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The Origins of the French Intervention in the Russian Civil War, January–May 1918: A Reappraisal*

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The question of the origins of the Allied intervention in the Russian civil war has long been a source of controversy. Western historians such as George Kennan, Richard Ullman, and George Brinkley have asserted that the Allies acted initially in Russia to reconstitute an Eastern Front in order to prevent Germany from concentrating all its military forces in France.¹ Ullman maintains that the intervention developed as a “part of the grand strategy of the war against the Central Powers. Involvement of Allied forces came about almost imperceptibly, by small increments, often from the execution of particular tasks assigned through military channels by officers acting with only the vaguest sort of political guidance.”² Kennan writes that, despite the Allied and especially French dislike of Bolshevism, the intervention against the Soviet government emerged as a product of circumstances strained by “the climate of confusion and suspicion that prevailed at this culminating moment of war and revolution” and enflamed beyond control by the uprising of the pro-Allied Czech Legion in May 1918.³ These historians conclude that the decision to intervene was neither premeditated nor the result of an aversion to the revolutionary nature of the Bolshevik regime.

Even early Soviet scholars, such as A. I. Gukovskii and M. N. Pokrovskii, have conceded that the Allied intervention prior to the Armistice was motivated initially by the desire to rebuild an Eastern Front.⁴ To be sure, not all early Soviet historians accepted this

* I would like to thank Profs. John M. Sherwood and Richard K. Debo for their helpful suggestions and criticisms of this work.

¹ George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917–1920: The Decision to Intervene* (Princeton, N.J., 1958), 2:438, and *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (New York, 1960), pp. 79–80, 99, 113, 115–16; R. H. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917–1921: The Anglo-Soviet Accord* (Princeton, N.J., 1972), 3:455; and G. A. Brinkley, *The Volunteer Army and Allied Intervention in South Russia, 1917–1921* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1966), pp. 276–77.

² Ullman, 3:455.

³ Kennan, *Decision to Intervene*, pp. 164–65; see also R. H. Ullman, *Intervention and the War* (Princeton, N.J., 1961), 1:185–86.

⁴ A. I. Gukovskii, *Frantsuzskaia interventsiiia na iuge Rossii, 1918–1919* (Moscow,

view. M. I. Levidov, for example, asserted that Allied intervention had been motivated from the beginning by the determination to overthrow the Bolsheviks and to reestablish the *ancien régime*.⁵ Later on, this interpretation, envenomed with Stalinist polemics, became the standard Soviet version of the origins of the intervention.⁶

All these Western and Soviet generalizations concern Allied attitudes toward the Bolsheviks, but how accurate are they when applied to the French alone? For example, did the initiative for intervention develop in military circles or in the Quai d'Orsay? Did French policy evolve "almost imperceptibly" as a result of circumstances over which Paris had no control, or was the decision to intervene deliberate and premeditated? And if such a decision was taken, was the motivation behind it generated from a desire to wage a more effective war against the Central Powers or to overthrow a revolutionary regime which threatened vital French political and economic interests? The answers to these questions emerge from the twisted, often contradictory course of French policy toward the Bolsheviks between February and April 1918.

The French government and high command had kept well informed of the disintegration of the Russian army and regarded the withdrawal of Russia from the war as inevitable. In the summer of 1917 the French general staff began to prepare for the transfer of a mass of German divisions from the east which would break the equilibrium of forces on the Western Front. To be sure, as long as Russia had not signed an armistice, hopes persisted that the situation would not be entirely lost, but it was never imagined that an Eastern Front could be reconstructed in any real sense.⁷ For the French high command, the October Revolution represented the culmination rather than the cause of the military collapse of Russia.

1928), pp. 8-9; and M. N. Pokrovskii, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii v XX veke* (Moscow, 1926), pp. 79-86.

⁵ M. I. Levidov, *K istorii soiuznoi interventsii v Rossii* (Leningrad, 1925), I:5, 173-81.

⁶ See, e.g., J. M. Thompson, "Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-1921," in *Rewriting Russian History: Soviet Interpretations of Russia's Past*, ed. C. E. Black (London, 1957), *passim*.

