonus paid to induce the necessary instructors and interpreters to volunteer from the Hampshire Regiment. But these wires never reached the War Office in London until after mid-June.3

Knox, however, felt the military position in Siberia now to be so bad that he sent Kolchak one of his rare personal letters. ‘The situation at the front renders it
necessary to write plainly’, he stated bleakly on the 7th. The British Government had undertaken to supply 200,000 sets of uniform and equipment, and vast quantities of military stores, of which Knox had now distributed over half. ‘This material assistance, if properly applied, should have enabled us to gain a real success at the front’, he wrote bluntly. But all the equipment and material given to Kappel’s elite Volga Corps, for instance, had been entirely wasted. ‘This Corps had a good cadre, but it was filled up with doubtful material—Red Army prisoners and former soldiers who had been demobilised in the rout of the revolution.’ Properly trained, it might still have done well. But it was thrown in untrained and undisciplined, and, ‘contrary to every rule of war even with regular troops, it was thrown in in driblets’. Thus, there were now some 10,000 Bolshevik troops, ‘arrayed in British uniform’, attacking the Siberian Army south of the Kama river.

The spring offensive had failed as there was no reserve. Though they still had some more British supplies, their position that winter would be very difficult if they could not open up a shorter supply line, as the Siberian population was against them, and the Czechs would not remain on the Siberian railway. A definite strategic decision must now be reached to make the best use of Allied cooperation. ‘As you know’, he went on, the British War Office, ‘previous to the recent events at the front’, favoured an advance through Viatka and Kotlas to enable Gajda to obtain equipment via Archangel to mobilise fresh troops near Viatka. ‘Recent events have increased the difficulty of this operation’, stated Knox, ‘and it is possible that General Gajda, in spite of his optimism, may be unable to open up this route before the northern Dvina freezes.’

Knox urged Kolchak to entrench all along the front, to ‘feed and pay the men regularly’, and thus organise an active defence until they could resume the offensive ‘with a reasonable chance of a permanent success’. They should then not strike all along the front, but place the reserves carefully and only attack where best. Three Siberian divisions should be kept as Kolchak’s own reserve, and they were ‘on no account to be thrown into the fight before they are properly trained and disciplined’, he stated. ‘I consider if these divisions are sent in before the beginning of August at earliest, it will be equivalent to handing over their rifles, uniform and equipment to the enemy.’

Knox then sharply criticised the training in the rear. All work had stopped for five days in May to celebrate the anniversary of the liberation of the training centres from the Bolsheviks. The General Staff should everywhere be combed out, and officers sent to the front; most of the Staff work could be done by women. British officers at Irkutsk and Tomsk had been waiting for three months for Russian officers and NCOs to train. At Irkutsk, the local general was clinging on to his best officers. At Tomsk, there were only 250 officer cadets, though

* “Including 170,000 rifles and 149 million rounds, 132 field guns and 58 howitzers, and 500,000 hand grenades.
there was room for 600, ‘and the front is crying out for officers’, he wrote despairingly. ‘We want to help if we are allowed’, he concluded, ‘but we are only being made fools of’.³

At Omsk, the British Consul Hodgson agreed with Knox. On June 9, the Foreign Office received a gloomy wire from Hodgson, in which he stated that desertions had become so frequent, even in Kappel’s Volga Corps, that a special Army order had had to be issued. All this might not matter if the rear were sound. ‘It is not’, stated Hodgson. The Omsk Government had not improved conditions in the areas freed from the Bolsheviks, and the Ministers were men of no account. ‘Fabric rests wholly upon personality of Kolchak.’ Thus, ‘open and avowed’ Allied support for Kolchak was a matter of ‘vital and immediate necessity’.⁴

At the War Office, Churchill’s anger at the Siberian reverses was easily diverted into a further outburst against Knox. ‘It is astonishing that we have not heard from General Knox any clear military account of the extent and character of the defeat sustained by Kolchak’s Southern Wing’, he minuted to the DCIGS on June 10. ‘We often get from Knox long telegrams on obscure matters of Siberian politics, but here a great operation has taken place profoundly modifying the whole situation and we are told nothing which enables an opinion to be formed. We are not, for instance, even told what losses there have been in men and guns on the Russian side. Unless you have received this information without my seeing the telegram, pray telegraph and ask for a specific report.’⁵

The General Staff, who were planning the Kotlas operation, now had to propose hasty but practical alternative measures to Kolchak. That day (the 10th), when they wired Ironside’s plans to Knox (whose wire of June 5th was still en route), they asked if the Czech troops would return to the front—in fact, if two Czech brigades, with the Anglo-Russian brigade on their right, would consider ‘cutting their way to Archangel’, from where they could be repatriated far quicker than via the Far East; if a small Czech force started, others might follow suit.⁶

Thus the British intervention, which had ostensibly been launched to rescue the Czechs, looked as if it might finish as it had begun—and as just as big a fraud; for the Kotlas operation, which Churchill had told the House of Commons would link up Russian and Siberian troops, was now to be carried out by foreign troops—by British and British-officered Russian troops from Archangel, and by Czech and British-officered Russian troops from Siberia.

In North Russia, General Maynard’s advance down the Murmansk railway continued. On May 31, some ten days after Maynard had seized the towns—and the ships—on the northern shore of Lake Onega (which had sharply improved local Russian morale), Finnish delegates came to tell him that with his immediate help, they could now overcome all Bolshevik troops on the Olonetz front from there to Petrograd. Maynard still refused to cooperate without a written guarantee that the Finns would not annex Karelia.
A slight lull now brought reverses. When Russian troops were ordered to open up a road to the Shunga peninsula (at the north of Lake Onega), they bolted so fast that some British howitzers were almost over-run; and when urged to make another attempt, they resolutely refused to move. (Russian morale cannot have been much improved by the arrival on June 6 of the Russian General Skobeltsin to take over local command at Murmansk. His manner was unassuming and quiet, records Maynard, though ‘his quietness indeed was so marked as to lend an impression of habitual sadness’.)

Two more White Finnish emissaries then came to tell Maynard that, though recently worsted by the Bolsheviks, some 3,000 White Finns were only awaiting his order to renew their advance; their nearest detachment was 50 miles away, and they were scattered over an 100-mile front. But as the White Finns still openly spoke of annexing Karelia, Maynard still could not agree to combined operations. However, he would much like White Finnish help, he wired the War Office, if the Karelian question could be settled, as all his Allied troops were being withdrawn, and the Russian troops were unreliable. If there were combined operations, half the Finnish force should contact him, the other half should attack Petrozavodsk. Maynard’s advance down the Murmansk railway, ostensibly to raise Russian recruits to go on down to Petrograd, was thus clearly running into difficulties—and he was a long way from base. 

At Archangel, brisk planning went ahead. On June 1, Ironside’s Chief of Staff, General Walshe, informed the various British Generals that their main task was to ‘effect a junction with the Siberian Army by capturing Kotlas’, and then to forward all the necessary supplies to Kolchak via Archangel. After the three British brigades had captured Kotlas, one would hold Kotlas and the northern Dvina river line; a second brigade would either advance towards Viatka, or move south down the Dvina (towards Vologda); while the third brigade would support a smaller force which would set out, when the other brigades moved, down the Vologda railway. These operations would begin in the first week of July.

On June 4, the War Office wired Ironside that it thought Kolchak still intended to capture Viatka, which would force the Bolsheviks to abandon the Perm-Vologda railway as far as Kotlas. But this offensive might now be delayed or seriously weakened owing to Kolchak’s recent reverses. Ironside should, however, prepare to strike an immediate hard blow against the Bolsheviks, and wire his plans.

That night, Ironside assured the DMO that he would not involve his force in any operations that could not be broken off at any moment. He would shortly launch a small offensive on the Dvina front with Russian troops only, supported by a fresh British regiment, to test the Bolshevik strength. As the second relief brigade was due at Archangel on the 5th, he could attack in strength from July 1, and break the Bolshevik front completely. If the news from Kolchak was good, the Russians could then push on towards Kotlas (which was not what his Chief of Staff had told his generals). If the news was bad, he could establish Russian troops in good positions from which they could resist, at least until he had embarked
British troops. But he strongly urged that no bad news from Siberia should be given to the British press, as he did not want local Russian morale lowered.  

On June 6, the day after the second Relief Brigade reached Archangel, Ironside wired more fully to the War Office. Operations could begin in early July, he stated; but Kolchak must keep his right flank ‘at least’ at Glazov, on the Perm-Viatka railway. All British conscripts were being withdrawn, and all the American troops would have sailed by July 1. Bolshevik morale on the Dvina and Vaga rivers was bad, their troops had little food and poor equipment. ‘Desertions frequent, and all our raids have succeeded with ease’, he wired. ‘A strong push will upset everything.’ One British brigade and the Slavo-British legion should advance on Kotlas, while a second brigade at Bereznik (the junction of the Dvina and Vaga rivers) should attack the Bolsheviks along the River Vaga (towards Vologda), destroy their material and enlist their troops. All this should enable Kotlas to be seized within fifteen days with ‘very few casualties’; the Dvina river however was now too low to enable the monitors to reach Kotlas, ‘but flotilla is sufficient’, he emphasised. At the same time, Russian troops would protect their flank by an advance down the Vologda railway against Plesetskaya, using the new poison gas, ‘which will be no danger to non-combatants’, he claimed.

If there was then a chance of a link-up with the Siberian Army, he would advance thirty miles south of Kotlas to cut the railway and block the Sukhona river (the river link between Kotlas and Vologda), ‘but in no case further’. The Slavo-British legion would remain at Kotlas, while the British brigade cleared the area of the river Vychegda (east of Kotlas), and brought in the Siberian right flank. The second brigade at Bereznik would block the River Vaga, while part moved towards the Vologda railway, and part back to Pinega (just east of Archangel). If there was no chance of a link-up, they would simply clear the River Vychegda, and hold on to Kotlas as long as possible, send all the river craft downstream to Archangel, and neutralise Kotlas as a Bolshevik winter base. Ironside underlined: ‘There will be no danger of being cut off in either case, as a withdrawal from Kotlas with our present flotilla is assured at all times.’

This was untrue. On June 3, as Captain Altham arrived up river in Borodino, Admiral Green replied to the Admiralty that their telegram no. 35 (of May 28, which enquired what vessels Altham proposed to use for offensive operations and minesweeping in the low water up-river) had been forwarded to him. ‘My own strong impression’, added the Admiral, ‘is that only river gunboats and the tunnel minesweepers will be able to be used.’ This drew an angry response from Collard. ‘IMMEDIATE’, he replied to Admiral Green. ‘Please request Captain Altham to reply immediately to Admiralty telegram number 35 as matter is urgent.’ There was still no reply.

On the 6th, as various monitors, tugs and lighters, and the four ‘Dance’ class minesweepers, left Murmansk for Archangel, and the Admiralty assured Admiral Green that all the guns (save one), for which Captain Altham had asked on May 20, would shortly be sent out, Captain Collard minuted to the DCNS that Admiral Green had now definitely stated that he did not require the last two
monitors. ‘Every effort is being made to find some more suitable vessels with a draft of less than 4 feet’, he wrote, ‘but it does not appear that there are any available vessels anywhere.’ Collard now submitted that the refitting of the two monitors should be stopped, and that they should be scrapped.

‘This annoying waste of money is, of course...due to the change in W.O. plan of campaign’, minuted the DCNS the same day.\(^\text{11}\)

Ironside’s plans, despatched on June 4 and 6, had now reached the War Office. On the 8th, Churchill forwarded them to Sir Henry Wilson in Paris. ‘If you consider that the plan proposed is sound in a military sense’, stated Churchill in a covering note, ‘will you please bring it before the Prime Minister as soon as possible and ask him to sanction it.

‘You should represent to him that it is not a matter of policy but a purely military operation within the limits of the policy which has already been pursued. Unless he wishes it, therefore, it does not require to be brought specially before the Cabinet, though I am quite ready to do so with his authority.

‘If you have any difficulty in obtaining the Prime Minister’s assent, please let me know at once and I will come over myself on Thursday [the 12th] or Friday [the 13th], as I attach the greatest importance to a speedy settlement of this business. I hope, however, to receive a telegram from you on Tuesday [the 10th], or Wednesday [the 11th] at the latest, saying that it is all right. I am sure that if you go to breakfast and have Kisch in attendance with his maps, you will obtain a favourable result.’\(^\text{12}\)

The War Office was by now very anxious about the Kotlas operation—as well it might be. On June 7, as further ships had left Murmansk for Archangel, the Principal Naval Transport Officer at Archangel (PNTO) had informed the Admiralty that military forces were advancing up-river; and General Ironside had shown him a War Office wire, asking if stores for the Siberian Army could also be taken up-river. The PNTO had replied that this could be done, if his original estimate for craft was met. But, he warned the Admiralty, ‘draught of water will be a controlling factor as in July and August a very low river is anticipated.’\(^\text{13}\)

That day (the 7th), Captain Collard wired yet again to Admiral Green. ‘Immediate. Please request Captain Altham to reply immediately to Admiralty telegram number 35 [enquiring which vessels he proposed to use for offensive operations and minesweeping in the low water up-river] as matter is urgent’ This crossed a wire from Green, stating that Altham wanted the message repeated. This Collard did next day. ‘Request Captain Altham to reply immediately as matter is urgent’, he added. ‘Understood this had already been referred to Captain Altham for report.’ Finally on the 9th, Altham wired the Admiralty—presumably in answer—giving the situation on the River Dvina up to the 7th. ‘Worst shallow patch 7 feet at Khohnogory [only 45 miles upstream from Archangel]...river stopped falling at present. Normally river falls July and reaches lowest depth end of July. Monitors are being used whenever possible in order to reserve gunboats. Gunboats are being lightened for emergency duty on upper reaches. 6 inch guns will be mounted on barges or rafts of shallow draft as soon as those asked for
arrive. “Dance” class and local paddle steamers available for minesweeping’, stated Altham. The same day, the PNTO at Archangel wired the Admiralty to ask how many craft would reach Archangel and be ready for service by July 1, ‘as by that date preliminary troop movements are expected to be complete’, he warned, ‘and serious operations will commence please give draught of all craft’.

Light craft were not the only things missing. On the 10th—by when 4 more monitors, the 4 minesweepers, and other vessels, had reached Archangel from Murmansk—the SNO Archangel passed on this message from Altham. ‘Request information when charts [for] upper Dvina river may be expected urgently required.’ Collard replied tersely. ‘Inform Captain Altham that charts of upper Dvina are in “Pegasus”’.13

A wire then reached the War Office from Archangel, giving the gist of an interview which Ironside had given in the first days of June to the local press, and which, it seems, had just been published by the Archangel press (perhaps on hearing of the publication in The Times of June 6 of bad news from Siberia). Ironside was quoted as saying that with the local Russian troops and the first Relief Brigade, he had everything needed to carry out that summer’s plan, which was to transfer the base of the Russian National Army from Siberia to Archangel. Everything needed would be shipped to Archangel during the summer. ‘As soon as the second contingent of volunteers arrives, I shall move up the river and take Kotlas’, stated Ironside. Russian troops would have all the supplies necessary, and would be supported ‘for a short time’ by the new British troops, whose ‘excellent quality’ would enable that summer’s campaign in North Russia to be carried out promptly, and ‘to establish ourselves at Kotlas, Vologda and Petrograd’. The entire North Russian base would then be in ‘our’ hands, ‘and we can get busy with the centre and south’.14

Churchill reacted severely when he saw this on June 10. ‘This is very disquieting’, he minuted to the DCIGS. ‘I have lately been carefully dwelling on the process of evacuation in public in order to conceal any impending movement. I cannot understand how General Ironside could have allowed himself to use language of this kind in an untrustworthy quarter.

‘Apart altogether from the military disadvantages, political difficulties will be caused here if it is thought that an offensive operation is impending. I have been considering what course we should actually adopt when the operation starts. Should we, for instance, allow daily progress to be chronicled or should we shut off all news for ten days or so until definite results have been obtained? I favour the latter. I think Ironside should get his correspondents together on the eve of the advance, take them into his confidence, and then shut off all references of any kind to his forward movement.’14

In Paris, all was well. ‘I lunched with L.G.’, noted Sir Henry Wilson in his diary on the 10th, ‘& afterwards explained Ironside’s proposals to him & to Bonar on the map & he made no objection.’ The CIGS at once wired this good news to Churchill. ‘I cross tonight and hope to see you tomorrow afternoon’, he added.14
Thus, by June 11, the Kotlas operation in North Russia, designed to link up Russian troops in Siberia and at Archangel, had developed into a dangerous Transarctic military adventure by British and Czech (i.e. foreign) troops; and though general Bolshevik mutiny had now laid Petrograd wide open, the Golovin master-plan, which would coordinate the Kotlas operation with a major Baltic offensive, and thus clear the whole area north of Moscow (a more which Lenin feared, and for which General Knox, the main British expert on Russia, was pressing from Siberia), had been totally rejected by the War Office.

When the War Cabinet met at 6.30 pm that evening, Churchill first referred to a paper he had recently circulated to the Cabinet entitled ‘The Expansion of General Knox’s Mission in Siberia’. The idea was to form a Slavo-British unit with British officers and NCOs; and he had approved the matter on May 14. The same day, however, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had drawn the War Cabinet’s attention to a wire from Consul Hodgson in Siberia, who had referred to the proposal; and the Chancellor had pointed out that such a step committed Britain to ‘more definite support’ of Kolchak’s Government than it had given up to now. Lord Curzon had then agreed that this was ‘closely related’ to the recognition of Kolchak. But the War Cabinet disallowed the proposal before hearing the views of the Foreign Office, the War Office, and the British delegates in Paris.

Churchill now said he felt, and Mr Balfour, with whom he had discussed the matter in Paris, had concurred, that how the increased personnel of the British Mission in Siberia should be employed was a ‘purely departmental matter’. On May 23, General Knox had wired with further proposals along the same lines; and Churchill said he had approved them, and directed that action should be taken. When discussing the matter with Balfour, he said he had felt disinclined at having to refer the matter again to the Cabinet, as no new principle was involved, ‘and the question was quite within his own scope, and was also in accordance with his policy’. Balfour had agreed that further reference to the Cabinet seemed unnecessary. In reply to a question, Churchill said that he had had ‘no opportunity’ of discussing the matter with the Prime Minister, only with Balfour.15

As Balfour was safely in Paris, it was highly unlikely that the War Cabinet now realised that Churchill was really talking about using the Anglo-Russian brigade and the Czechs in the Kotlas operation.

The War Cabinet, under Lord Curzon’s presidency, then went into closed session to discuss, at Churchill’s request, the Kotlas operation, to which the Prime Minister had consented, subject to the approval of the Cabinet. Churchill explained that it was necessary to have the consent of both the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet as ‘for the first time, we proposed to depart from our present defensive policy and embark upon definite aggressive action against the Bolsheviks’.

