

# Issue: Rethinking foreign intervention and influence in revolutions

**Forum:** Special Conference devoted to Russian  
Revolution Centenary

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## **Introduction**

During the whole history, thousands of revolutions have happened all around the globe. Actually, the revolution process always originates within the society of a state, caused by the discontent of the citizens with living conditions, government, etc. However, the influence of foreign powers in lots of revolutions should not be underestimated. The fact, which we have to understand, is that “big players” on the politics area are always chasing their own interests, funding anti-governmental, revolutionary structures within the enemy countries, which may help that states to achieve their own geopolitical aims, by destabilizing the situation in another country. That is why foreign intervention often explains the outcome of each revolution.

This thesis may be proved by lots of examples. For instance, we may use rather recent revolutions in Bahrain, Libya, and Syria as case studies to illustrate this phenomenon. How did the Libyans successfully oust Kaddafi and the Bahrainis overthrow their monarchy? Actually, the Libyans did it because during the revolution they had received assistance from powerful foreign States, including the USA, the UK, and France, which gave this help not in real peacekeeping aim, but chasing the geopolitical goals of NATO alliance. While in Bahrain the protesters and revolutionaries were working against foreigners who supported the government and were subsequently forced to stop their efforts. Syria is an unusual case, because there is foreign intervention and the support of both sides: the rebels and the state, which helps to explain why the situation became deadlocked. That is why, rethinking the foreign intervention and influence in revolutions, we should be realistic and analyze which powerful states may benefit from each revolution.

## **Definition of key terms**

Revolution - a fundamental change in political organization, especially the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of it by another, that sometimes may be easily governed.

Intervention - the interference of a country in the affairs of another country for the purpose of compelling it to do or forbear doing certain acts.

Geopolitics - the combination of geographic and political factors influencing or delineating a country or region.

The Arab Spring - a revolutionary wave of both violent and non-violent demonstrations, protests, riots, coups, foreign interventions, and civil wars in North Africa and the Middle East that began on 17 December 2010 in Tunisia with the Tunisian revolution.

The Great Russian Revolution – a period of Russian history from February to October 1917 during which the Tsarist autocracy was dismantled and which led to the following rise of the Soviet Union. The Russian Empire collapsed with the abdication of Emperor Nicholas II and the old regime was replaced by the Provisional government during the first revolution of February 1917 (March in the Gregorian calendar; the older Julian calendar was in use in Russia at the time). Alongside it raised grassroots community assemblies (called 'soviets') which contended for authority. During the second revolution in October, the Provisional Government was toppled and all power was given to the soviets.

## **Background information**

One of the most comprehensive examples of foreign intervention and influence in revolutions may be seen in the Great Russian Revolution and Civil War that happened after it.

First of all, we need to refer to the backgrounds of foreign sponsoring of the aforesaid revolution. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the Russian Empire had already achieved the top position in economy and politics and was powerful enough to enter any relevant military conflict most successfully.

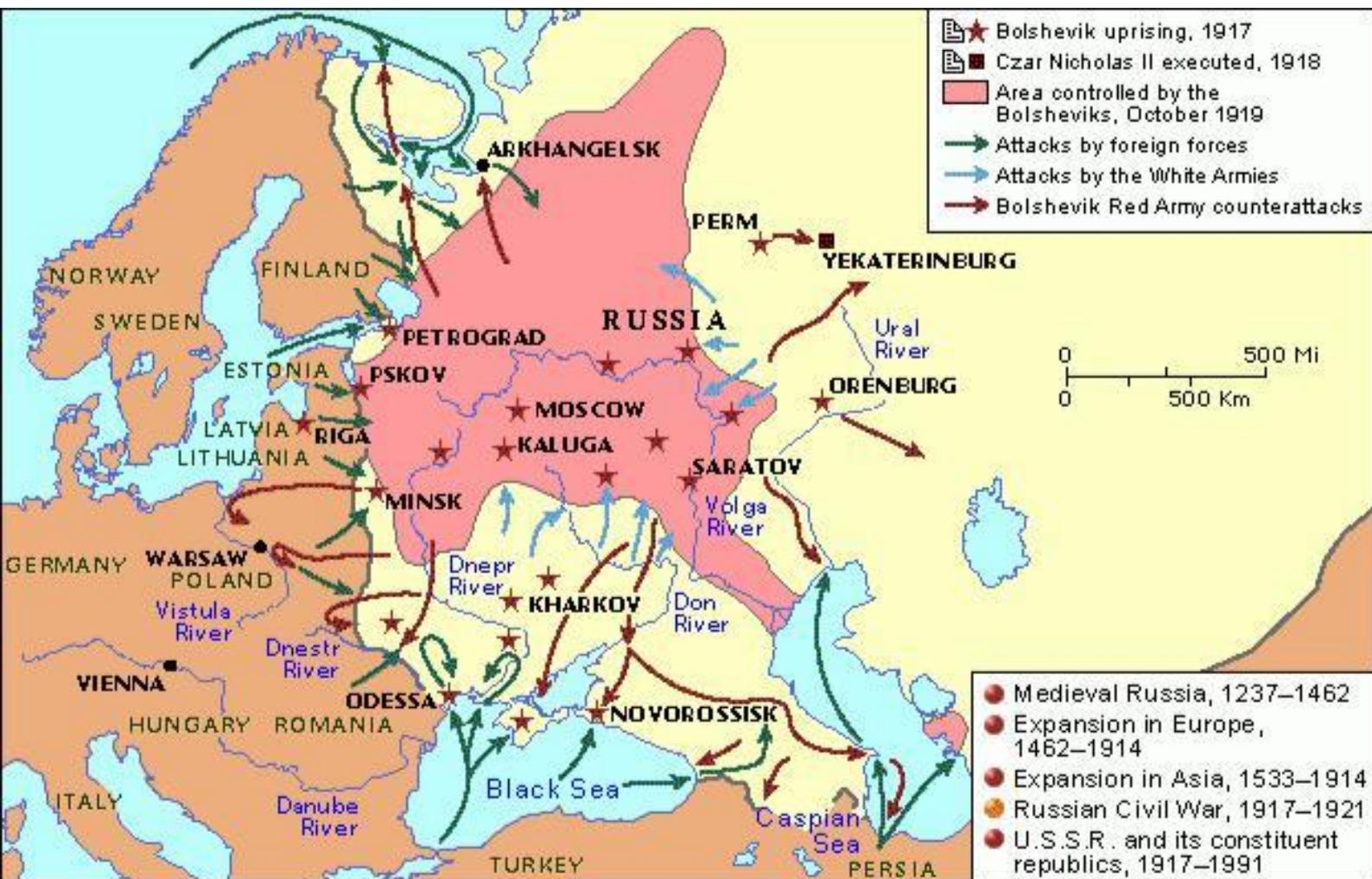
However, one of the most complex international problems of that Russia was unreliability of the allies because they pursued their own interests, among which was a desire to prevent the increasing powers and potential of Imperialistic Russia. Countries