Sir Henry Wilson stated that in two to three weeks time, while a Russian force would go down the Vologda railway to Plesetskaya, Ironside would advance with
one British and one Russian brigade upon Kotlas, which he hoped to take within fifteen days. If, after the capture of Kotlas, it was then feasible to link up with Gajda, Ironside would take part of his force thirty miles south of Kotlas to block the Sukhona river (the river link between Kotlas and Vologda), while another part would clear the River Vychegda area (east of Kotlas), and link up with the Siberian right flank. If it was not possible to link up with Gajda, Ironside would hold Kotlas as long as possible, and simply clear the River Vychegda area, sending all craft down the river to Archangel, and thus denying it as a base to the Bolsheviks before the winter. Kolchak had to keep his right flank near Glazov, while Ironside was making ready; and when Ironside advanced, he would move towards Viatka. If a link-up was made, Ironside would once more be able to base himself on Archangel. ‘The morale of our two brigades, which were composed of picked men only, was excellent’, stated Sir Henry Wilson, and the Slovak troops, who would be taking part, were ‘also in very good heart’. 15

Churchill added that this plan ‘precluded any possibility of General Ironside’s troops being cut off’.

Sir Henry Wilson went on that the worst that could happen was that the enemy would run, and that British troops would strike a blow in the air; or that Gajda would not meet them. In any case, Britain could always withdraw. ‘Unfortunately, the enemy had only to evaporate in order to spoil the coup.’ The objectives were to hit the enemy hard, and to join up with ‘friendly forces’ coming from the south. Once the link-up was made, Britain would hand over to Kolchak, and then withdraw from North Russia. The whole intention was to facilitate that withdrawal. But if Britain just tried to clear out, ‘we would have the whole pack of Bolsheviks at our heels and would be risking a possible disaster’. Ironside had anyhow been told to withdraw before the port of Archangel closed in October or November.

The First Sea Lord warned that as British naval forces would have to advance along the Dvina river in boats, they would have to proceed cautiously owing to mines, and might take longer than fifteen days to reach their objective. The naval ratings, who would man the 10 gunboats and 6 motor-boats, were not conscripts, but ordinary long-service men, and ‘absolutely to be trusted’. British naval policy in North Russia was simply to support British troops. ‘Unfortunately’, Monitors could not take part; but the Admiralty was sending a number of barges and heavy guns. (But he did not add that this was ‘unfortunately’ due to the rapid fall in the Dvina river, and that Ironside had insisted that proper naval support was essential to the success of the Kotlas operation.)

Edwin Montagu (Secretary of State for India) and Lord Curzon disapproved of British troops taking the offensive. Montagu pointed out that it had been said that the ‘sole purpose’ for the despatch of more British troops to North Russia was to enable British troops already there to withdraw in safety. ‘Was this move a part of that operation?’ Curzon expressed concern about the pledges given in Parliament.

Sir Henry Wilson retorted that the men taking part were not ‘driven conscripts’,* but were ‘tremendously keen about the whole expedition’. Admiral
Kolchak had known all along that Britain intended to carry out some such operations, but this was the first time that they had been put forward ‘in any detailed form’. Kolchak’s own forward movement would be ‘all right ‘if he secured command of the [Kama] river’. He was fully aware that whatever happened, ‘we did not intend to remain in North Russia another winter’. The Kotlas area could supply us with ample food, ‘especially if we managed to link up with the south’.

Churchill added that he had fully explained British policy in his recent speech in the House, and there was nothing inconsistent in the proposed operations. ‘He foresaw no difficulty in justifying to Parliament the present plans, which were simply designed to secure our withdrawal from North Russia, more especially if, as he saw no reason to doubt, they were successful.’ The repatriation of the Czechs would be ‘much facilitated’ by these operations, and they would be told that it was ‘up to them to fight their way home through Kotlas before November’. (This was the first that the War Cabinet had heard that these operations even involved the Czechs—of whom Churchill, quite wrongly, seemed to assume that Gajda was in command.) As the Czechs ‘professed a great contempt for the Bolsheviks’, Churchill added, he felt that they ‘might be induced to make the effort’. General Denikin had recently gained a great victory over the 10th Red Army, he added hopefully, and was now advancing with ‘powerful forces’. If he could take Astrakhan and Tsaritsin, he could consolidate his position, and dominate the Caspian. The recognition of Kolchak would be ‘considerably to our advantage’, as Britain might thus induce both America and Japan to play a larger part in Siberia.

With that, the War Cabinet decided to ‘approve the proposed operations’.15

Sir Henry Wilson’s note in his diary that day is suitably laconic. ‘Cabinet at 6.30…I explained our proposals for Ironside’s attacks on Kotlas & joining hands with Kolchak via Kotlas & Viatka. They all agreed to my proposals.’16

But later that evening, Curzon wrote to Churchill that in view of this Cabinet decision, he was ‘rather concerned’ at a wire that had just come from Vladivostok. He agreed that Gajda, on whom Churchill relied to advance to meet British forces, was in a serious position, and that the Siberian Army might postpone all idea of a renewal of its advance for the present. ‘In these circumstances’, asked Curzon, ‘are you not apprehensive of a fiasco?’

Churchill replied stoutly to Curzon next day. ‘The news from the Siberian front is disappointing but not necessarily final.’ There was no question of any British move before July 1, and the operations could be stopped up to the very last moment, when the whole situation must be reviewed in the light of the existing facts. ‘The military authorities are inclined to consider the seizure of the enemy’s flotilla, which is to be done at the first stroke, as an essential step in a

* This phrase is in inverted commas in the Cabinet minutes, and was evidently spoken with sarcasm.
well conducted evacuation. In any case, there is no need to take a final decision now.'

At Archangel, there was a sharp drop in temperature and a sudden heavy snowstorm when news arrived on June 13 that Ironside’s operations were approved. But this did not alleviate a tense atmosphere. The Bolsheviks, whose guns outranged the British naval guns, had begun floating down hundreds of small mines, and their propaganda sharply increased. Where would the next Russian mutiny be? For the moment, all the fronts remained ‘curiously quiet’, recorded, Ironside, and there were an increasing number of enemy deserters, who simply said that they were deserting as they were not getting enough food.

On the 10th, Captain Altham had wired the Admiralty that river conditions were ‘favourable’ for the despatch of two or more 4.7 inch or 4.6 inch guns, of the longest possible range, mounted on barges with 2 feet 6 inches draught, which should arrive by July 15. ‘General Ironside concurs’, added Altham. ‘As the Bolshevik batteries are outranging our ships’ guns’, minuted Captain Collard on this wire next day, ‘it is submitted that these may be urgently provided if the material is available.’ On the 11th (as Pegasus reached Archangel with the charts for the upper Dvina), the Admiralty informed the PNTO at Archangel that a number of barges to take stores for the Siberian Army up river, were en route for Murmansk, as well as some tugs of 5 feet 10 inches and 5 feet draught, and two tugs of 3 feet draught (and that twelve tugs of 3 feet draught, which had just reached England, should arrive at Archangel by July 1). That day, Captain Altham recorded, ‘The river has not fallen any more, although it probably will do so next month’. General Ironside therefore now decided to capture Troitsa, as an advance base from which to launch the Kotas operation.

On the 14th, the SNO Archangel informed the Admiralty that the depotship Haldon, 4 monitors and the 4 minesweepers had been lightened, and sent upriver; and they reached Kurgomen, save for 2 minesweepers, two days later. ‘No more ships drawing over seven feet should be sent above Bereznik until river rises’, Altham warned the Admiralty on the 16th. That day, Captain Collard (who could see what was likely to happen) wired urgently to Admiral Green. ‘Secret. To be decyphered by Rear Admiral personally’, he stated. ‘Policy as at present defined is to evacuate Archangel before next winter. If junction has not been effected between Archangel forces and Kolchak, this evacuation may be serious operation’, he warned. ‘Until situation is perfectly clear, Admiralty do not consider naval forces at Archangel should be reduced.’

On June 16th, The Times had the headline: ‘General Ironside’s plans for Archangel’; ‘Offensive with Russian troops’. This most injudicious report, sent from Archangel on the 14th, stated that fresh British troops would be ready to cooperate with the Russian troops before July ‘so that Bolshevism in North Russia may be dealt a blow which may determine its existence’, it read. The intention is to evacuate the country when Admiral Kolchak is able to hold his own, but…we cannot evacuate without taking what may seem an offensive.’ Archangel harbour was full of naval craft of the ‘latest design’, and there was ‘every
indication of a speedy settlement if sheer force can effect one’, the Times correspondent wrote. ‘General Ironside’s intention is to use for this operation only Russian troops, especially Dyer’s battalion, composed of ex-Bolshevik prisoners, trained with Russian and British officers.’ The fresh British troops would be held in reserve to counter a ‘possible success’ of the Bolsheviks. This report not only gave Ironside’s plans away, but showed the Bolsheviks just which Russian unit to concentrate on.

In Paris that morning, both at and after breakfast, the Prime Minister had a long talk about North Russia with Lindley, who was just back from Archangel, and with the CIGS. ‘The Prime Minister is rather frightened and very much averse from getting in any way mixed up by a too forward advance from Archangel’, Sir Henry Wilson informed Churchill, ‘and the paragraph which particularly caught his eye was Ironside’s proposal [in his wire of June 6th] under certain eventualities to go 30 miles south of Kotlas. Lindley gave Ironside the highest character as a man of sober sense and good judgment and this had considerable weight with the Prime Minister’, Sir Henry Wilson underlined. But he had asked the CIGS to wire Ironside making two points quite clear: first, that under ‘no circumstances whatever’ was he to become so embroiled that an expedition would have to be sent to pull him out, ‘because no expedition would be sent’; and second, under ‘no circumstances whatever’ was he to run any chance of not being able to withdraw his entire force before the ice set in.

Sir Henry Wilson pointed out that both these questions had already been answered in Ironside’s telegram, ‘and I made him read this telegram again, but he still expressed so strong a desire for me to send a telegram to Ironside that of course I at once agreed I would do so’. 17

From his present advance base at Bereznik (which was already becoming so disorganised that it was like ‘a sort of old-fashioned Clapham junction’, reported Captain Altham), Ironside now launched his small attack along the upper Dvina to capture Troitsa. On the night of the 15th, Captain Altham came on board a CMB, just above Bereznik, and they cruised up and down, during which time, ‘we hit the bottom about 8 times (SNO River thought he knew the channels a bit too well)’, recorded a CMB officer. In fact, the newly arrived charts for the upper Dvina were absolutely useless. (‘The Navy supplied the river charts and the Army the maps’, Captain Altham later reported, ‘but the Russian surveys were so old or inaccurate and the river changes its channels so much from year to year that neither charts nor maps could be absolutely relied on.’)

On the 17th, a small naval action took place at Kurgomen, and the British gunboats were sent for. ‘They had orders not to fire unless the Bols did’, records the CMB officer. ‘Having started the battle, the Bolo gun barges then started off on our 60 pdr battery, who replied and so there was quite a matey like show’, he writes. ‘Just a usual daily hate.’ On the 18th, Captain Altham asked the Admiralty when the gunboats Moth and Mantis would arrive. ‘Very important they have longest possible range guns’, he stated; and asked for a reply to his wire of the 10th (about the despatch of two long range guns, and some very light draught
barges). Collard replied the same day that *Mantis* should reach Archangel about July 15th, and *Moth* about a fortnight later; both had 6 inch guns.\(^{17}\) ‘There are no barges in United Kingdom suitable for mounting guns of draught approaching 2 feet 6 inches’, Collard went on; but six 6 inch and two 5 feet 5 inch guns were being shipped to Archangel about June 23. ‘You must mount these on local barges or rafts as time [is] prohibitive to construct suitable barges here’, he wired in some desperation.\(^{17}\)

Before going up-river himself, Ironside purposely spoke ‘very optimistically’ about a link-up with Kolchak, to raise the spirit of the Russian troops, who were to attack the front, while the Hampshire regiment made a detour through the forest and took the enemy in the rear. This time the Russian attack was a complete success, while British operations were a complete failure. On June 11, Colonel Sherwood Kelly V.C. had outlined the forthcoming plan of attack on Troitsa to the Hampshire regiment, who were stationed at Kurgomen. Russian troops would make a frontal assault, and drive the Bolsheviks out to the east, where two Hampshire companies would be waiting, having made a detour of eighteen miles through the forest. Owing to the swampy ground, they could only take some ponies to carry their ammunition. Though pledged to secrecy about the whole operation, they were assured of its simplicity. ‘The whole manoeuvre from our point of view was to be in the nature of a picnic with some quite good sport of potting “Bolos” at the end of it’, was the impression left on the mind of one Private in the Hampshires.\(^{17}\)

On June 18, two companies marched out of Kurgomen, headed by their band playing ‘lively and cheering marches’. At the edge of the forest, the band halted, still playing, while the troops marched past. Inside the forest, they were soon wading knee deep in soft, boggy swamp, and the ponies were floundering about up to their girths; and frequently had to be unloaded, and hauled out. The troops were soon prostrated, as the burning sun beating down on the forest swamp produced extreme damp heat. A wade through a small river momentarily cooled them off; but they arrived that night in their positions totally exhausted.

At 4 am next morning, they waited for the retreating Bolsheviks to appear. Little could be seen. ‘In a blind way we made our way forward to the very edge of the forest until we were able to see the wooden houses of Troitsa and, above the roofs, the sphere of the church. Figures were seen running about among the houses and we spent about an hour potting at anything we could see moving in the village.’ As they lay wondering how things were going, they began to realise that they were listening to Bolshevik rifles, not White Russian rifles. ‘And as far

\(^{17}\) I am grateful to Mr C.R. Swan, of Pinner, Middlesex, who served with the Hampshire regiment in North Russia, and who took part in this action, for this account, which he wrote down not long after it took place. He personally heard Colonel Sherwood Kelly speaking on the field telephone. Mr Swan underlines the fact that prior to this incident, Colonel Sherwood Kelly had been going round muttering for some time; it was not a sudden outburst.
as we could judge from the sound direction there were indications of a flanking movement on the part of our enemy on both sides of our little “shooting gallery”.

Soon, word came to withdraw quickly and quietly; they were apparently almost surrounded. After wearily retreating in single file for about a mile, they were told to dump their surplus ammunition, and open their iron rations. They drank from pools of bog water. After a further march, they lay down in safety. Colonel Sherwood Kelly then spoke by field telephone to Brigade HQ, who evidently ordered him to launch a further attack on Troitsa. He replied: ‘I have only a haversack and walking stick and am all in, but my men have full equipment and rifles and they must be all in. We are coming back!’

Ironside was furious. When interviewed next day, Sherwood Kelly could not explain why he had so acted. ‘He had obviously lost his head’, thought Ironside, ‘thinking that he had overshot his position and gone too far forward. It was a clear case of disobedience of orders.’ Ironside withdrew the battalion from the line, and sent Sherwood Kelly home for demobilisation, instead of having him courtmartialed, as he seemed worn out. But as patrols pushed further and further each day up the Dvina, they found the enemy in hopeless confusion, not holding a line at all, while the Bolshevik flotilla had withdrawn, and small mines were being floated down instead. The first small attack with the fresh British troops of the relief brigades had not been a success.

The Times, however, covered up for the War Office. A report, sent from Bereznik on the 21st, stated that The Times correspondent was just back from the capture of Topsa, ‘which the Russians took after a brilliant operation’. Russian conduct was a ‘tribute to the discretion’ of Ironside. A combined party had set off at 4 am through the forest, lead by Colonel Sherwood Kelly, who went on to Troitsa, leaving Topsa to the Russians, which they took. ‘Meanwhile, Colonel Sherwood Kelly marched 27 versts [18 miles] in tropical heat, but before Troitsa was reached the Bolsheviks took advantage of a temporary indecision, mounted machine guns on the crest, and compelled Colonel Sherwood Kelly to retire to Topsa.’

This was later printed in The Times on June 30, under the headline, ‘General Ironside’s confidence justified—Russians’ brilliant operation’.

At Murmansk, there had been a quick victory. To avenge the ignominious defeat of his Russian troops on the Shunga peninsular (on Lake Onega), General Maynard organised an immediate counter-attack. What Maynard called a ‘sprinkling of Serbians’ was added to each Russian company, some Allied infantry—quite against Maynard’s orders—was brought in to protect the flank, other local troops were reinforced with some Royal Engineers; while Maynard’s ADC (who had ‘pleaded so eloquently to be allowed to undertake the job that I had not the heart to refuse him’, he writes) led a party of twenty Russian volunteers, mounted upon mules. The attack on June 13 was a complete success. For when they saw these raw Russian cavalymen, with their attendant Serbian ‘whippers-in’, goading their mules into a brisk trot, the Bolsheviks fled; and their position,
though well fortified, was captured without any casualty. Honour had been restored. The War Office then instructed Maynard to consolidate his present position, and go no further; motorboats and even tanks, it was hoped, were on the way. ‘Your British troops are to be congratulated on having given a good example to the Russians once more’, he was told, and his success had much assisted Ironside (though quite how is unclear).\textsuperscript{18}

Churchill, who had so suddenly sprung on the War Cabinet of the 11th that the Czech troops were to be involved in the Kotlas operation, now had to obtain the leave of the Prime Minister. Two days later, on the 15th (as the Bolsheviks retook Glazov), he wrote in some alarm to Lloyd George urging that the Czechs, now guarding the Siberian railway, should be sent to strengthen Kolchak’s northern front, as ‘I do not see at the present time what resource other than the Czechos is available’. As their ‘supreme desire’ was to go home, and their repatriation the original reason for the North Russian ‘expedition’, they should be offered a passage home via Archangel, if they would ‘cut their way through’. This, Churchill stressed, would be a ‘definite part’ of the link-up between the Siberian and Archangel forces. The CIGS thought this plan ‘useful, hopeful and necessary’. Churchill urged the Council of Four to consider it at once.\textsuperscript{19}

He also enclosed a report by the French General Janin on the defeat of Kolchak’s Western Army. ‘This is the first clear and comprehensive military account which has reached us’, he wrote, ‘and I am bound to say that it compares very favourably with the sloppy, piecemeal and amateurish productions which we are receiving from Knox. The latter is a good energetic man, but appears to me to be lacking both in military knowledge and mental force.’ He was thus considering the selection of a ‘more adequate officer’.

Churchill then launched into a further attack on Knox in a letter the same day to Sir Henry Wilson. On other papers, he wrote, he had already commented on the ‘poor quality’ of the reports and messages received from Knox, and Janin’s wire of May 30 threw into ‘painful contrast’ the military aspect of Knox’s information. Here was a ‘terse and comprehensive’ staff paper, drafted in ‘admirable military form’, giving a clear impression of the situation as a whole. ‘Surely there are officers in our service capable of similar work. We should have at this most important centre an officer of the highest attainments in whose judgment we have the utmost confidence, and not merely a good energetic man who is clearly out of his depth.’\textsuperscript{19}

All this is grossly unfair criticism of Knox, as already pointed out; and is perhaps due to the arrival of Knox’s wire of June 5, stating that British troops could not go into action with the Anglo-Russian brigade, on which Churchill had now evidently set his heart to try and pull the Kotlas operation out of the fire. Churchill’s support of Janin, even when the report of Janin’s flagrant personal betrayal of Kolchak reached London in 1920, is more perplexing. Janin was the worst type of French military politician, and he received short shrift from his military and political superiors on his return to Paris. He has now received his long overdue deserts from Peter Fleming.
Churchill next took further action to try and bring together the White Russian politicians in Paris and the Prime Minister’s entourage. In a letter to General Spears of the 15th, answering his of the 10th (which is missing), Churchill first instructed him to take no further action about Kerensky, who had been sharply criticising Kolchak.

2) ‘Seek an opportunity of talking to Philip Kerr and telling him of the steps I have taken through you to dispel the unfavourable impressions which the Paris Russians had formed of his influence…’

3) I consider Kolchak’s answer very good and well-conceived, and in view of the fact that the allies have accepted it as satisfactory, there is nothing more to be said.

4) I will ask C.I.G.S. what he thinks about our transmitting Sazonov’s despatches instead of the French.

5) We are arranging for a W/T installation to connect Denikin and Kolchak, and much progress has been made.

6) I should like you to get in touch with the Savinkov group and let me know more about them.’

Spears replied a few days later. ‘I saw Philip Kerr this morning…I spoke to him on the line mentioned in paragraph 2 of your Memorandum of the 15th. Kerr spoke to me at some length about the Russians here, and he told me the Prime Minister was determined not in any way to be mixed up with what could be described as the “emigre” element, which includes Sazonov. I spoke to him also about Savinkov and he agreed with me that the latter did not come under the heading of “emigre”.’

A reply then came from Paris about the Czechs. ‘I have now had two talks with the Prime Minister about your proposal to get the Czechos, who are now in Siberia, to fight their way out to Viatka and Archangel’, wired Sir Henry Wilson to Churchill on the 16th, ‘and I think he will do all he can to further this scheme. I will, however, jog his memory day by day and will lose no opportunity of pressing your proposal.’ Churchill was evidently somewhat dismayed not to receive a more positive answer.

In the Foreign Office, it was felt that something should be done to explain British Russian policy to the British public. The Russia Department had been impressed by an article by the labour M.P. Clynes in the Observer of June 15, in which he doubted whether the British Government appreciated the ‘depth of feeling which exists in the minds of thousands of workers with regard to Russia…The truth is obtainable’. A proper British Commission should be sent for a few weeks into Russia to discover if the conditions really justified the despatch of British troops and munitions.

‘There can be no doubt that there is a great deal in what he says’, minuted the Russia Department. ‘No properly organised campaign has ever yet been undertaken by the Government to explain our policy in Russia to the masses of
the people…The proper course is for the Prime Minister to give a lead.’ Someone just back from Siberia ‘felt sure that Admiral Kolchak and his entourage felt that we had an absolutely free hand as regards according him support’. General Knox did ‘not sufficiently impress on him the point of view of large circles of opinion in this country. With General Denikin the position is still worse since he is more reactionary…I think we should lose no time in bringing the position home to Sir C.Eliot and I submit a draft.’

‘I entirely agree’, minuted Sir Ronald Graham on the 18th. ‘We have lost no opportunity of making representative Russians who have called here aware of the true situation and most of them, with the notable exception of M.Sazonov, have seemed to realise it.’

Lord Curzon approved, and rephrased the wire to begin thus: ‘Recognition of Admiral Kolchak’s Government has at the same time made clear the policy of the Allied Powers and…’ The Russia Department objected. The Allied Governments have not “recognised” Admiral Kolchak’s Government, they have only agreed to continue their support on certain conditions which he has accepted…We have recognised Kolchak as our candidate but not as the de facto head of the Russian State. At least this seems to be correct’

‘Very well’, replied Curzon. ‘But if we have not recognised him I don’t know what it all means. Everyone knows at bottom that it is recognition.’

A wire thus went off to Eliot stating that the Allied despatch to Kolchak had ‘made clear their policy and has given a valuable momentum to his cause’. (This was an odd phrase to use, since the Allied despatch was manifestly unclear to Lord Curzon himself.) But Kolchak should realise that there was a ‘considerable section’ of British opinion which regarded it with ‘great suspicion on the ground that the Allies are supporting the extreme reactionary elements in Russia’. Kolchak’s proclamations should in fact be worded with as much regard for British and American as for Russian opinion.

Moscow and Petrograd

In Moscow, Lenin was desperately trying to withdraw all the best Bolshevik troops from the Eastern front to reinforce the Petrograd and Southern fronts. ‘While perfectly understanding the difficulties of your position’, he wired to the Eastern front at Simbirsk on June 11, ‘we are absolutely compelled to draw on you for more and more’. Frunze (the Military Commander of the southern group on the Eastern front) protested at the transfer of yet another division. Lenin was adamant; by exerting every effort, they could hold the Belaya river line without it, thus ‘averting defeat’ on the Eastern front.

This led to a further dispute about the Eastern front. On June 12, the C-in-C Vatsetis (who, with Trotsky, did not think that the offensive against Kolchak could be maintained if troops were withdrawn) informed the Military Commander Kamenev that he must destroy Kolchak as soon as possible; but owing to the danger on both his flanks, his first objectives and lines of defence
must be the Kama and Belaya river lines. As these had already been passed, this order did not square with instructions to continue the attack; the Eastern front thus thought they were not meant to advance, and asked for further orders.22

On the 14th, some of the Central Committee met in Petrograd; as Party workers in the Red Army were becoming more and more hostile to Trotsky, Stalin seems to have spoken against Vatsetis, whom Trotsky supported. Next day, the Central Committee (strongly urged by two new arrivals from the Eastern front, one of whom was Gusev, who had now been instructed to reorganise GHQ, and made a member of the Military Revolutionary Council of the Republic) ordered the offensive to continue on the Eastern front. Trotsky was angry at this interference by the Eastern front, which should have referred the matter to the Military Revolutionary Council of the Republic (of which he was Chairman), and not applied political pressure at the centre. ‘Exasperated by his setback in the Central Committee, Trotsky is venting his rage on the Eastern Front’, wrote Gusev to Lashevitch, a comrade back at Simbirsk.

On the 16th, the Bolshevik offensive continued against Kolchak. One group crossed the Ufa river, and seriously threatened Krasnoufimsk (halfway between Ufa and Perm) and Zlatoust (where there was an important munitions factory), while another group crossed the Kama river, and threatened Kungur (between Krasnoufimsk and Perm). Thus, the 5th Army was now well placed to take Zlatoust, and the 3rd Army to take Perm itself (whose fall would prevent any advance from Siberia, through Viatka, to Kotlas and Archangel).22

‘I am surprised at Lev [i.e. Trotsky] being in a rage’, wired Lashevitch to Gusev in Moscow on the 19th, on hearing of the recent dispute in the Central Committee. ‘Our plan is proceeding ideally and, if it continues so, total annihilation of Kolchak is assured.’ Except for the right flank, their position was excellent. Kolchak’s centre was routed. ‘But this is not the main thing: the most important thing of all is we have started to move in against the enemy’s northern group, the steadiest and strongest one and one as yet undefeated. The Third Army is moving ahead rapidly.’

Lashevitch concluded: ‘We are aware of the general position and are making every effort to settle the issue on the Eastern Front as rapidly as possible so as to then switch our attention elsewhere. We are firmly convinced of success.’ He added: ‘Tell Ilitch [i.e. Lenin] that all measures have been taken to establish contact with Kolchak’s rear; that we expect rapid results.’22

North Russia

At noon on June 18, the War Cabinet reconsidered the Kotlas operation in view of the deteriorating situation in Siberia. Curzon reminded his colleagues that just after their meeting on June 11, wires had arrived announcing Kolchak’s ‘serious setback’; and further wires were far from reassuring. He had been so much disturbed that he had written to Churchill to enquire if these reverses affected the War Office’s plans. Churchill had replied that he realised the gravity of the
situation, and promised that the War Cabinet could review their former decision before orders were issued to Ironside. Curzon added that both Chamberlain and Milner insisted on this too.

Churchill then read out a wire which Sir Henry Wilson had sent to Ironside, emphasising that the Prime Minister wished it to be known that British troops were under no circumstances to become embroiled, as no relief column could be sent out from England; second, that the operation must allow for a complete evacuation from Archangel before the ice set in. Churchill now stated that the Archangel position was not wholly dependent on Gajda’s operations. The proposed advance was part of the withdrawal. The General Staff believed that the ‘real trouble’ on Kolchak’s front was now coming to an end, as the Bolshevik troops were now so far from their base. But the position was ‘not quite a happy one’. Denikin’s successes in South Russia, however, were remarkable; and he had gained much more ground than Kolchak had lost, and was being joined by the Military Commander of the 8th Red Army at the head of a ‘large insurrectionary movement’, and had taken 20,000 prisoners, with guns & booty. The General Staff thought that his further advance would draw Bolshevik troops from Kolchak’s front, who would thus be ‘considerably relieved’, possibly by the time Ironside moved. ‘In any case’, he added airily, ‘he [Churchill] had no doubt that the military experts would be able to make a case for our advance, even though the plan of joining hands with Admiral Kolchak was no longer feasible.’ He promised the War Cabinet that they would be able to revise their former decision, if they so wished, before the British troops moved. Sir Henry Wilson was returning from France on the 26th, when he would be able to advise them.

Bonar Law remarked that when Sir Henry Wilson had discussed the matter with himself and the Prime Minister in Paris, he had wondered what advantage there could be if a link-up with Kolchak were impossible; Sir Henry Wilson, however, had told them that he was pressing Kolchak through Knox to give up an advance on Moscow, and concentrate on a junction with the Archangel force. Curzon added that though it was true that Denikin had won ‘considerable victories’ in South Russia, Kolchak’s reverses were ‘very severe’. A wire received the day before stated that Kolchak had been defeated by a Bolshevik force, which had 10,000 less men. Though favouring a forward policy, he could not approve an expedition into Central Russia ‘doomed to failure’. He feared that Kolchak would still be some 200 miles away from British forces who would have to abandon the area re-won, ‘with the additional stigma of failure’. British plans should not be so far advanced that Ironside could say he was ready to move, and was going ahead on his own, and was not dependent on Kolchak. The whole operation looked much less favourable than a fortnight before.

The DMO stated that it had always been the view of the CIGS that an ‘effective blow’ must first be struck to ensure a safe evacuation of Archangel. This was the main object of Ironside’s proposed attack; but so much the better if British troops could link up with Kolchak. Whatever happened, however, the attack would assist the British withdrawal, and could only improve the Archangel
Government’s position, and enable it to protect its territory. ‘There appeared to be every reason, both military and political, for carrying out the attack.’

Bonar Law repeated that when Sir Henry Wilson had spoken to himself and the Prime Minister, he had implied that the operation should not be undertaken unless they could link up with Kolchak. Churchill suggested that preparations should go forward, but that the War Cabinet should again review the position later before an order for an advance was given.

Chamberlain did not think this sufficient: ‘The situation caused him grave concern.’ Ironside had been told that the War Cabinet had approved his operations, and he was going ahead. But he should be warned now that Kolchak’s defeat might entail their cancellation. Was this not better than to give Ironside no warning that they might ‘suddenly at the eleventh hour veto his plans?’ If an advance was really necessary for a safe withdrawal, he would not object; but when it became a ‘question of prestige’, that was a political matter, and we would gain none by advancing into Central Russia, and then at once withdrawing.

The DMO retorted that British troops would not advance alone. Ironside had 23,000 Russian troops who would ‘do their share of the fighting’, and hold the area won when British troops retired. Churchill added that he would guarantee to the War Cabinet that if they decided in a fortnight’s time to cancel the operation, he would see that they would be stopped ‘before a man had been moved’. The DMO, in answer to a question from Bonar Law, stated that Ironside had reported that the capture of Kotlas would be ‘invaluable’ for future operations, particularly for the coming evacuation.

Curzon referred to Consul Hodgson’s wire of June 11 from Omsk, which ‘gave a blacker view of the situation than even the military telegrams’. The Western Army was still demoralised, and its failure had caused the latent discontent at Omsk to errupt. Though certain changes in command had been made, it would be some time before their beneficial effect would be felt, and the Western Army, which had been ‘seriously shaken’, could renew the offensive. Hodgson also stated that the Bolsheviks were bombarding Ufa (which they had now in fact captured).

Churchill replied that he had read a wire from Janin the day before, which stated that though the Northern Army’s reserves had been thrown in to defend the western front, there were great distances in between; and the Bolshevik thrust, which had turned up towards Perm, was at least 200 miles from Kolchak’s right wing. ‘Consequently he did not at all exclude the possibility of Admiral Kolchak being able to cooperate with our troops at Archangel, but, of course’, he added carefully, ‘the Cabinet must know what the situation was before they gave final orders for an advance.’ If it became certain that Britain could expect no help from Kolchak, this would create an ‘entirely new situation’, which the War Cabinet would have to review; and the General Staff would then have to justify an advance from the point of view of a successful evacuation of Archangel alone.

Curzon suggested that Ironside be waraed that the War Cabinet would review the position later. Bonar Law wondered whether this would not upset Ironside’s
plans, if he was told that they wished to do so yet again. The DMO did not think it would upset his plans, but it would be ‘rather unsettling’ for him not to know whether the actual advance was to be made. The War Cabinet finally decided to discuss the matter again on June 27th, and to ask Sir Henry Wilson to attend; meanwhile, Ironside should continue his preparations, but not make a ‘definite advance’ until the War Cabinet so decided.23

The DMO was most displeased. ‘With reference to my statement to the War Cabinet this morning’, he minuted later in the day (apparently to Churchill), ‘that it has always been the intention of the C.I.G.S. to strike a blow at the Bolsheviks in the direction of Kotlas, in order to secure the withdrawal of Allied troops in a satisfactory manner, please see General Staff paper of April 15th.’ He enclosed a copy, and marked the relevant passages in support of his argument.

Two urgent wires went off that night explaining the Cabinet’s decision. The first, via Knox for Kolchak, stated that in order to strengthen his northern front, the War Office proposed that American or Japanese troops should replace the Czech troops on the Siberian railway, who should be offered a passage home via Archangel before ice closed the port in late October, provided they would fight their way through via Viatka and Kotlas or Vologda. Both proposals had been put to the Peace Conference; if agreed, the Prague Government would be asked to issue the necessary orders. But both were also subject to approval by Kolchak, who should answer at once. The wire explained that the War Cabinet had approved the Kotlas operation, provided Kolchak could link up with the British force. But if, because of his defeats in the South, Kolchak could not cooperate, the War Cabinet would have to consider whether to authorise it ‘merely as an isolated enterprise’. Kolchak must thus wire urgently ‘what you intend to do, and believe you can do’.24

The second wire went at 9.45 pm to Ironside. ‘Your proposed operations are approved and that approval stands. However it was as part of an operation to join hands with Kolchak that Cabinet approval was obtained.’ Owing to Kolchak’s reverses, the War Cabinet, with Churchill’s approval, would review the question on June 27, and decide whether there was sufficient prospect of a proper link up to justify the original operation; or whether to proceed with the operation independently as a necessary part of the evacuation. Ironside should therefore not start before so instructed; but continue his preparations, and wire his views on both proposals for the War Cabinet.24

Next day, the DMO, still irritated by Curzon’s criticism in the Cabinet, informed Sir Henry Wilson in Paris of what had taken place, and then again minuted to Churchill. ‘In support of what I said at the War Cabinet yesterday as to Ironside having already contemplated a situation in which no junction with Kolchak could be effected, please see last para of his wire of June 6th.’

Churchill considered this. ‘Quite true’, he wrote. ‘I am drawing Lord Curzon’s attention to it.’ He then sent the file straight over to the Foreign Office, on whose pages a sort of running Cabinet meeting took place.
‘Yes’, scribbled Curzon. ‘The point under discussion was however whether it would do more good or harm to advance & then retire.’

On its return, Churchill passed the file straight back to the DMO. ‘With reference to Lord Curzon’s minute’, wrote the DMO underneath. ‘It is not a question of withdrawing, that is to say relinquishing ground gained, but a matter of handing over the new front after capture to the Russian troops who will thus relieve our British forces & enable the latter to return to Archangel for embarkation. It is considered that if the Russian troops take over the line immediately after a notable success, quite apart from the tactical advantages of the Kotlas position, their morale will be so raised as greatly to enhance their prospects of successfully maintaining their positions for the future, if not of making a further advance.’

Late on the 20th, a wire reached Churchill which Ironside had sent from Archangel on the 19th stating that preparations for an advance on Kotlas were nearing completion; minesweeping was to begin the next day (the 20th), while a bombardment was carried out by aircraft and the British flotilla. ‘Enemy behaviour under bombardment should show their value and give indications of what his front line battalions intend to do.’

It was easier to judge Kolchak’s operations from London. But two points should be borne in mind:

1 ‘Russians are easily affected by success and if there were any wavering our arrival at Kotlas might just give that extra moral required.’
2 In any case, Ironside should be able to ‘pull in’ Kolchak’s right wing from the direction of Yarensk on the Vychegda river, and substantially reinforce the Russian force detailed to move just south of Kotlas by arming the badly armed and unarmed.

If no junction with Kolchak was possible, Ironside put forward the following points. ‘In order to be certain of an orderly evacuation it should be carried out as a peace operation. To ensure this I must disengage myself on all my fronts and render an offensive by the Bolsheviks during a reasonable period an impossibility.’ Ironside himself must thus take the offensive on the important sectors of his front to disengage and embark in peace, and so place the Russian troops in a position to maintain themselves, even though there was no link-up with Kolchak.

Ironside would thus have three objectives:

1 Capture of Plesetskaya on the Vologda railway, which was the junction of the roads leading from the railway line to Onega on the west, and Tarasevo and Shenkursk on the east, and thus prevent an enemy winter campaign.
2 Clear the Pinega area, so that the whole northern region was free of Bolsheviks.
3 ‘Advance on Kotlas for the object of destroying all workshops, depots, wharves; capturing all enemy boats, and rendering the place useless as a base
during this summer or winter. Also, to bring in the right wing of Siberians, and arm them; and to clean up the Vychegda area.  

With these three objectives gained, the evacuation could be carried out as a peace operation before November 10, leaving behind a mission whose strength could be decided on later. For the first and second objectives, the Russian troops would take the necessary action, practically unaided. For the third objective, Russian troops and the Slavo-British Legion would move south of Kotlas, if necessary, while the Relief Brigade under Sadleir-Jackson cleaned up the Vychegda area; and the other brigade, under Grogan, would return to base, when required, to take over from the conscripts being demobilised by September 1, and also perhaps supply small detachments for Pinega.

‘In no case do I think that any advance less than to Kotlas will have any effect of disengaging our forces and it does offer possible chance of bringing on Kolchak. I have no intention of allowing British forces to get into such a position that they would require relief or that they could not withdraw. I do not think that it would be advisable to continue an advance against Kotlas if the enemy really puts up a stubborn resistance.’

This was an ill-advised telegram, for Ironside was engaged in nothing less than wilful deception of the War Cabinet. For, referring to the alarming fall in the River Dvina, he wrote that very day in his diary: ‘I do not think for a minute that I can get to Kotlas but I do not want to be left wiring for permission to do things just when I want to be doing them.’ The only inkling that the General Staff were given was the change in the order of his objectives.