of the Entente block mostly sponsored liberal-democratic anti-governmental figures that lately became the main acting personalities of the February Revolution. Actually, it is easy to understand that the bourgeois-democratic revolution was beneficial to countries such as Great Britain, France, and the USA, since they were already capitalist powers with such a type of social and governmental system. Another threat to the existing system in Russia came from the enemies in the First World war: Germany and Austria-Hungary. Their main purpose was to destabilize the internal situation in the Russian Empire and remove the country from the First World War earlier in order to be able to concentrate all military forces on the Western front. That is why German and Austria-Hungarian intelligence supposedly began to fund Russian socialists-revolutionaries as Lenin, Trotsky, Plekhanov, although the evidence is not always transparent. Bolshevik's party lead by Lenin and Trotsky later became the main initiator of the October socialistic revolution.

The Civil War in Russia began after the establishment of the Soviet government in 1918 and lasted until the year 1922. Countries that previously funded the Russian revolution did not neglect the Civil War because most of the states did not recognize the legitimacy of the Soviet government and saw a great threat in the new social system and ideology that appeared in the biggest country in the world. Thus, the aforementioned states tried to change the situation by supporting anti-governmental White forces and decided to begin an intervention.

The allied intervention was a multi-national military expedition launched during the Russian Civil War in 1918. The stated goals were to help the Czechoslovak Legion, to secure supplies of munitions and armaments in Russian ports, and to re-establish the Eastern Front. After the Bolshevik's government withdrew from World War I, the allies militarily backed the anti-Soviet White forces in Russia. The efforts of the allies were hampered by divided objectives, war weariness as a result of global conflict, and lack of internal support. These factors, together with the evacuation of the Czechoslovak Legion, forced the allies to withdraw from North Russia and Siberia in 1920, although the Japanese forcibly occupied part of Siberia until 1922, and the Northern half of Sakhalin until 1925.

Rethinking the situation with military intervention and economic and political influence of the foreign states during the Great Russian Revolution, we can clearly see the model, which is more or less typical for most of the revolutions during the whole history of the world.



## Major countries and organizations involved

- Russian Empire (from the 19th of July 1918 Russia was renamed into RSFSR – Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic)
- Germany
- Austria-Hungary
- Great Britain
- France
- The USA
- The Russian Provisional Government

## Relevant treaties

- Milyukov note – a document written by Milyukov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the bourgeois Provisional Government, to the governments of the Entente countries dated April 18 (May 1), 1917, explaining the position of the Provisional Government on the question of war. In the context of the rise of the revolutionary activity of the masses and the universal desire for peace, the bourgeois Provisional Government was forced to mask its imperialist goals with "democratic" phraseology. The dual nature of the statements of the Provisional Government aroused concern and discontent among the governments of the Entente countries.
- The Franco-English agreement of December 23, 1917 (also known as Convention between France and England on the subject of activity in Southern Russia) - the agreement on the division of Russia into spheres of influence, accepted in Paris on December 23, 1917 in connection with the October Revolution in Russia and the conclusion of a truce between the Soviet government and Germany on the Eastern Front, as a result of which Russia actually withdrew from the war on the side of the Entente. The French sphere of influence included Ukraine, Bessarabia, and the Crimea. England retained the

right of preferential influence in the "Cossack and Caucasian regions", Armenia, Georgia and Kurdistan. It was stated that the agreement was directed exclusively against the Central Powers (Germany and its allies); it was supposed to avoid direct collisions with the Bolsheviks. It was also decided to support,

but not recognize, the governments of Finland, the Baltic states, Ukraine, Cossack regions and Transcaucasia, which sought sovereignty from Russia. The agreement involved joint costs and a joint supervisory body, although it recognized that France had already allocated 100 million francs for intervention.

### **Reliable and Useful Sources**

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