On receipt of this wire, the DMO added a further note to Churchill. ‘In continuation of my former minute…please see the following extract from a private letter just received from CIGS, which I think bears out everything I said.’ The extract read: ‘I do not know how Bonar thought that my view was that the move on Kotlas was only justified in order to effect a junction with Kolchak, because I expressed myself in the exact opposite sense and said that if there was no Kolchak, the move on Kotlas would become all the more necessary because if we retired now the Bolsheviks would be treading on our heels all the way to Archangel. I saw the 2 telegrams drafted by the S of S and think them quite sound.’

Churchill therefore threw the argument open again later that day. ‘You should glance at this’, he minuted to Bonar Law, Curzon and Chamberlain. ‘The military view has always favoured this operation even if isolated. There is no change of view.’

Bonar Law merely ticked this. But Chamberlain minuted that evening that Ironside was, according to the General Staff, advancing for two reasons.

a) to facilitate the withdrawal. This was quite permissible, he stated.

b) to enable the North Russian Army both to keep the field and to maintain the Archangel Government. This, he wrote, was desirable in itself, but impossible
unless the Archangel Government had inherent strength; unless the Russian troops could really stand alone; and unless Kolchak could link up with them, or somehow relieve Bolshevik pressure on the Archangel front. But as none of these desiderata really existed, Ironside should not be encouraged, under cover of withdrawal, to undertake operations not essential to the withdrawal.

Churchill answered at once. ‘I understand that the General Staff consider that the advance will not involve serious fighting by the British troops; that the Russian troops will be strong enough to hold Kotlas after it has been taken while the British withdraw: & that the destruction of the Kotlas base, flotilla etc. will protect Archangel from any speedy attack.’

He then passed the file on to Curzon, who merely added: ‘I hope it will be so. But nothing can alter the fact that the British forces will first advance & then retire.’

That day (the 20th), the DCNS decided that it was imperative to summon the War Office to the Admiralty to discuss the Dvina river operations.

Just at this moment, Churchill was presented with a file on Anglo-Soviet negotiations for the release of British prisoners of war.

‘I am asked to express an opinion on these papers’, Churchill replied. ‘I greatly regret that it shd be necessary to correspond & negotiate in these terms with the Bolshevik Government, especially by wireless en clair…I shd have thought the proper course was to draw up lists of prominent members of the Bolshevik Government and notify them that they are held personally responsible for the treatment of our prisoners & will be pursued without hope of pardon wherever they may be as long as they live if they do not insure their proper treatment.’

Curzon’s answer was sardonic. ‘The main thing is to get our people out and there is no use our standing on our dignity if we are to succeed.’

Before the Admiralty Conference with the War Office, Captain Collard provided the DCNS with a paper, listing which ships could be used on the upper Dvina reaches, ‘unless the river happens to be abnormally low’. These were: 6 gunboats, 4 minesweepers, and some local paddle steamers, and barges fitted with 5.5 inch and 6 inch guns (with ranges of 15,600 and 17,900 yards), which had been sent out to Archangel. ‘The local authorities appear to be quite satisfied, however’, wrote Collard, ‘that this small flotilla is adequate for the operations in question.’ The remaining vessels, like the 8 small monitors, could not be used on the upper reaches.

At 3.30 pm on the 23rd, present in the Admiralty were: the DCNS, the 4th Sea Lord and Captain Collard; the DMO and Colonel Steel (for the War Office); and two Ministry of Shipping officials. The DCNS (Admiral Ferguson) began by explaining that the Archangel river expeditionary force had been organised by the Admiralty during the winter ‘on the assumption that there would be no material advance from the positions then held by the Allied military forces on the River Dvina in the vicinity of Kurgomen, an assumption which had been concurred in by the War Office, and in consequence of which the vessels provided had been
only limited to a draught of about 8 feet. He wished to make it quite clear to all the Departments concerned what the Navy could do, now that the policy had been changed and an advance to Kotlas was being considered, as in the upper reaches of the Dvina the depth of water was only 4 feet at the most and might even fall to 3 feet in a dry year. Consequently the majority of the vessels which had been provided could not be employed in the upper reaches. He desired to point out that the Navy would do all in its power to cooperate in every way with the Army, but that owing to the scarcity of shallow draught vessels, it might not be possible to do all that might be expected. He then discussed the offensive operations in detail, listed the vessels (as stated by Captain Collard) which could operate in the upper reaches; and said he ‘understood that the G.O.C. [Ironside] was satisfied with the flotilla provided’.27

Mr Kemball Cook (of the Ministry of Shipping) added that the transport requirements for the river operations were ‘based on the same assumption as outlined by Admiral Ferguson, and that great difficulty was being experienced in providing such a large number of very shallow draught vessels’. Though the Principal Naval Transport Officer at Archangel (PNTO) had wired that the War Office ‘were proposing to advance to Kotlas, he [PNTO] had not definitely said that the transport would be sufficient. It seemed most unlikely that General Ironside would have proposed the advance to Kotlas unless the PNTO had given him some assurance’, remarked Kemball Cook. ‘It seemed highly probable therefore that sufficient transport was available’; but the War Office and Admiralty should wire to Ironside and the PNTO, ‘and clear up the point. But he was perfectly convinced’, Kemball Cook added strongly, ‘that the PNTO could not handle the extra stores which the War Office contemplated sending to Admiral Kolchak by way of Archangel and by water to Kotlas.’ The PNTO had said he could transport these extra stores, ‘if he were provided with the number of craft originally asked for, but these could not possibly be provided as they were not in existence’. Kemball Cook thought, however, that the Shipping Controller would agree to the stores for Kolchak being sent to Archangel, ‘providing that he was not asked to bring them away again’.27

The DMO remarked that he thought the stores ‘would have to be sent to Archangel, and that they would be left there for the use of Kolchak’s Armies later on’.

The DCNS then asked ‘if he might take it for granted’ that General Ironside was satisfied that the Naval Flotilla provided was adequate. The DMO replied that he had received ‘an assurance’ on this. (But this referred to Ironside’s wire way back on June 6th.) The DCNS next asked ‘if it might be said’ that the vessels provided would meet all the transport requirements. The DMO replied that he was ‘quite confident’ about this, ‘but at the request of Mr Kemball Cook he would send a telegram to General Ironside to clear up the matter satisfactorily’. Kemball Cook retorted that he hoped the War Office would inform the Ministry of Shipping ‘definitely’ whether the stores for Kolchak were to be sent to Archangel. The DMO replied that these stores ‘would be required at Archangel
in any case’, and the War Office would inform the Ministry of Shipping as soon as possible when they would be ready for shipment. The meeting then broke up. Whatever the War Office tried to do on the River Dvina, the Admiralty now had a clear conscience.  

At 6 pm that evening, the Admiralty wired the PNTO at Archangel. ‘Request definite opinion whether the small craft, of which you have already been advised, will suffice for the advance of the expedition up the river beyond present positions, apart from the conveyance of the extra stores for Kolchak.’ It was presumed that the PNTO agreed with Ironside, ‘but desirable [to] clear the matter up, and War Office are cabling G.O.C. in this sense. War Office have been definitely informed that small craft, over and above present arrangements, is not available for conveyance of stores to Kolchak.’

Thus, on the 23rd, the Admiralty had informed the War Office tactfully, but carefully and bluntly, that the British flotilla could not support British troops in the coming Kotlas operation, which Ironside had clearly stated was vital for its success, as it could not get up the Dvina river. The Kotlas operation, whether to achieve a link-up between forces from Archangel and Siberia, or merely to ensure a trouble-free withdrawal, was off.

But the War Office turned a blind eye to all objections to their plans. On the 24th, as rumours began to circulate of the failure of the British attack on Troitsa on June 18, the DCIGS assured the War Cabinet that these ‘present minor operations’ were connected only with minesweeping, and were not part of the Kotlas operation, which was to come later.

Meanwhile, there had been alarms in Paris. On the afternoon of June 20, news reached the Council of Four that the German Government had fallen. There was an immediate Allied Council of War in the French War Office about an Allied advance into Germany. ‘Foch opened by describing his two bounds to the [river] Weser’, recorded Sir Henry Wilson, ‘and then a halt, pending further reinforcements and separate armistices with Wurtemburg, Baden and Bavaria. He said he would be on the Weser in 15 days.’

Next day, as the German Fleet was scuttled at Scapa Flow, Churchill hurried over to Paris to induce the Peace Conference to ‘allow’ the Czech troops in Siberia to link up with Ironside at Archangel, since the DMI had had to warn Knox on the 17th that the Bolsheviks might take advantage of Kolchak’s reverses to use intensive propaganda to offer the Czechs, now guarding the Siberian railway, a free passage through Bolshevik Russia, if they agreed to abandon Kolchak; Knox should warn Kolchak and the Czech leaders accordingly. ‘Winston flew over & I saw him just before dinner’, noted Sir Henry Wilson on the 21st. ‘He agrees with me. The news of Kolchak is bad; he is now retiring from Glazov in front of Viatka. This looks as though Ironside would not join hands.’

In fact, the news of both the Siberian Army and the Czechs was much worse. On the 20th, the American Consul Harris wired from Omsk that he had just seen General Gajda, on his sudden and unexpected return to Omsk the day before. He was despondent, discouraged and would probably retire; he complained of the
reactionary military clique around Kolchak, ‘who were intriguing against him’. The Siberian Army, Gajda thought, would not defeat the Bolsheviks, and the ‘overthrow of Bolshevism is not yet in sight’. Also on the 20th, Polk warned Lansing that the American Consul in Irkutsk had wired underlining the ‘urgent necessity’ of sending the Czech troops home at once to avert grave trouble. They were quite demoralised, and had reached the ‘breaking point’ beyond which no one would fight someone else’s battles; and Allied troops, who had not seen nearly so much fighting as the Czechs, were being sent home first. Consul Harris had further reported from Omsk that General Syrovy, the Czech Commander, could no longer control them; and if they were not shipped home before autumn, they might force their way through Bolshevik territory, with Bolshevik consent, to Czechoslovakia.  

On June 22, as the German reply to the modified Allied peace terms reached Paris, Benes (the Czech Foreign Minister)—perhaps hearing some rumour of what was in the wind—asked Lloyd George if the Czech troops could in fact be shipped through Archangel, if there were no ships to repatriate them from Vladivostok. Lloyd George at once mentioned this interview to Churchill, who forthwith asked Benes if the Czechs would fight their way through to Archangel, if there were ships there to take them home. Benes replied cautiously that the only question was the route; since the Archangel route might lead to further hostilities with the Bolsheviks, perhaps 30,000 could come via Viatka and Archangel, and 20,000 via the Far East. But people in Czechoslovakia and the Czech troops themselves would want to know exactly what the Allied proposals were. They might accept if told that they could not return home for another two years, unless both routes were used. With a precise plan, he could obtain a quick answer from Prague. Churchill then drafted a paper, and passed it to the British Military Section, who did not like it at all; Czech morale was too low, and it was now too late, they stated firmly.

But Benes was in fact disturbed by Churchill’s suggestion. On the 23rd, he wrote to Lloyd George that the Czech troops would never fight any more battles for Kolchak, and it would be a ‘very serious’ matter if they had to fight the Bolsheviks. Could they not travel to Archangel as neutrals? A detailed plan should be drawn up. ‘If I had such a programme in my possession and could submit some precise assurances to my Government, we could probably arrive at a successful result’, he wrote.

That day, as the Germans, amidst universal relief, agreed to sign the Peace Treaty, Lloyd George told the Council of Four of this proposal; the Czechs might ‘open the communications’ between Kolchak and Archangel, ‘with a view to their withdrawal’, he stated, carefully bridging the yawning gap between Benes and Churchill. He asked if American and Japanese troops could replace the Czechs on the Siberian railway.

Next day (the 24th), Churchill, with the help of Colonel Kisch (the General Staff expert on Russian affairs) hastily redrafted his entire proposal. Czech morale, Churchill admitted, had been ‘seriously impaired’ by their long stay in Siberia;
and there was ‘ground for doubt’ whether they could reach Archangel before the port was closed by ice. For 30,000 Czechs could not reach Perm before mid-August, and would then take five weeks to reach Viatka; and a further three weeks to reach Kotlas, assuming all went well, in mid-October. But though Archangel was closed by ice in mid-November, it could usually be kept open for another month by ice-breaker. Though they might in fact arrive too late, this project offered ‘great advantages’, for it would link up the Siberian and Archangel forces, while the British held Kotlas. It was all rather different from what Benes (and Ironside) had in mind.34

But Churchill had powerful support for this wild scheme. On the 24th, Lansing wired Polk in Washington that the Czechs must be repatriated either through Russia or by sea. Both the Russian Political Conference and the Czech Prime Minister Kramarz wanted them to fight their way out overland; if assembled at Perm, and told that there were ships at Archangel, their morale would still be high enough. Two Czech politicians and some doctors had already left Paris to take care of invalid Czechs, and to encourage the remainder to fight their way out. Kramarz particularly wished them to render ‘this last service’ to Russia, fearing that their previous services would be forgotten if they left by sea.35

Next day, Churchill put his redrafted paper about the Czech troops before the Peace Conference, justifying it as action needed to restore the Siberian front after Kolchak’s recent defeat. The British Military Section, who had been asked for advice, were still dubious. On the 22nd, they had had a wire, sent from Omsk on the 13th, that General Janin had left for Irkutsk because of trouble amongst the Czechs, while other reports stated that they were very dissatisfied at remaining in Siberia, and did not understand why other Allied troops were not sent; they were particularly bitter about the Americans. ‘I am not very happy about this’, wrote Colonel Kisch to the DMO on the 25th, ‘but S of S made us put it up. He himself wrote a paper in the first instance, but he let us add to it, and in paras V & VI [which referred to Czech morale, and the risk due to the lateness of the season] we have drawn attention to the dangers and difficulties attendant on the scheme. In any case, further action is dependent on:-

(a) The scheme be [sic] accepted by the Council of Four.
(b) It being accepted by the Czech Govt.

Both of which are at least doubtful. In this connection there is a telegram… about the trouble amongst the Czechs which D.M.L. says S of S should see if he had not already done so. Would you please tell Skaife to dig it out for you. A copy of the paper [? which] was forwarded by S of S to the P.M. has been sent to C.I.G.S.’36

That afternoon (the 25th), Lloyd George told the Council of Four bluntly that Kolchak’s thrust, which was eventually intended to reach Moscow, had failed; as a first step, it had been intended to link up at Kotlas with the Archangel forces, but the Bolsheviks had driven the Siberian Army back. In South Russia,
meanwhile, Denikin had inflicted a severe defeat on the Red Army. ‘Hence the latest information was that Kolchak was doing badly but that Denikin had routed his adversaries.’

Lloyd George, however, said he had received a paper from Churchill requesting that Czech cooperation with Kolchak’s right wing should be considered with ‘extreme urgency’. But on hearing this summary, the Council of Four simply referred the paper to their military advisers; and Churchill returned to London.

The situation in both North Russia and Siberia was deteriorating. On the 25th, as Captain Altham reported that the minesweeper Sword Dance had struck a mine the day before and sunk, the War Office wired Ironside that 100,000 rifles and ammunition would be sent in via Archangel for the Siberian Army. On the 26th, Altham wired again. ‘River is falling rapidly’, he stated in alarm; and Ironside that day wrote in his diary that ‘all hope of any operations to Kotlas is over’.

He kept this, however, strictly to himself. Next day, General Walshe (his Chief of Staff), in a short memo on the military position there after Archangel had been closed by ice, stated that the coming Kotlas operation might produce one of three results:

1. A complete junction with Kolchak, and a general Bolshevik retreat.
2. No junction, but a big extension in the Archangel Government’s territory.
3. A junction with Kolchak’s right-wing only, via the Vychegda and Yarensk rivers, but without the capture of the Kotlas-Viatka railway, or Viatka; which would, however, mean the relief of Bolshevik pressure on Kolchak, to whom supplies could be passed.

The more complete the junction, the less would be the need for future British aid; probably only a British Mission. But if there was no junction, the whole operation would become a large-scale raid; Kotlas might have to be destroyed, the boats and stores either blown up or removed, to deny it as a base for future Bolshevik operations on the Dvina river. British troops would then retire, and Russian troops could then remain or retire as they pleased.

At Murmansk, where Russian morale was low, and Bolshevik propaganda was now having its due effect, General Maynard felt that the only cure was a further advance! On June 20, he had decided both to link up with the Shunga peninsular (on Lake Onega), and set out for Kapaselga, the next town down the Murmansk railway line. But Red Finns, supported by Bolshevik gunboats on Lake Onega, sharply attacked the Russian troops on the Shunga peninsular. The White Finns, to his south, then informed Maynard that they would cooperate with him, provided he withdrew all Russian and other local troops; half the White Finnish force would then advance against Petrozavodsk, and half would assemble and link up with Maynard. When he again refused, there was mutiny—and not only by Russian troops. ‘To state the unvarnished truth’, Maynard records, ‘I was compelled to withdraw from the front more than one small body of troops.’
On the 23rd, the War Office received a desperate wire, sent from Omsk on the 17th, stating that the Archangel force must make a greater effort than at present, if the link-up was to be made. Lebedev (Kolchak’s former Chief of Staff) was still positive that they could occupy Viatka and Kotlas, but Dietrichs (the present Chief of Staff) was equally positive that they could not.41

The Foreign Office then received a wire, sent by the British High Commissioner Eliot from Omsk on the 12th, confirming that the military situation was extremely serious. ‘This deplorable collapse seems due not so much to superior Bolshevik forces, as to bad management. Rash advances were made in too many directions at once…and several Generals were incredibly careless and indolent’ Both Generals Knox and Janin thought little could be expected from Kolchak’s troops this summer, unless there were successes on other Russian fronts, or revolts within Bolshevik Russia. Siberian Army morale was bad; and ‘whereas Bolshevik propaganda in Siberia is extremely efficient, Kolchak has practically none.’

Knox had written to Kolchak, urging him to entrench along the whole front until August, when his reserves should be able to resume the offensive. ‘Kolchak did not like the letter but it produced a considerable impression on him’, stated Eliot. The Russians were unwilling to accept any foreign advice, ‘but I think General Knox has real influence with Kolchak and principal Generals’, he stressed, ‘but idea of an Anglo-Russian regime is not popular’, he warned. The Siberian railway, between Vladivostok and Irkutsk, was working well. But further west, between Nizhneudinsk and Krasnoyarsk, trains were being held up; and five had recently been derailed.42

In Paris on the 27th, however, Lloyd George was urging the Council of Four to wire Kolchak to ask if the Czechs could cooperate with Gajda. It was agreed that he should submit a draft wire next morning. But that day, the Times correspondent cabled that Perm itself was being evacuated, thus killing all hope of a Siberian or Czech link up with Archangel—even if the Kotlas operation could have taken place.43

On June 25, the General Staff had summarised their arguments for the Kotlas operation. The two main original objectives were:

1. ‘To secure the safe (and it may be added the creditable) withdrawal of British forces.’
2. ‘To assist the anti-Bolshevik forces in so doing.’

Since the original General Staff paper of April 15, the Russian situation had changed owing to: the ‘impending recognition’ of Admiral Kolchak, and Allied ‘determination’ to support him; present Bolshevik success in dealing him a ‘knock-out blow’, and especially General Gajda’s retirement from Glazov back to Perm; the ‘rapid successes’ of Denikin in South Russia; and the ‘development’ of the military situation before Petrograd.
The present Russian military situation, they argued, was one of those cases in which ‘one depressing feature is apt to monopolise attention to the detriment of… decided action’, which experience had shown had the ‘most surprising consequences’ in Russia, where the moral factor today counted to an ‘unparalleled degree’. But the Kotlas operation must not be considered solely from Kolchak’s point of view. The ‘real test’ was whether or not it was necessary to enable the British withdrawal to be carried out ‘with certainty, and without losses and confusion’. Ironside must carry out some offensive operations for an orderly withdrawal. ‘A methodical withdrawal, in face of a close pursuit, and possibly threatened by local risings in rear, would be a matter of considerable difficulty’, and the actual embarkation might become a ‘hazardous proceeding’. If the need for offensive operations was accepted, it remained only to consider their scope. Ironside considered that the nearest ‘definite objectives’, whose capture would really effect the military situation, were Kotlas (on the Dvina river) and Plesetskaya (on the Vologda railway), the important Bolshevik advanced bases. If they could be held long enough for all railway engines, rivercraft, and supplies to be removed or destroyed, the Bolsheviks would be unable to move north for a ‘considerable period’. Ironside was confident of breaking Bolshevik resistance without much difficulty, ‘and hopes to go straight through to Kotlas’. The recent action at Troitsa had shown that though there might be ‘serious fighting’ at first, there was every reason to hope for a rapid Bolshevik collapse. The only sound course, therefore, was to sanction Ironside’s operations, ‘leaving him a free hand as to their limits and conduct’.44

But the Allies, as has been seen, had no intention of recognising, and little intention of even giving any further support to Kolchak; and though he was not knocked out, the loss of Perm prevented any junction by any force—Russian, Czech or British—from Siberia with Archangel. The War Office could still—just—argue that they did not know of the loss of Perm; but after the Admiralty Conference of June 23rd, they could no longer hold that any junction by any force from Archangel with Siberia was possible either. The Kotlas operation was off. General Ironside knew it; but would not, or could not, inform the General Staff, who in turn could not face up to the glaring fact of their own negligence in not informing the Admiralty of their change of plan in military operations along the Dvina river back in April. Denikin’s ‘rapid successes’ however were certainly a fact; though the present omens were that they might meet the fate of Kolchak’s. But the military situation before Petrograd was not developing. It had, through British naval and military apathy and negligence, already relapsed into failure.

This was the reality of the situation on the various Russian fronts. On June 26, Sir Henry Wilson minuted underneath the present General Staff paper that Ironside’s recent wire of June 19 ‘answers all objections’. Although a link-up with Kolchak was desirable, the need for the Kotlas operation in no way depended on it. In fact, the contrary was true; for if the Bolsheviks were freed from Kolchak’s front, they could mass against Ironside, harass his withdrawal, and render it ‘not only a difficult but a hazardous operation’.
Quite apart from stabilising the Archangel Government, or even maintaining British and Allied prestige, British troops could only be safely withdrawn if there were first offensive operations. Ironside had clearly outlined their object and scope, so as to ensure that the withdrawal was carried out under peace conditions. ‘The capture of Kotlas will, it is confidently anticipated, realise this condition by rendering possible the destruction of all workshops, depots, wharves and river craft, by which alone the enemy could follow us up down the Dvina. No advance short of Kotlas would effect this object. Moreover, as General Ironside has pointed out in his telegram of June 4th, there will be no danger of our troops being cut off as, with the Flotilla now available, our line of retirement from Kotlas is assured, and there will be ample time to carry out the operations and embark before the port closes in the third week of October.’

The recent preliminary operation at Troitsa had given ‘most encouraging results’, wrote the CIGS (evidently badly misinformed), and ‘if our success is followed up, there is every reason to hope that the Bolshevik forces will become very rapidly disorganised’.

Ironside should therefore be authorised to proceed with his operations, which were not only desirable, but ‘essential to the safe and orderly withdrawal of the British forces in North Russia’.

At noon on June 27, Lord Curzon presided at a War Cabinet to decide whether or not to sanction the British advance on Kotlas. On the 18th, he stated, the War Cabinet had approved the operation to enable Ironside to link up with Kolchak, while the War Office advocated the operation on its own merits as necessary to cover the withdrawal. Churchill stated that as the question was more military than political, he would suggest that the CIGS should explain why the operation was necessary.

Sir Henry Wilson began by saying that the original object was for Ironside to link up with Gajda; and second, to strike the Bolsheviks a heavy blow to enable British troops to retire in good order. Some months previously, when it was agreed to withdraw British troops from North Russia, he had gone ‘very carefully’ into the matter, and decided that a retirement with tired troops ‘might contain the seeds of a serious disaster’. They had thus formed two special brigades of some 8,000 ‘selected men, admirably equipped, under excellent officers’ to cover the withdrawal. Meanwhile, Kolchak had advanced to Glazov; and it appeared possible that he might link up with ‘our troops’. Kolchak’s success, however, had been shortlived; and he had fallen back, first in the south, then in the centre, then in the north. ‘Today the chances of a junction appeared very remote.’ But they must remember that the Russian temperament was ‘very mercurial’. Though Kolchak had recently fallen back 300 miles, Denikin, who had been in a ‘very perilous position’ three months ago in South Russia, now held Tsaritsin, and would soon have Astrakhan and control of the Caspian Sea.

Curzon interrupted that Denikin’s successes were due to British supplies. Sir Henry Wilson retorted that Britain was also supplying Kolchak. If European troops were involved, he would think there was small chance of a British advance
achieving a link up with Kolchak. ‘With the Russian temperament, however, anything was possible, and he did not, therefore, give up all hope.’ The second objective was to cover the British withdrawal. To withdraw 120 miles in the face of ‘pursuing Bolsheviks’ would be very difficult. The fact that Kolchak had retired made it even more necessary for British troops to advance and strike. The further Gajda retired, and the less the chance of linking up with him, the more important it was for British troops to reach Kotlas, and destroy the Bolshevik steamers and stores. They would then retire, and leave the Russian troops there. ‘After giving every aspect of the case his most careful consideration, he strongly advised the Cabinet to permit the operations to proceed.’

Curzon then asked Sir Henry Wilson two questions. What would our position and ‘our prestige’ be if we reached Kotlas, but did not link up with Kolchak? Second, if we did not reach Kotlas would we be faced with ‘probable disaster’? Sir Henry Wilson said he would be ‘surprised’ if we did not reach Kotlas; the Bolsheviks might face British troops once, but hardly twice. If we failed and then withdrew, ‘our position would be grave’. It was true that the British withdrawal from North Russia before or after the advance might ruin the Archangel Government. There was no escape. The best chance for the Archangel Government was for British troops to undertake this operation. Ironside was ready to start now, and would reach Kotlas within fifteen days from setting out. The Admiralty did not think it safe to postpone the evacuation of Archangel beyond the third week in October owing to the ice. The First Sea Lord did not like a suggestion that this period could be prolonged by a month by ice-breakers. Curzon commented that if Kotlas was taken by July 16, there would be three months to carry out the withdrawal.

Sir Henry Wilson went on that there were 13,000 British troops in North Russia, 100 French troops, 30 Italians who were just about to leave, and 22,000 Russian troops, with whom Ironside was satisfied, and spoke of using in the front line. Opposing them were 33,700 ‘questionable’ Bolshevik troops; Ironside was more afraid of striking a blow in the air. The two forces were about equal in guns. British forces, however, had the British flotilla, and, either present or on the way, three aircraft squadrons. The enemy had none. The British force would advance both by rail and by river. (This may simply be a slip; but the only railway was down to Vologda—the Dvina river was the only route and supply line down to Kotlas.)

Curzon asked if there was a chance of disaster for Ironside if he reached Kotlas in fifteen days, failed to link up, but destroyed the Bolshevik steamers and stores, and the enemy then rallied and attacked? Sir Henry Wilson replied that this chance was small. ‘The enemy could only advance by water, and we could certainly render their progress very difficult by mining the river.’ Curzon then asked if Britain would still have to take away some 15,000 to 16,000 friendly Russians when she withdrew, if the operation was successful. Sir Henry Wilson replied shortly that it depended whether the Archangel Government could look after them.
Churchill stated that the growth of the North Russian Army was ‘remarkable’. There were now 22,000 Russian troops, including the Slavo-British legion, which, though they could not be compared to the best European troops, were rapidly developing into a ‘very useful and self-sufficient’ Russian force. The War Cabinet had recently authorised him to train some 1,200 Russian officers in England, who would be sent out to North Russia. He thus hoped that Britain would leave an ‘established’ government when our soldiers withdrew, which should be ‘quite capable’ of defending itself ‘in so out-of-the-way place’. The Bolsheviks would be much more likely to concentrate on Kolchak and Denikin, and the operations around Petrograd. It was thus reasonable to hope that the Archangel Government could adequately protect the 15,000 friendly Russians when we left. Thus, there would be no discredit attached to our withdrawal. The Archangel Government, he reminded Curzon, was the most democratic of the three Russian Governments whom Britain was supporting. It was dependent upon her, but the Bolshevik Government itself was ‘far from stable’. The various wars in Russia were on both sides ‘wars of the weak’.

It would be wrong for Britain in future to ‘break our political necks for Russia by maintaining indefinitely a kind of equipoise warfare’. He fully agreed with the Prime Minister that British policy next year would require rethinking. He did not believe in an early Bolshevik collapse, but hoped that the White Russians would be self-supporting in 1920. He wished to wind up British affairs honourably in North Russia. British policy could only succeed if the War Office could carry out their plans. The CIGS was right to be cautious. The CIGS had ‘complete faith’ in Ironside, who was confident about the operation. His plans were fully approved by the General Staff.

Curzon pointed out that there had recently been some ‘regrettable incidents’ at Murmansk. Was the same thing likely to happen at Archangel? Sir Henry Wilson replied that there was no reason to fear this. British troops at Murmansk were tired and disheartened. Ironside’s picked volunteers were in ‘excellent heart’. Fisher (the Minister of Education) asked whether Britain’s forces could not secure both their position and their withdrawal by mining the river, as it was the only line of advance and retreat? Sir Henry Wilson said there was a ‘great deal to be said’ for that view, but it would mean giving up all hope of joining Gajda, and the Archangel Government would be in a ‘very unhappy position’. Churchill added hotly that to secure the river, British forces had to capture the Bolshevik ships, and to do this they had to advance; if this operation was successful this month, it would swell the Russian forces from 22,000 to 35,000, or even more. Britain had to give the Archangel Government every chance. She could not slink out of the country, and leave nothing between them and the Bolsheviks but a few mines in the river. British credit, which was very high in Russia today, was at stake. All the ‘civilised forces’ there knew that ‘we alone (with the doubtful exception of the Japanese)’, had really helped them; and if Britain now departed, British reputation would suffer irretrievably.
Chamberlain (the Chancellor of the Exchequer) asked whether Britain would have to remove the people both between and in Kotlas, as well as the 15,000 friendly Russians, if her blow fell in the air. Sir Henry Wilson replied that he could not say. The local people knew that Britain meant to withdraw before the ice. Chamberlain then asked whether the Russians would be able to resist when Britain left, if the Kotlas operation was a complete success, but there was no link up. Sir Henry Wilson replied that if British forces defeated the enemy and mined the river, the Russians should have ‘a very good chance’. They should feel ‘fairly safe’ for the next six months. If we took Kotlas, the Russians would be fixed there, he added in answer to a question from Fisher. Geddes pointed out that mines could only act as a temporary check. The First Sea Lord agreed. Chamberlain concluded that he would be against the operation if the question were merely political, as it was too risky. ‘He did not share the optimistic views that had been expressed about the soldierly qualities of the Russian troops who would be fighting with us, or about the capacity of the Archangel Government.’ But he was ‘greatly impressed’ by Sir Henry Wilson’s statement that the operation was necessary to enable British troops to withdraw in safety.

In answer to a question from Curzon, Sir David Shackleton, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, who was also present, stated that there was ‘very strong’ feeling in Labour circles about British intervention. Moderate Labour members were doing their utmost to restrain the extremists, but it was doubtful if they could continue to do so for more than a few weeks. Our Russian policy had been much canvassed at the Labour Conference now in session at Southport. The majority wanted to force the British Government’s hand. It was likely that the Triple Alliance would soon declare a General Strike to force the withdrawal of all British troops, and to bring British interference to an end. Chamberlain objected that such a strike would not only be against British intervention and assistance for ‘what Labour regarded as reactionary [Russian] Governments’, but against conscription, the retention of conscientious objectors in prison, and income tax for the working class. The Permanent Secretary insisted that the main factor was British intervention. All the Labour papers were saying that there was now a chance for a proper Soviet Government in Russia, and the main obstacle to it was the British Government. Men of all classes were coming round to the Labour view that the Soviets should have a ‘fair chance’. We had never attempted to interfere with the Tsar when he was in power. He feared that agitation might assume ‘formidable proportions’.

Churchill stated hotly that he would defend British policy in the House. The British withdrawal from Archangel and the Caucasus was going ahead, and he would say that we were withdrawing, and that the Kotlas operation was ‘only’ to cover the evacuation. The Permanent Secretary then warned the Cabinet that there would be trouble in early September if a casualty list was published at the TUC Congress giving the names of British troops killed fighting to suppress a Soviet Government. Curzon agreed with Churchill that a strong case could be made for British policy in the House. The Permanent Secretary regretted that at
present there was no Labour member of calibre, like Arthur Henderson or Ramsay Macdonald, who could reply responsibly in the House.

Sir Henry Wilson stressed the need for ‘careful and well-conducted’ propaganda to state the ‘true facts’, and explain British policy to working men. The First Lord agreed. Churchill stated that he would be against the Kotlas operation if he thought it would result in a ‘really big battle’ and heavy casualties. He did not think there would be serious resistance. In the past, Maynard, with an armoured train, 200 poor troops and some bluff, had defeated the Bolsheviks with no casualties at all. ‘All experience went to show that the Bolsheviks had never been able to screw up enough courage to offer any prolonged resistance.’ Denikin had defeated them again and again with odds of 10 to 1 against. He did not feel that the Bolsheviks would put up much fight in the Kotlas operation. Sir Henry Wilson again warned that any attempt to withdraw without striking a blow would be ‘much more dangerous’. Chamberlain stated that it was this point that had convinced him that the War Cabinet should approve; and he now appeared to speak for them all. Curzon thought the propaganda suggested by Sir Henry Wilson might overdo what was really only a small operation. Sir Henry Wilson replied that he intended to explain our whole Russian policy, not just this one item. Chamberlain suggested that the Sunday newspapers would be a good medium. Churchill concluded that there was no difficulty in defending British policy, which was to withdraw British troops from Russia.

The War Cabinet then decided to ‘sanction General Ironside’s proposed operations, on the conditions laid down’.46

That night, Sir Henry Wilson noted in his diary: ‘Cabinet meeting at which I persuaded Cabinet to allow Ironside to go to Kotlas.’ But while General Ironside had grossly misled the War Office about the Kotlas operation, both Churchill and Sir Henry Wilson had grossly misled the War Cabinet.47

On June 6, it will be recalled, Ironside had stated, in the course of a wire describing the coming Kotlas operation, that ‘flotilla is sufficient’. This, of course, was before the Dvina river began to fall. Then on June 16, The Times printed a story giving Ironside’s complete order of battle in the coming Kotlas operation, which, inter alia, told the Bolsheviks exactly which of the Russian formations, i.e. the Slavo-British Legion, was to be used. On June 19, Ironside wired again, emphasising that his aim was to ‘advance on Kotlas…rendering the place useless as a base…also to bring in the right wing of the Siberians’. This last point was stated when it was known that Admiral Kolchak’s chance of getting through to Viatka was virtually non-existent, and that it was proposed instead to use the Czechs to fight their way through. Further, the same day (June 19), Ironside was confiding to his diary: ‘I do no think for a minute that I can get to Kotlas.’ The Dvina river, in fact, had begun to fall alarmingly.

This prompted the Admiralty on June 23 to insist on conferring with the War Office. At this meeting, the DMO had clearly stated, in answer to a pointed question on whether Ironside was satisfied that the naval flotilla provided was adequate (one of Ironside’s original provisos for his guarantee to link up with the
Siberians), that he (the DMO) had received an ‘assurance’ on this from Ironside. But this referred to Ironside’s wire back on June 6.

Three days later, on June 26, Ironside was confiding to his diary that ‘all hope of any operations to Kotlas is over’. But he never informed the War Office.

At the crucial War Cabinet of June 27, it was clear first that Sir Henry Wilson was completely unaware that the Troitsa operation of June 18 had been a disaster, as far as the fresh British troops were concerned; or else concealed the fact. As for the Kotlas operation, ‘Ironside was ready to start now’, stated the CIGS. Further, Churchill, after grossly exaggerating the ability of the local Russian troops, stated firmly that Sir Henry Wilson had ‘complete faith’ in Ironside, who was confident about the Kotlas operation, which was approved by the General Staff. Nothing was said about using the Czechs instead of the Siberians. Nor, it must be underlined, was anything whatever said about the Admiralty conference on June 23. But the doubters in the War Cabinet were finally won over to give their approval to the operation, because of Sir Henry Wilson’s military arguments, i.e. that it was necessary in itself to secure a safe withdrawal for the British troops.

It is difficult to decide who is most to blame. Ironside would later argue that he had never once when at Archangel ever been given any definite orders—but that does not excuse him for failing to inform the War Office at the time that the river was too low for any operations of any sort. The blame is divided between Ironside and the CIGS.
London and Paris

In Paris, the Peace Conference was over; and the German delegates were to sign the Peace Treaty at Versailles on the afternoon of June 28th. At 11 am that morning, the Council of Four, at their last meeting, again considered Churchill's proposal about the Czech troops, and approved a draft wire to Kolchak, subject to the agreement of the Supreme War Council. If Kolchak agreed, the Allies would then ask the Prague Government to cooperate. ‘To avoid subsequent misunderstanding, it is pointed out that there can be no question of retaining any of the Czechoslovak troops once their junction with Archangel forces has been affected’, it was underlined.¹

In London, Churchill sat in the War Office burning with impatience. At 11.30 am, he wired Sir Henry Wilson (now back in Paris). ‘Consideration of proposals re Czech troops in Siberia must not be delayed a single day aaa please do your utmost to secure decision of Versailles Council of military experts this afternoon or tomorrow morning early aaa every hour counts’. Later that day, he minuted sharply to the DMO: ‘Telegraph daily to ask whether it has yet been considered and what is the result. Most urgent’.²

By now, Sir Henry Wilson was on his way to Versailles, ‘and a very pretty sight it was driving up, with Lancers and Infantry lining the streets, and with their colours’. The signature of the Peace Treaty was an anti-climax. ‘The fountains played and some guns fired, and we went away.’³ Sir Henry Wilson, however, on return to his office, appears to have done little about the Czechs.

At 6 pm, Churchill finally made the General Staff telephone to Paris. They reported that the Supreme War Council had not yet considered the matter; but were expected to do so on Monday the 30th, or Tuesday July 1. Churchill had to make do with this.

Siberia

That day (the 28th), another very gloomy wire reached the Foreign Office from Omsk, sent by the British High Commissioner Eliot on the 16th, that the Russian
Foreign Minister had just spoken to him at ‘considerable length’ about the Allied reply to Kolchak, in which it was noticed that the Allies studiously avoided the word ‘recognise’. This ‘greatly disappointed’ the Omsk Government, ‘and I understand their difficulty’, added Eliot. Kolchak’s troops had no idea what they were meant to be fighting for; and it would help if they were told that it was for a properly recognised Russian Government. The Foreign Minister also asked if they could now discuss general Russian policy with the Allies. ‘Hitherto this had not been the case: they knew hardly anything of our relations with Denikin and Yudenitch.’ Though the Siberian Army hoped to advance into European Russia that autumn, the military situation might not materially change until next spring. Would the Allies now, in fact, discuss with the Omsk Government a military plan of action for all the Russian fronts? Would military supplies continue to be sent out? Would all the Allies contribute, and would they be given credit, ‘or required as usual to pay cash?’ Could Russia obtain an Allied loan? Could Allied troops guard the Siberian railway, and garrison the Far East? He thought some Czechs might volunteer to fight their way through to Archangel.4

These questions had already been raised in Washington. On June 27, however, Polk at the State Department wired Secretary Lansing in Paris that it was impossible to deal with Kolchak’s officials now in Washington to purchase supplies, unless they could work on credit after a 10 per cent cash payment. Could the Secretary for War understand that this had the President’s approval? In fact, the Secretary for War had already signed three contracts with the Russian Cooperatives for the purchase of $5 million of surplus military material on credit; and would sign further contracts up to $25 million.5 But on the 28th, a wire came from Consul Harris that the Omsk Government wanted an American loan of $325 million, of which $125 million would cancel earlier American loans, and $200 million would buy American supplies. This was a very large order.

Two days later, Polk wired Ambassador Morris in Tokyo that as the recognition of Kolchak, and the extent of American support, were still left open, the President now wished Morris to go to Omsk as earlier planned. As well as reporting generally, he should impress upon the Japanese the great American interest in Siberia, and the American intention to adopt a ‘definite policy which will include the “open door” to Russia free from Japanese domination’. Morris should be guided by the Allied despatch, which did not involve ‘any present recognition of Kolchak’, Polk stressed. ‘The situation requires quick action’, he added. Polk was then informed that the President, now aboard the George Washington on his way back to America, saw no objection to the Secretary of War selling American supplies to Kolchak, or to sales on a 10 per cent basis, provided there was ‘no formal or diplomatic recognition’.5

But as Ambassador Morris was instructed to set out, the British High Commissioner Eliot was again wiring in anxious terms from Ekaterinburg, where he had just arrived on receiving ‘alarming reports’ from General Blair (Knox’s assistant, and the commander of the Anglo-Russian brigade, which Churchill wanted to advance with the Czechs to Archangel). Gajda’s retirement on the
northern sector had become a rout. ‘It is not easy to see how panic can be stopped’, stated Eliot. The troops now ran before being attacked, there were many deserters and self-inflicted wounds. Boys between the ages of 12 and 17 were now being called up.

Though Gajda had been dismissed, he still in fact commanded the Siberian Army, and was ‘very influential’ at Ekaterinburg, especially with the moderate and left-wing parties, who had just sent a resolution to the Omsk Government demanding a Constituent Assembly; grants of land to soldiers; foreign policy in close alliance with Allied policy; and the removal of General Lebedev (the former Chief of Staff, and now the Acting War Minister). General Dietrichs (Kolchak’s new Chief of Staff), who was ‘very hostile’ to Gajda, planned to abandon Perm and Kungur to save Ekaterinburg, and to concentrate on his southern front, and link up with Denikin in the autumn; but Knox did not think any serious offensive could be made this year. Thus, any wild project for a Czech advance through Perm to Archangel was doomed.

Eliot had further bad news. The Anglo-Russian brigade ‘continues to be very unpopular’, though Kolchak had stopped acts of physical violence against these British-trained soldiers, who were called ‘pampered’, simply because they received all their rations from their British officers—in Russian regiments, Russian officers made a ‘considerable sum’ out of their men’s supplies. The Anglo-Russian brigade and the Hampshire regiment, which had trained them, were to be moved back to Omsk—which the Russians would say meant that the British pulled out as soon as things went badly. Dietrichs, concluded Eliot, had issued an order that the present anti-Bolshevik campaign was not political but religious; which might be interpreted as anti-Jewish, as his feelings about the Jews were well known. But Eliot’s wire took some ten days to reach London.

London

On June 29th, as Sir Henry Wilson came back to London with Lloyd George on his official return from the Peace Conference, Churchill was still waiting for news from Paris about the Czech proposal. Finally, there was a telephone call from Paris at noon that the Supreme War Council would consider the matter next day at 10 am. At Victoria Station, the King, the Prince of Wales and the War Cabinet greeted the Prime Minister, who was loudly cheered by the crowd. ‘I am so glad’, recorded Sir Henry Wilson, ‘and I wrote to him tonight and told him so.’ At the Ritz that evening, there was ‘Darnie de Saumon de la Liberté’ and the whitebait was christened ‘Blanchaille de l’Egalité’. On Highgate Hill, an over-exuberant bonfire burnt down the local searchlight station. Otherwise, celebrations were fairly subdued. But after Question Time next day, the whole House of Commons rose and greeted the Prime Minister with loud cheers, and they all sang ‘God Save the King’. But though Lloyd George had returned with a Peace Treaty for the House of Commons to ratify, he had not brought back peace in Europe. Churchill, with his backing, was at that moment busily making war in Russia.
North Russia

On June 30th, Sir Henry Wilson records: ‘Office all morning. Saw Winston, but not much gossip except good news from Denikin…Kolchak is going to [lose] Perm, but Denikin has taken Kharkov.’ That day, reassured that the Czech proposal was presumably being approved in Paris, the War Office wired Knox that Ironside’s advance on Kotlas was now approved, and would begin in early July. Shipment to Kotlas, however, of more British supplies for Kolchak would await its result. But together with Denikin’s success and a possible advance on Petrograd, the War Office thought that the capture of Kotlas might change the whole Russian situation. At 5 pm, Colonel Kisch finally telephoned from Paris that the Czech proposal had been approved, and the Peace Conference were sending a wire to Kolchak—in fact, the one agreed on the 28th, which was sent over at 10 pm that night for Churchill’s approval.

On July 1, the DMO warned Ironside privately that Kolchak’s position was ‘undoubtedly bad’, and Gajda was slowly retiring; and as there were at present no reserves, it was difficult to know when matters would improve. Prospects of a link-up were thus ‘at the moment unfavourable’, admitted the DMO. But Denikin’s ‘striking success’ and the threat to Petrograd must relieve the pressure on Kolchak, and give him a breathing space. ‘When one considers that Denikin himself was in far worse case only a short time ago I see no reason to despair of Kolchak’s ultimate recovery’, he stated hopefully.

By now, British troops on the Dvina river had captured Troitsa. ‘This enabled our minesweepers to start on the Bolo minefields’, recorded a CMB officer. The mining officer was a young naval lieutenant called Brockholes, whose own party worked from small boats, ‘catching hold of the mines and towing them ashore…All this under a good fire from the Bolo’. On the 28th, as the British river force shifted its base to Troitsa bay, Captain Altham wired the SNO Archangel. ‘Flotilla anchored above Troitsa and transport can proceed to Troitsa. Maximum load drafts five feet’. The gunboats Glow worm and Cockchafer, which had been damaged during the engagement of June 17, had to be refitted with great haste. ‘Owing to fall of river and limited range of Monitors’ guns, I am chiefly dependent on gunboats’, he stressed. That day, the depot ship Haldon—somewhere near Kurgomen—wired to Archangel. ‘Seven feet only found in shallows. No vessel drawing more than 6½ feet should be sent up river.’ But on the 29th, Altham wired abruptly. ‘River has apparently fallen 3 inches in 24 hours.’ Next day, Haldon wired, ‘River has fallen 2½ inches during last 24 hours’.

Meanwhile, minesweeping continued. ‘The Bolos had of course laid more mines further up when they retreated’, recorded the CMB officer. ‘They have all sorts of mines, small ones with horns, large sea mines with horns, and small ones with two whiskers (these are awful because they will go off if you look at the blighters almost)’, he added. On July 1, one of these killed the young mining officer. ‘One of Brockholes’ arms was picked up on the cliff, but nothing else.’
Then the *Fandango* struck a mine and sank, leaving Altham with only two minesweepers.

On July 1, the PNTO at Archangel replied to the Admiralty wire of June 23rd that the ‘small craft, of which I have already been advised, will suffice for the expedition up the river’, he stated, ‘but not for the conveyance of extra stores for Kolchak’, he added carefully. ‘This is on the presumption that all craft advised arrives within reasonable time and that we [?]get an average depth of water in the river. G.O.C. [Ironside] is in agreement’.9

But there was to be no average depth in the Dvina river that year. ‘Have just returned from Troitsa’, wired Admiral Green to the Admiralty on the 2nd. ‘Depth of river between Bereznik and Troitsa 4 feet in places and falling’, he warned.9 (‘I think that the low water in the river’, he recorded in a report next day, ‘was not properly appreciated by the authorities at home or out here.’)

By now, in fact, nearly the whole British flotilla, upon which the British and Russian troops entirely relied for supplies and support, was either stuck in the mud, or stranded. Any advance on Kotlas, for any reason whatsoever, was ‘now quite out of the question’, Ironside wrote in his diary; all he could do was to break the Bolshevik line, if he could find it, and settle the Russian troops in before the evacuation. On July 2nd, still without informing the War Office of this decision, he flew back to Archangel to tell General Miller (the Russian Commander). ‘When I told him the news hardly a muscle of his face moved’, records Ironside. ‘I could only see in his pale blue eyes how desperately tired he was. For a full couple of minutes he just looked at me without saying a word. I reached out my hand and he took hold of it with a firm grip.’ Ironside said he must withdraw from the Dvina by October 1, but assured Miller that he would give him enough supplies and equipment. Ironside then flew straight back to the Dvina front to find troop transports and strings of barges wending their way up-river to Troitsa (which was as far as they could get), and ‘everyone was discussing the coming offensive and canvassing the chances of getting to Kotlas’.9 Only his Chief of Staff and QMG were now informed that the Kotlas operation was off. He still hoped to keep it secret until the Bolshevik line was broken.

Finally, the War Office received a wire on July 2, sent from Ekaterinburg on June 21, that General Dietrichs (Kolchak’s Chief of Staff) would undertake no offensive before August. Both Denikin and Yudenitch should thus draw the Bolsheviks away from the Urals front up till then, so that he could rest and train his troops. Dietrichs thought there was now no chance of joining up with the Archangel force this year, nor of beating the Bolsheviks this summer. In August, he would first strike towards Samara to regain supplies, and then link up with Denikin—the move on Viatka was no longer of prime importance. The most valuable Allied assistance would thus be to support Denikin and Yudenitch until the recovery of the Siberian Army, which they should supply now for a winter campaign. Disillusion thus came slowly to the War Office—who still somehow imagined that the Kotlas operation would cover the British withdrawal from Archangel; and that evening the Allied wire to Kolchak about the Czech proposal
was nevertheless despatched top priority (‘clear the line’) to Omsk. But that
night, Sir Henry Wilson recorded: The Czechos in Siberia won’t try and cut their
way out to Kotlas.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{London}

On July 4, Churchill admitted to the War Cabinet that in Siberia, where the
front ran from Orenburg to Perm, Kolchak had advanced much further than had
been intended, and his recent defeats were due to undue rashness in pressing
forward; all his troops were put into the front line, and, unlike Denikin’s troops,
were not trained to manoeuvre. Kolchak’s troops were now retreating, and had
lost Perm. But Churchill saw no reason why these 160,000 ‘fighting men’ should
cease to be a ‘considerable factor’ in Siberia. (This is a good example of
Churchill’s wilfully romantic attitude towards the Russian problem, which now
seemed to have gained the upper hand in his general thinking.\textsuperscript{11} Kolchak’s troops
were, in fact, a ragged lot of raw Siberian peasant boys, who had been brutally
press-ganged into service. They were unfed, unshod, unclothed, and unhappy.
Their opponents were not in much better shape; but their leadership was
superior.)

The DMO added that both Lenin and Trotsky were said to be at Perm, where
they were intent on stopping Kolchak linking up with the Archangel forces. (In
fact, both were in Moscow: Lenin was writing soothing notes to Trotsky, who
had resigned in high dudgeon, and taken to his bed.) The DMO had heard that
the Bolshevik Government was rapidly collecting troops from every quarter to
stop Denikin’s advance. If true, this meant that pressure on Kolchak must
diminish. It would take them some weeks to develop anything like a counter-
attack against Denikin, whose ultimate objective was Moscow, ‘but it was to be
hoped that his ambition to get there would not lead him, like Kolchak, to be too
venturesome’, stated the DMO. To a question, he added that military operations
could continue until late November. Both sides were probably very short of
ammunition; and the Bolsheviks must be very anxious to keep the Turkestan
railway open.

The Prime Minister remarked that Kolchak’s ‘rather severe defeat’ had altered
the situation considerably, since the War Cabinet decision to sanction Ironside’s
advance in North Russia. Churchill retorted that when the War Cabinet had
discussed the matter the week before, Sir Henry Wilson had explained that a safe
withdrawal was impossible unless British troops first struck an ‘offensive blow’ at
Kotlas; this blow would be ‘quite independent’ of the proposed junction with
Gajda. The Prime Minister stated that, whatever happened, they must strictly
fulfil their pledge to Parliament and to the country that British troops would be
withdrawn from North Russia before the ice set in. He trusted that Churchill
fully realised the importance of British troops not becoming ‘inextricably
involved’. Churchill replied that every possible precaution had been taken.\textsuperscript{11}
Later that day, Churchill held an unique press conference at the War Office to ‘sell’ the Kotlas operation—which he really must by now have known was doomed to failure. Admiral Green had that day wired the Admiralty. ‘Enemy are mining river Dvina extensively.’ Two more ‘Dance’ class minesweepers, or tugs of less draught, were thus urgently required for sweeping. But General Ironside now finally wired the War Office. ‘Very secret’, he stated. ‘Latest news of loss of Perm [and] Kungur, coupled with the Dvina at very low ebb, makes even a raid on Kotlas at the moment impossible.’

Churchill now made plans to leave London to join the Prime Minister in Wales. ‘I cd come to you on Thursday 10 for a day or two if that wd suit’, he wrote in a brief note to Lloyd George that same day. ‘It will be vy jolly to see yr river again. Much water has flowed since I last tried to dam it. I will tell H.Wilson that you want him there too, if you find the date convenient.’

Churchill’s evident enthusiasm to turn his thoughts from a dried-up Russian river to an overflowing Welsh river can hardly be coincidental.

Churchill was incensed that George Lansbury, editor of the socialist Herald (and later leader of the Labour Party) had been invited to his Press conference. Churchill had just had copies of the Herald seized in Germany for the circulation of ‘essentially disloyal and subversive’ propaganda, which had caused disorder among the British troops. It was obvious that Lansbury would want to strike back at Churchill, and the Kotlas operation was in a very delicate state, to put it mildly; and when Lord Riddell had called to arrange the press conference, Churchill had done his best to stop Lansbury coming.

Churchill started off the press conference with a harangue. ‘Our policy is to withdraw from Russia—that is our policy, but to withdraw from Russia with credit and honour, without deserting the people who compromised themselves with us during the German War…Our policy has been that Russia is to be saved by Russian manhood alone.’ He turned to the map, and went round the Russian clock, starting with the Caucasus, which the Peace Conference wanted the British to take over, he claimed, ‘but we do not want to go too wide’. Britain had stuck firm to her intention of pulling out. ‘Of course, when we go there will be a great deal of bloodshed etc, but that won’t take place until we leave, before the winter sets in. So much for that’ He then pointed to Archangel and Murmansk, where withdrawal was a ‘dangerous and difficult’ operation. It was thus necessary to ‘make an offensive, working up the Dvina River…and if possible smash up their [i.e. Bolshevik] fleet so that they will not be able to run after us.’ Britain would then leave a strong British Mission behind to help the North Russian troops. ‘It would never have done for us to be pushed into the sea at Archangel in the same sort of shameful manner as the French were kicked into the Black Sea at Odessa.’ While this operation was going on, ‘we cannot help feeling a certain element of anxiety’. He went on more bluntly.

‘I know there are great differences of opinion on the Russian question, but let us have the facts stated in their true proportion and not give the idea to the country that great enterprises are on foot there. We are winding up our affairs there
in an honourable manner. At the same time I do not think we shall get clear without a certain amount of fighting, and it should not be argued that all we have got to do is to walk away. That would lead to disaster and operations will probably take place in the near future, in the immediate future. I do not want you to be taken by surprise and I do not want the public to imagine that all we have got to do is to turn tail and run for the ships.’

Question: ‘You would not want us to say “an offensive operation up the Dvina River?”’

Mr Churchill: ‘You will see as soon as some movement begins.’ The D.M.O. explained that ‘if you have got your hand jammed in a door, you have got to force the door open before you can withdraw your hand, and we want to lock the door behind us as well.’ Ironside wished as little as possible said in the press until the operations had actually taken place.

Mr Lansbury: ‘Well, I would not like Mr Churchill to think that I agreed with everything he says… I have got personal information as good as any information you have got, Mr Churchill. Every American soldier who has come back from Archangel says that our troops could have come away just the same as they came away.’

Mr Churchill: ‘I am not endeavouring to argue about it. Mr Lansbury is quite at liberty to disbelieve me if he likes, and I do not in the least suppose that everyone does believe what I say.’ From the Baltic to the Black Sea, he went on gamely, the border states had withstood the Bolshevik tide, and the Poles had even advanced. The Bolsheviks were making considerable efforts to defend Petrograd. ‘I should deprecate the assumption that it is easy to take Petrograd: I do not know—it may or may not be…but still you never know. This is a land of the unexpected.’

He turned to South Russia, where Denikin’s ‘most amazing successes’ had not received proper attention from the Press. Denikin would soon very probably have the Volga. ‘He is moving very fast…and enormous districts have been liberated, where the people have received the troops on the whole with a very great measure of joy…To the left [is] Gregoriev—Gregoriev is a ruffian—he was a Bolshevik, but he deserted the Bolsheviks and started a sort of counter-Bolshevism and now anarchy prevails all over the place. He succeeded so much that he became an important figure, but we are in no way responsible. We have had nothing to do with Gregoriev nor has General Denikin, The advance of the Volunteers has been helped by what has been going on behind the front, but we are not responsible for Gregoriev.’ (If there was one thing that Churchill disliked more than Bolshevism, it was anarchy. Someone, it seems, had been accusing him of supporting Gregoriev.) Manufactured goods must be got to the people, Churchill stressed. ‘There is a tremendous opening there. I hope you will try and direct the attention of British traders to this area…I admit it is risky but there are chances. If
any newspapers want a spare article to put in, it would be a great help if they would discuss the possibility of building up a new market in South Russia.

‘Now, there is only one other point, Admiral Kolchak... He has got more than 4,000 miles behind him, so that he is in no immediate danger of being driven into the sea.’ But it was ‘extremely improbable’ that he would make any big advance for the present; though Denikin’s advance up the Volga might relieve him. ‘This is all speculative.’

Siberia

On July 5, Sir Charles Eliot was writing another of his private letters to Lord Curzon from Omsk.

‘We are beginning to feel here that we are in the wrong part of Russia and ought to be with the victorious Denikin. It is curious how things go up and down. Two months ago the Siberian army was advancing gaily to the Volga, and Denikin seemed in danger of being pushed into the sea: now he is carrying all before him, and Kolchak’s troops are in danger of being pushed east of the Urals. It is most unfortunate that the two armies could not be successful at the same time for then, I think, we should have overthrown the Bolshevik Government this summer. As it is, we can only hope that Denikin’s success will be greater than our failure.’

Denikin appeared to have two strong points which were lacking in Siberia. First, he had many more officers—so many, it was said, that some were serving in the ranks—who were not just efficient, but were fighting to rejoin their families, and recover their property. In Siberia, there were very few officers, and they had no such incentive. If they went to the front, they were taken away from their families and property; thus most preferred not to fight, but to have staff billets at Omsk. Second, Denikin was operating in a countryside which had had bitter experience of Bolshevism, and the peasants thus hailed him as their deliverer, and provided him with fresh troops as he advanced. Here, the Siberians only had a ‘slight and not recent’ acquaintance with Bolshevik ways; the economic situation was very bad, and the peasants felt that the present Omsk Government did nothing to improve it. ‘Hence, now that the front is broken, the army retreating and Bolshevik agents coming with it, pro-Bolshevik movements in Siberia are probable, but perhaps they will be scattered movements, which can be suppressed without great difficulty.

‘It seems to be true that the population are generally anti-Bolshevik, when they have been for some time under a Bolshevik Government; e.g. crowds of refugees are coming eastwards from the country around Perm to avoid being there when it comes under Bolshevik rule for the second time. On the other hand, it seems hard to deny that the people in the Ufa-Samara region prefer the Bolsheviks.

‘The military position seems almost hopeless on the Siberian front. If by the time that you receive this letter things look better, it will probably be due to one of the following causes:
1) Denikin is having considerable successes.
2) The Bolshevik troops are deeply engaged in the Urals. Though the prospect of their advance seems alarming to us here, I understand that from a military point of view it is not advantageous to have troops entangled in a hilly country from which it may be difficult to extricate them if they are wanted elsewhere.
3) Bad as the Siberian troops are, it is believed that the Bolshevik troops are no better. The Siberian troops got into a panic because they did not understand a strategic retirement, which ought not to have alarmed them & having once started running, they have been running ever since. But it is believed that if they can be induced to take up a favourable position & turn on the Bolsheviks, these latter will run with equal speed.\(^\text{15}\)

There was much talk about giving a religious character to the anti-Bolshevik cause. The danger, of course, was that it would be interpreted as an anti-Jewish crusade, Eliot explained. ‘Judging from a benediction of the troops which I saw recently in Ekaterinburg, I should say that the religious feeling among the troops & the public is only moderately strong, but I daresay it is stronger in European Russia. I have read articles in Russian papers saying that large sections of the peasantry regard Lenin as Antichrist & that sounds to me probable. Antichrist is a familiar personage in Eastern Christianity, though we don’t know much about him in England.

‘Though, as I have often warned you, the Government of Omsk is neither efficient nor popular, I see no signs of a movement against Kolchak. He has no rival & his name carries great weight. But he has many limitations, one (which is a pity at the present time) being that he remains shut up in his house, as secluded as any Tsar or Sultan. He dines out with foreigners, but only very rarely, and never with Russians and invites no one but his ministers to his house. His only distraction seems to be a scandalous intimacy with the wife of another Admiral. She lives in an adjacent hotel & visits him twice a week for two hours in the afternoon. I recently begged him to show himself more & try to put a little spirit into his troops. I hope that he may be taking my advice, for he is at present at the front.

‘Though he sometimes gives way to excitement (particularly when talking of people such as Semenov or Gajda) he is more reticent than most Russians. I should think that he is at heart in favour of a Constitutional Monarchy, but he is wise enough to be silent on this point and does not go beyond saying that he wishes to give the people the form of Government for which they may express a preference when peace is restored.

‘I think he appreciates what England has done for Russia, but he is angry at the idea of the Caucasus, Esthonia etc being detached from Russia & only reluctantly accepts the independence of Finland. Most of his Ministers and the public are, I fear, anti-Ally & anti-British at present. Of course our policy of giving money and arms but not sending troops to fight is perfectly reasonable, for how can
Bolshevism be permanently conquered in Russia except by the Russians themselves? Still, when I have to justify the withdrawal of the Hampshires from Ekaterinburg because that city is in danger, I feel that it is a difficult task to be plausible. It would have been so much better not to send them there but leave them where they were at Omsk. I suppose that Knox (who is at present in Vladivostok) would say that he never imagined Ekaterinburg could be in danger & that if ordinary prudence had been used, it never would have been.'

When dissatisfied with Britain, and their other Allies, the Russians frequently talked of turning to the Japanese. ‘The argument is that the democratic Powers of the West have great difficulty in inducing their parliaments to consent to any effective anti-Bolshevik policy, whereas Japan has not the same difficulties and will send troops to the Urals in return for definite concessions—such as mining rights—in the Far East. This sort of talk is only half serious, but it is becoming increasingly frequent and the Government now wish to get rid of the Czechs and entrust the long stretch of line between Irkutsk and Omsk mainly to the protection of Japanese troops’, concluded Eliot.15 ‘I hope you will give me leave to come home for the winter.’

On July 6, an American officer, Major Homer H.Slaughter, sent a sombre but expressive report to General Graves (the American Commander), on his return from the Siberian front. The Bolsheviks had taken both Perm and Kungur on July 1, and the entire Kama river flotilla of 38 ships had been burned. ‘Troops still fair morale but slightly out of hand, require collecting’, stated Slaughter. ‘Only five to ten officers [in each] regiment. Men better morale than officers who greatly fear torture [and] certain death [at] hands [of] Bolsheviks…Men will fight if lead’, he added, underlining that the Bolsheviks had no reserves at all. But refugees coming east were bringing horses and cattle, and often their families in carts. ‘From Tiumen west all disorder and panic, no one in charge. Officers and men leaving front every train by hundreds, no apparent control, no arms, some equipment, few slightly wounded on hand probably self-inflicted. Actual strength army at the front unknown to any one.’ On June 20, Gajda was drawing 270,000 rations. ‘Now investigating for whom.’

There was then further news from Ekaterinburg. On July 7, Kolchak had a stormy interview with Gajda, the British Consul later reported, and accused him of demoralising the army and encouraging Bolshevism. Gajda told Kolchak that the fault lay with Kolchak’s Generals, like Lebedev, and others who robbed the country and were not punished for it. This interview ended in a very heated quarrel, in which Kolchak threatened Gajda with a court-martial and finally dismissed him. All available reserves were being moved east. The next few days would decide the fate of Ekaterinburg, which was being evacuated, and probably Chelyabinsk. ‘Demoralisation which has set in is strikingly reminiscent of collapse during revolution of 1917’, added the British Consul. The refugees daily streaming in from the west were largely small landowners, while the peasants waited for the Bolsheviks.15 But these wires did not reach London for some time.
On July 8, however, the War Office had a long wire sent from Omsk on June 24, in which Knox stated that he had that day seen Lebedev, who said that about July 20, a first offensive would be made north of the River Belaya to reach the junction with the River Kama, and to capture Orenburg in the south. The main offensive would then start with the three divisions ready to enter the battle, who would move towards Viatka, and retake Ufa and the area west. Mannerheim had been told that if the Finnish Government allowed, he was to drive towards Petrograd at once to assist Yudenitch to take Petrograd as soon as possible. Yudenitch had been told; and if Mannerheim could not move, Yudenitch was to stop and consolidate, and prepare for a final effort on Petrograd when Kolchak’s force started about July 20th. If Mannerheim could move at once, Lebedev requested that Ironside’s force on the Vologda railway and Maynard’s force on the Murmansk railway should drive south at the same time to assist both him and Yudenitch. Lebedev did not think that Ironside’s Kotlas group should move before July 20, as it must conform with the Siberian right flank, who would only start after the completion of the first offensive, say about August 1. If Yudenitch had to wait, the Murmansk and Vologda groups must delay until July 20. Thus, the Murmansk and Vologda groups must take their cue from the Baltic, while the Kotlas group must wait and conform to the attack from Siberia.\(^\text{16}\)

This, of course, was now very out of date, wholly impracticable, and completely contradicted the plans of General Dietrichs, whom Kolchak, with Knox’s concurrence, had promoted to Chief of Staff in place of Lebedev—with whom Knox now had no business to be conniving.

But the War Office then had a further wire from Knox, sent only on July 4, and evidently based on his previous wire, that, if not too late, the plan for the Czechs to strike through to Archangel was excellent, if only the Czechs, Japanese and Americans would play. But the Czechs would not remain much longer under Russian command, and were unlikely to agree if the other Allies held back. Knox therefore proposed that General Janin take command of a non-Russian Army to be formed on the Hampshire regiment’s right, made up of the Hampshires, various Poles, Serbians, and so on, as well as the Czechs. The idea of going along alone to rescue the Russians would not appeal to the Czechs, but this plan was feasible, if all agreed. ‘The arrival of an Allied Army would have a great moral effect, and once at Viatka and across the Volga, we could go on to Petrograd if Archangel was closed for shipping.’\(^\text{17}\) Knox was telling Janin of this plan and of this wire; Janin was the only man who could organise this.

North Russia

On the Archangel front, as many vessels lay aground, or anchored, in the upper Dvina river, the SNO Archangel advised Admiral Green on the 7th. ‘River falling rapidly. Only 3 feet 4 inches in places between Bereznik and Troitsa.’ That day, Captain Collard replied urgently to Altham about his request for two more ‘Dance’ class minesweepers. ‘Vessels are available’, he stated, ‘but in view of depth
of river, it appears inevitable that these flat bottomed ships will strike mines.’ That day, Collard also wrote to Colonel Steel, advising him of the latest position on the River Dvina, which was now so low that it was doubtful if any ships could be used, until the river rose. ‘We will, of course, meet all possible demands from Altham, but as you know, we have shot our bolt as far as shallow draught craft are concerned’, he admitted. ‘I think we ought to consider the possibility of having to evacuate from positions not so far advanced from the present positions held on the Dvina.’ But early that morning, there had been disaster. At 3.45 am on the 7th, records a CMB officer, ‘I was called and told that SNO (River) wanted to see me. I nipped up and as I got on deck heard a burst of machine gun fire on the beach. He told me to take 6 Lewis guns etc ashore at once as our Russian troops had mutinied…The state of affairs was as follows:- We have Russian troops holding our line here; Russian troops in the village and hardly a British soldier in the place except officers. The Russian troops in the village had English and Russian officers. They had recently come up from Archangel. General Grogan [Commander of the first Relief Brigade] and staff were in the village also. Two howitzers were on the beach ready to move up to the line. Most of the recently arrived Russian troops were Bolo prisoners. We have lots of blokes on our side who have been taken prisoners 5 or 6 times and fought on both sides alternately.

‘The officers, in their own minds, had thought there was bound to be trouble sooner or later. Two companies mutinied and murdered their officers in their beds, 5 British and 6 Russian, and then shoved off into the woods when the two howitzers on the beach opened fire on the village. The blighters simply mutilated these officers. One English officer got away down the cliff and swam about three quarters of a mile or more to the “Humber”. He had 11 bullet holes put through him, but I think will be alright. Three English Colonels who were in the same hut got off with their lives. The mutineers fired through the walls and door and were about to come in when the howitzers opened fire. These three had armed themselves with shot guns etc and were prepared to have a scrap for it. I had a yarn with one of them. General Grogan (he is a fine man, very small but a proper fire eater, and wears about umpteen medals, including VC, CB, CMG, DSO and bar, and is apparently very well liked by the soldiers) went up there in his pyjamas and was greeted with a burst of machine gun fire as the mutineers were shoving off. He addressed the remainder of the men and they seemed to be alright, but of course you cannot trust the blighters. When we got ashore, we went to GHQ and after seeing how things were and so on, were sent out to take over the left flank of a semi-circle surrounding the 3 villages. There were only a few Russians there and we expected to be attacked by the mutineers at any minute. We had about 70 men all told and 9 Lewis guns from the ships and we occupied various posts. Some Russians were also there and we had to see that they did not run if we were attacked.

‘As was expected, the mutiny was timed to coincide with a Bolo attack on our lines. That night, he attacked in force and drove our lines right back to our anchorage and the woods around the villages. Urgent messages had been sent to
Bereznik for British reinforcements and 500 of the 46th Battalion of Royal Fusiliers arrived on Tuesday (the 8th). (They are all volunteers, and any quantity of ex-officers in the ranks, Colonels etc galore; fellows wearing DSOs and MCs in privates’ uniform. I have never seen a finer crowd of men anywhere.) They belong to General S. Jackson’s brigade, and he came up with them. Another battalion of Russians also came up, and a few guns. All this time we were expecting to be attacked on the left, where we were. One of the motor bicycle despatch riders had been out and walked into the middle of a crowd of Russians whom he thought were our fellows, but who turned out to be the mutineers, and he was chased by cavalry, but got back alright…The British troops that came up were not sent up to attack because they wanted to use up the Ruskies.

At 8.30 am on July 8, there was a heavy military and naval bombardment for two hours, and then a counter-attack, which drove the Bolsheviks back. ‘They could be seen being knocked out of the trees’, he writes. ‘The whole show was jolly fine, but it was touch and go at the beginning whether we were going to be pushed to blazes out of it or not. It is about the narrowest squeak they have had. The casualties were extraordinary considering the amount of fighting. Our military forces had 2 killed and 38 wounded. In the wood, 200 dead Boloys were picked up. There must have been plenty more.

‘The weather is very changeable, boiling hot one day, cold the next, or raining like a second flood, very cold at nights…The transport up river is on its last legs and things are pretty serious now.’

The SNO Archangel confirmed this. ‘Only 4 feet of water 177 versts [117 miles] above Archangel causing serious delay in transport’, he wired on the 8th. ‘About 3/5ths way to Bereznik’, noted Collard in dismay on this telegram.

Ironside’s first report of the new disaster reached the War Office on the 8th. ‘Determined mutiny took place at 2 a.m. this morning’, he had wired on the 7th. ‘All is now quiet, mutiny is due to active propaganda and came without any warning’ (See Figure 2). It had taken place on the Dvina front in Dyer’s battalion, which was to have been used in the Kotlas operation. Eight determined Russians had murdered 5 British officers, 4 Russian officers and 3 orderlies, and wounded another officer and another man; and then taken about 150 men over to the enemy. There had been ‘not the slightest sign’ that any conspiracy was being organised, the Times correspondent later reported. At one moment, there was danger of a further Russian battalion going over. A British Colonel and a British journalist were held up by the mutineers, and locked up in a mobile bath house. But when General Grogan lobbed over some shells, the mutineers scampered off; and the two escaped out of the bath house window. When the Times correspondent asked for permission to report the incident, he was told ‘Certainly not’. Next day, he left Bereznik; but was then marooned for four days and nights on a sandbank in the Dvina—whether by accident or by Ironside’s order remains unclear.

Ironside later reported: ‘I consider no blame attached to anybody. All ranks from the Colonel downwards had great faith in the battalion and in its loyalty. The outbreak originated with the 8 men...[who] were deserters from the
Copy of E/T Message.

Date 9 July 1919.
Time 7.30 a.m.
(Intercepted by "Number").

Listen Listen Radio Station to English Listen Listen.
To English.–

White Sailors stop fighting. Your brother workers of England, France and Italy decided to help us 20 and 21 July. Join them and throw over your officers. Go home to make the world free for working people.

Look at the uprising amongst the White Russian Troops, it is significant for you. Don't delay. We want to see you helping as soon as possible.

Let us shake hands and do away with Tsars, Kaisers, Kings, Terrible Capitalists and Bankers.

Rise up the Red Flag of International Unity.

We are waiting for an answer.

The Red Sailors on Dvina Listen Listen To English Radio Station. To English General Ironside – You know that you are a murderer of liberty. Send us no more any foolish leaflets because they spill your dirty work unconditionally. There are 99 facts out of a hundred that the White Army is getting Red. Beware, don't stop mighty power of workers. Now Kolchak has gone, next are you.

Do away with your Air terrors, let your flyers serve the labour.

The Reds on Dvina Listen Listen to English "Matrosy".

Ø Sailors.

Figure 2 Bolshevik wireless message broadcast to British soldiers and sailors, timed to coincide with the mutiny of the Slavo-British legion.
Bolsheviks...The outbreak came without warning...Those men who went off with the mutineers...were in most cases forced to do so by armed force. It only shows the sheeplike nature of the ordinary Russian. One propagandist can make them do anything. The Russian officers did practically nothing to quell the mutiny...Many simply ran away and deserted their posts. The mutiny was quelled by the British officers. I interviewed the Russian officers a few hours after the event, and found them in a state of panic, and quite useless for any military purpose.'

This report provoked a furious and rather pathetic reaction from Churchill. ‘The names of these Russians should be carefully recorded and never lost sight of. They are guilty of the blackest treachery conceivable, & if our affairs with Russia should at any time in the next five or ten years reach a condition when it is possible for us to demand their exemplary punishment, we must not fail to do so. Propose me steps which will ensure that these men’s names are not forgotten nor their cases overlooked, & that if & when the Russian situation re-establishes itself a demand is put forward on our behalf that these men are excepted from any amnesty and are placed on their trial for treason and murder either before a Russian, British or international court’*

This was Churchill’s last minute on the Kotlas operation.

The DMO reacted very quickly. He passed Knox’s latest wire (for an Allied Army from Siberia to charge through Viatka to Petrograd) straight on to Sir Henry Wilson with this agitated note. ‘I am afraid that I do not regard this scheme as feasible—because it would involve the use of the Hants and commit them indefinitely to the heart of Russia—this we cannot do. In any case the French, Americans and Japanese would have to agree in Paris.’

Next day, when the Peace Conference discussed the matter, the American General Bliss stated that Benes (the Czech Foreign Minister) wished to know, before agreeing to the Czech advance to Archangel, whether Allied troops would remain in North Russia during the winter if they arrived after the ice had closed the port. Balfour replied flatly that ‘as far as Great Britain was concerned, the answer was “no”’. The Japanese delegate doubted whether there were enough Japanese troops to replace the Czechs. Lansing replied flatly that the problem was a military one, with which he could not deal. Pichon (the French Foreign Minister) thought it would be militarily possible if a few American troops could reinforce the Japanese. But General Bliss did not think this could be done.

* It was therefore decided to circulate their names to all White Russian theatres, and to keep careful record at the War Office. ‘Yes’, wrote Churchill, ‘but with machinery that ensures their names being brought up on the anniversary of their crime each year.’ A round robin letter was therefore sent off on August 23, but it was unsuccessful. In September 1920, there was a report from Danzig that some of the men were believed to be interned in a camp at Stettin. But it seems that they were never traced in the end; though the matter was still being pursued in January 1921.
American troops had been sent to Siberia to help the Czechs to leave. ‘Once the Czechoslovaks had left there would be no pretext to justify the retention of American troops in the country.’ But after further discussion, it was agreed that a draft wire should be prepared for Clemenceau to send to America and Japan to ask them to defend the Siberian railway after the Czechs had left—via Vladivostok.21

On July 9, The Times ran this headline about Kolchak: ‘The Retreat to the Urals’, ‘Ragged troops’ fight for clothing’. That morning, Sir Henry Wilson presided at a General Staff meeting, at which the military position in the various Russian theatres was reassessed.

1 In North Russia, all supplies left after the British withdrawal would be given to the North Russians, whose further needs were still awaited from Generals Ironside and Maynard; at present, there was only enough food up to mid-August. No more aircraft or tanks would be sent out; and six tanks, under orders for Murmansk, would go instead to the Baltic. Sir Henry Wilson would ask Churchill, and later Ironside and Maynard, whether British Missions could hold on after the withdrawal.

2 In Siberia, it was ‘impracticable’ to bring the Czechs back through Archangel, since this would entail the retention for an ‘indefinite period’ of the Hampshire Regiment, who would sail from Vladivostok with the Middlesex Regiment, when ships were available. Though there were not enough volunteers to replace them with British Missions, an effort should be made to fill General Knox’s cadres, for whom six months supplies were approved.

3 It was agreed that 10,000 North Russian and 17,000 Siberian prisoners should leave Germany for Russia, if shipping could be provided.

4 In the Baltic, it was impossible to send further British supplies to the NWR Army; anything further should be organised in Paris.22

5 In South Russia, where there were now 12 British tanks, and 62 more being sent (all but 16 of which were either en route, or being prepared), the prime necessity was a British credit of £2 million to £3 million to restore trade. Denikin’s detailed needs were ‘not to be met for the moment’ owing to Treasury opposition, though Churchill was reconsidering the matter; but the DMI would try to induce the Treasury to send a ‘good man’ to Denikin.

At noon, the War Cabinet reconsidered the position at Archangel in the light of the abandonment of the advance on Kotlas, and the recent mutiny. Curzon admitted that he was anxious and perturbed about our evacuation. Churchill retorted that it showed how ‘prudent’ they had been in not sending alarmist telegrams about Kolchak’s defeat to Ironside just when he was about to make his advance. In fact, the War Office had not interfered, and Ironside had come to the independent conclusion that the attack would be unwise, ‘at any rate during the present month’. The War Office had replied that his decision was sound, ‘in the circumstances’. (This, of course, refers to Ironside’s wire of July 4; though
Ironside had realised even by June 19, as his diary entries show, that he could not get to Kotlas; but had said nothing about it to the War Office.

Curzon reminded Churchill that the whole point of the attack was to ensure a safe evacuation of the British troops. Churchill retorted that, of course, the evacuation would now be ‘more difficult’, but it would still be possible to carry out before November 10, as planned, save for a British Mission. Perm, he stated, had been evacuated because the river Kama also was ‘abnormally low, which prevented our flotilla advancing’, and because both Bolshevik morale and Bolshevik artillery were a lot better than ‘our own’. As for the mutiny, it had occurred in a battalion of ‘Bolshevik criminals,’ which at one time had fought ‘exceedingly well’, but had since been disrupted by Bolshevik propaganda. (Only eleven days earlier, on June 28, Churchill had assured the Cabinet that Dyer’s battalion formed part of a ‘very useful and self-sufficient’ Russian force, whose growth was ‘remarkable’.)

Chamberlain doubted whether there would be any military advantage in remaining at Archangel as late as November 10. Churchill retorted that Britain would now have to stay ‘until the very last minute’, as the ‘unexpected strength’ of the Bolsheviks would entail British organisation of the Russian troops before we could leave. Curzon expressed his anxiety about the future; in view of what Sir Henry Wilson had said, the British position would be ‘seriously compromised’ if the offensive were abandoned. In reply to a question, Churchill said it was too soon to know if British troops would have to bring any Russian refugees away with them.

Chamberlain then raised another point. The War Office were now asking that the special allowance of 2 shillings and sixpence per day, granted to the British Mission in South Russia, should be given to British troops in North Russia, ‘in order to attract volunteers’. Churchill explained that the conscripts in North Russia were entitled to leave by September, and this extra allowance was sought ‘as an inducement to these men to stay on and assist in the evacuation’. It was not intended to send out fresh volunteers from England. This extra allowance should also be paid to the British Mission of 2,000 men, who would have to remain at Archangel for the whole winter. Chamberlain remarked that a British Mission of this size would be left in a very precarious position after the evacuation.

Fisher recalled that when the matter had been discussed before, and it was stated that the Dvina river was the only supply line to Archangel, he had suggested that we could bring away our troops, if the river could be kept mined; and the First Sea Lord had mentioned that he had some ‘good mines’. He (Fisher) thus wished to know why we could not evacuate at an earlier date, if the river could be kept mined for a sufficient time. Churchill confirmed that it was

* Sciolism, a word which seems to have dropped entirely out of use, means assumption of knowledge; conceit based on fancied wisdom.
intended to mine it; but the First Sea Lord pointed out that ‘as the river was only 2 ft 6 in deep at the present moment nothing could be done’.

Bonar Law stated that the position in North Russia must be kept under constant review, as the Prime Minister was very anxious that our pledge to the volunteers should be fulfilled. It was agreed that Sir Henry Wilson should submit a fresh appreciation of the new position on the Archangel front, and on the general Russian situation.²³

But the *Times* correspondent, when eventually allowed to report, was rather more scathing. Though this revolt marked one of the ‘most tragic episodes of this expedition’, Russian officers felt that ‘we, who came out professedly to help the loyal Russian Army, are greatly to be blamed for our sciolism;* they say that we have not tried to understand the Russian character, we have been theatrical in our efforts to overcome Bolshevism, and the murder of five British officers by the mutineers is the natural result of moral weakness’. There were even some Bolshevik Commissars amongst the Bolshevik prisoners in Dyer’s battalion. The Russian critics said that the very idea of such a scheme was as theatrical and Utopian as Bolshevism itself; but Ironside refused to believe that a little perseverance would not achieve good results. He placed British officers alongside Russian officers believing that they would infuse that ‘splendid spirit of camaraderie’ that existed between the British officer and soldier. When the battalion was given its colours, the British officers ‘seemed to stand out in the sunshine like symbols of our traditional love of fair play’. Five were now dead. ‘It availed them nothing that they had sought to treat the men as men, scorning the traditional harshness of the Russian officer. They were attacked while they were asleep.’

Russian officers later told the *Times* correspondent: ‘You British do not understand the Russian character. You blamed us for harshness, but that is the only way to deal with these people. We hope that this will be a lesson to you. These people do not understand kindness; and what they don’t understand they suspect.’ From the beginning, we had tried to reason with the Bolsheviks. Great efforts had been made with propaganda; for Ironside, when he formed Dyer’s battalion, honestly believed that the peasant soldiers in the Bolshevik ranks were only misguided. The present position of the Archangel force was now disturbing, if not serious. Ironside had had little luck from the start, but might have done much better if he had undertaken larger operations down the Vologda railway—‘this in view of the extraordinary difficulties which have been encountered on the river’.²⁴

In early May, when waiting for the ice to break up to enable the British gunboats to go up river to Kurgomen to bombard the enemy positions, ‘impatience, according to the Russians, led to our undoing’. By dynamiting the ice, and hastening the ‘run’ to the White Sea, the banks were deprived of much water that might have filtered through from the swollen river; and as there was little snow last winter, the Dvina was now ‘little better than a pool in places. Sand banks abound; only the narrowest of channels is navigable, and the swift current,
five knots even in this tropical season, is constantly shifting those sand banks so that a navigable channel today may be unnavigable tomorrow. Our troops are wholly dependent on the river for transport.’

The Times correspondent, in one of the best despatches sent from Russia, summed the position up thus: ‘The new troops that you sent out in early June have not achieved the success for which we hoped. They have not approached the work accomplished by the physically unfit Royal Scots, who returned last month…The Bolshevik Sixth Army, against which we have been fighting in this part of Russia, has not been pulverised; indeed, it has seemed to take to itself an access of new strength, until, today, we are in as bad a position, or worse, as ever the old troops found themselves.’

Both Churchill and Sir Henry Wilson then abruptly left London to stay with the Prime Minister in Wales. ‘Both arrived depressed’, noted Hankey, who was also at Criccieth, ‘presumably by the failure of Kolchak in Russia. Winston talked most gloomily about the dangers of flying (he is learning to fly himself) and about what an easy death it was to fall’ After dinner on the 10th, noted Sir Henry Wilson, ‘a long discussion about Russia & it is clear L.G. wants to cut our connection with it altogether even to stopping supplies & missions to Denikin & Kolchak’. The discussion was continued after breakfast next day, when ‘we (L.G., Winston & I & Hankey) had a long talk. We discussed Russia again & it is very clear that L.G.’s instinct is to make a clean cut. As regards Archangel & Murmansk he is opposed to our leaving a mission.’ The Prime Minister, Hankey pointed out, ‘was always opposed to Winston’s operations from Archangel and was only persuaded with great difficulty to assent to them, so he was in rather a “I told you so” kind of mood’.

Churchill seems to have sought consolation in the bottle. On July 13, when Sir Henry Wilson sent Lloyd George a brief note on his return to London, he wrote: ‘Thank you so much for my visit. You know how much I enjoyed it. You will be sorry to hear that Winston did not behave very well. We pulled up, by your direction at “The Hand” for lunch. Exactly opposite Winston was a picture of “a fush”. This seemed to excite him. He kept mumbling something about “a fush the size of your…”’. I could not quite catch the word. Then he got up and measured the “fush” and then went into convulsions and altogether behaved in so strange a manner that I was quite glad to get him out of the house without a scandal.

Churchill remained in an unbalanced mood, and next day wrote a furious (and grossly unfair) letter to Curzon, trying to make him somehow responsible for the North Russian debacle as well. Curzon must realise, Churchill wrote, that his difficulties had been ‘very seriously’ increased by the various debates which Curzon had initiated on the North Russian position in the War Cabinet. ‘I had

* Admiralty italics.
† Admiralty italics.
always looked upon you as one of the very few members of the Government who took a strong anti-Bolshevik view, and yet it is you who now on three occasions have raised discussions which have had the effect of starting a regular chorus of opinions in favour of a general scuttle.’

Churchill went on. ‘You must not suppose that it is my power single-handed to maintain this contest, and if I am not helped by those who in the main agree, I shall have to give up the struggle and let events take their course.’ If Curzon had any doubts about the military position, Churchill did not see why he could not let him know privately, so that he could send over the CIGS, or his Deputy, or the DMO, whom Curzon could cross-examine at his leisure. ‘But I could not indefinitely continue to maintain a policy of this kind in complete isolation.’

But good sense finally prevailed. Churchill must have seen how grossly unfair such accusations were; and he did not send the letter.

Who was responsible for the débâcle on the Dvina river?

In February 1920, the Naval Staff issued a history of naval operations in the White Sea, for use at Staff College only, which contained the Admiralty’s defence of its role in the Dvina river operations of 1919. On February 5, it stated, the War Cabinet directed the Admiralty to make the necessary provisions for river operations in North Russia. It was thus decided at the Admiralty to reinforce the Archangel river expeditionary force. ‘It is very important to note that the strength of the reinforcements being prepared was based on the assumption that an active defensive only, in cooperation with the army, would be undertaken and only as far as the positions then occupied by the military forces on the rivers’, it was stressed. ‘At this time, our military forces were holding a position on the River Dvina in the vicinity of Kurgomen, about 200 miles from Archangel, and there was no thought of any further advance south down the river towards Kotlas.’ Thus, ships with a draught up to 6 or 7 feet could be selected. In March 1919, the War Cabinet decided to advise the Allied Governments ‘to withdraw all forces from North Russia absolutely’, and the naval and military authorities in North Russia were instructed accordingly.

There then arose Kolchak’s idea of an advance to Kotlas, and a junction with the Archangel forces. ‘This scheme, involving our troops leaving their positions on the Dvina and forcing their way up the river towards Kotlas, would have meant an absolute reversal if the policy of complete and early evacuation’, pointed out the Naval Staff. ‘Nothing official was settled until much later, but it was considered quite possible that such a change of policy might be made at any time.’ The difficulties of protecting the military forces were stressed. ‘The distance by river from Bereznik to Kotlas was about 200 miles through unknown channels, of which every yard could, and would be, mined by the enemy.’ Thus, a large minesweeping force, a strong gunboat flotilla, and many small craft were needed. ‘Such an advance could only be extremely slow, and there was no possibility of reaching Kotlas until probably well on in August.’ The Naval Staff then gave the depth of the River Dvina up to Kotlas. ‘Every possible step was taken to obtain very shallow light draught vessels in case it should be definitely decided to
endeavour to advance to Kotlas, but though vessels from Mesopotamia were brought home specially for the purpose, there was no prospect of providing sufficient vessels for successful operations above Kurgomen.’

While waiting for the War Cabinet to decide, the War Office wired to General Ironside on June 4. Ironside replied thus on June 19. ‘Preparations for advance on Kotlas are nearing completion and minesweeping commences tomorrow, but whether it is considered that Kolchak will be able to join up with the Archangel forces or not [Admiralty italics], it is considered that, in order to ensure an orderly evacuation, offensive operations should be carried out towards Kotlas.’ The Naval Staff here state. ‘It thus appeared that whatever the fate of Kolchak’s Army, the Navy, in spite of the difficulties involved, might be called upon to assist in an advance towards Kotlas.’

The Admiralty therefore called a conference to discuss the matter on June 23, at which the DMO said he was ‘quite satisfied’ with the ships provided.

‘On June 27th, the War Office informed General Ironside at Archangel that after consideration of the whole situation, approval had been given to carry out the operations proposed by him on June 19th. This decision constituted a complete abandonment of the policy adopted in March’, the Naval Staff underlined. By June 27, however, the minefield had been cleared to Troitsa (the Bolshevik winter position), where an advanced base had been formed, and, ‘save for one vital consideration’, they pointed out, ‘conditions were favourable for a further advance toward Kotlas’. But by now, the minimum depth in the Dvina river above Bereznik was 3 feet 4 inches, which made naval cooperation so impossible that on July 4, General Ironside had to wire that he was now unable ‘even to make a raid on Kotlas’.

Save for one or two points, the Admiralty in fact were in the clear. But the Dvina river charts (XI55–172, which cannot be traced in the Public Record Office), which were prepared at the Admiralty by the Naval Hydrographer from Russian charts, were hopelessly inaccurate. Second, the river gunboats were somewhat inadequate. They were, remarked Captain Altham in a report in late July, ‘very lightly constructed, have developed continual defects due to shock of gunfire and grounding, and therefore had to be reserved for essential long range work. During the majority of the operations, only two gunboats have been available, the other two being at Archangel refitting. At one period lately, for over a week, no gunboat was in action, due to defects to gun supports and shell damage.’ Third, Captain Altham himself is not entirely blameless for failing to inform the Admiralty soon enough of the real state of affairs on the Dvina river. (In this connection, it is interesting to note that in February 1920, Altham was asked to write a paper on combined operations. This he did, at considerable length. ‘A very well written & interesting paper’, wrote the Second Sea Lord underneath. The First Sea Lord concurred; and Altham (who had received a very frigid letter of appreciation from Their Lordships on his return from North Russia) now received a warm letter of commendation, and this paper—the fruit of
a completely botched job by the Army and Navy—was then incorporated into a new handbook on combined operations.\textsuperscript{26}

The main villains of the abortive Kotlas operation, which arose from the ashes of the French debacle at Odessa, and was based on a rash guarantee given by Ironside back in March, are undoubtedly at the War Office; and they are the Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, and their Director of Military Operations. But General Ironside, who had made adequate naval support an absolute precondition for success, certainly misled the War Office and War Cabinet in his wires on and after June 19, by delaying to inform them of the real state of the Dvina river, which made the Kotlas operation impossible long before he officially informed them on July 4. But Ironside, it must be remembered, had never been given any real orders at all.

The real culprit is Churchill, who had never informed the Admiralty what he was proposing to do on the River Dvina, that he was in fact going to twist a relief operation into a foolhardy dash into the interior—which could not receive the necessary naval support, since the river craft, which had been requested solely to cover the relief operation, could not get further up the river. It is curious, in views of his own experience of river wars, that he paid so little attention to the state of the Dvina. Churchill (and his DMO, whom he simply appears to have overawed) both stand guilty of professional negligence.

He seems to have known this. On July 4, when Ironside finally wired that the Kotlas operation was impossible, he prepared to depart from London—as he was likewise to depart in late March 1920, on hearing that Denikin’s operations in South Russia were about to end in a complete debacle, as that Russian champion was literally driven into the Black Sea at Novorossisk.

As the Peace Conference ended in Paris (some eight months after the German Armistice), the overall British military position in the former Russian Empire was not promising. The Bolsheviks had certainly been held within Russia; but their opponents, the Whites, expendable British pawns all of them, had achieved little else. Though the British had virtually placed Admiral Kolchak in supreme power in Siberia, and sent him vast quantities of British surplus supplies, his ill-coordinated lunge forward (rather than an advance), in early March, had petered out; and his troops had all the signs, not of an army, but of a ramshackle rabble. In North Russia, Churchill had twisted a relief operation into a foolhardy dash into the interior; but had been abruptly halted by mutiny and a dry river bed. In the Baltic, the promised British supplies had failed to arrive, and British warships in the Gulf of Finland were clearly reluctant to give their support. Only in South Russia was progress at last being made. But General Denikin had no support on either flank. The Golovin plan, designed to achieve just this, had been abandoned at the War Office in London.

General Denikin now had at most some four months before the onset of the Russian winter, when the central position of the Bolsheviks would count for more and more. Could he confound the critics of medium intervention, seize
Moscow, and send the Bolsheviks packing within that time? Or would the Bolsheviks easily overcome him, the last of the expendable British pawns? And would they then, triumphing over everything that the British had been able to hurl against them, still manage to break out of Russia in the spring, and ravage a still prostrate Europe?
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