⁷ Jean Delmas, *L'Etat-major français et le front oriental après la révolution bolchévique, novembre 1917-11 novembre 1918* (doctorat du troisième cycle, Université de Paris, 1965), pp. 36-37. This excellent thesis is a study of the policy of the French general staff toward Russia during the last year of the First World War. Delmas, an officer in the French army, was given special permission to see the archives of the Ministry of War several years before they were officially opened. However, he did not gain access to the archives of the Quai d'Orsay and was therefore unable to compare the general staff's policy with that of the Foreign Ministry or the government in general.

Although the actual Bolshevik seizure of power came unexpectedly and caught France in the midst of a ministerial crisis, the government rapidly fixed its attitude toward the Soviet regime. While the Allies at the outset decided not to break off all relations with the new government at Petrograd in order to protect their nationals and to avoid abandoning their considerable political and economic interests in Russia to Germany, the French were not less determined to overthrow the Soviet regime. To this end they sought to encourage anti-Bolshevik and anti-German resistance in the Ukraine and the Don. Paris hoped to maintain Romania in the war and foster the formation of a southern coalition of Ukrainian and Russian anti-Bolshevik forces around the Romanian army. As the French foreign minister, Stephen Pichon, put it, French action was intended to counterbalance the power usurped by the Bolsheviks through the constitution of military resistance in the south designed "to hasten the end of the anarchy in Russia and to facilitate the reestablishment of order and a legal government."⁸

In its effort to encourage the formation of this southern coalition, the French government decided on January 5, 1918 "to recognize in fact" the Ukraine "as an independent government."⁹ Although the Quai d'Orsay acknowledged that there was no possibility of obtaining a resumption of hostilities against the Central Powers because of the general desire in Russia for peace, the government sought to forestall the worst by organizing resistance to the Bolsheviks and by blocking the German economic exploitation of the Ukraine.¹⁰ However, even these limited objectives were beyond Allied means to secure. French agents never formally notified the Ukrainian government of recognition because of its increasing movement toward an accommodation with the Central Powers. The other groups intended to form part of this makeshift coalition were also coming to terms with the Germans or were in flight and complete disarray. The basis for a southern anti-Bolshevik bloc had thus ceased to exist before the end of January 1918. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks,

⁸ Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (MAE). *Guerre, 1914-1918* (hereafter referred to as *Guerre*), vol. 357, *Balkans, Roumanie, La crise roumaine et la Russie du sud, 15-31 déc. 1917*. Pichon to P. Cambon (French ambassador in London), nos. 5258-59; and elsewhere, December 18, 1917, p. 49.

⁹ *Guerre*, vol. 695, *Russie, Ukraine, 22 déc. 1917-20 jan. 1918*, Pichon to Auguste de Beauvoir de Saint-Aulaire (French minister in Romania), nos. 19-20; and elsewhere, January 5, 1918, p. 162; see also *Guerre*, vol. 697, *Russie, Ukraine, 10 fév.-mars 1918*, "La France, a-t-elle reconnu le gouvernement ukrainien?" (note from Clément-Simon, February 20, 1918, p. 112).

¹⁰ *Guerre*, vol. 695, Pichon to A. Beau (French minister in Berne), no. 34, January 8, 1918, p. 196.

who had negotiated an armistice with the Central Powers, had not yet signed a peace; and a rupture of the talks taking place at Brest-Litovsk appeared more and more likely. The French were therefore faced with the alternatives of moderating their attitude toward the Soviet government or of abandoning Russia to the Central Powers. Under the circumstances, France turned warily to the Bolsheviks themselves, having failed to sustain their enemies.

An important factor contributing to the reversal of French policy was the conduct of the Soviet delegation at the peace conference of Brest-Litovsk. These talks opened toward the end of December 1917 and served the Bolsheviks as a public platform for revolutionary propaganda vilifying the Germans. Although the Bolsheviks were incapable of continuing the war, Leon Trotsky, the head of the Soviet delegation, behaved as though they could and played for time in hopes of provoking a revolution against the war by the German proletariat. Aside from stalling negotiations and delaying the conclusion of peace, Soviet tactics seemed to generate more tangible results as German troop movements toward France slowed down in January and strikes broke out in Berlin and Vienna.¹¹

In spite of these circumstances, an improvement of relations with the Bolsheviks did not come easily. The Quai d'Orsay initially resisted a movement in this sense. On January 11 Pichon informed the French ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, that the Quai d'Orsay disapproved of the British government's intention to send a special agent, R. B. Lockhart, to Russia in order to establish unofficial relations with the Soviet regime.¹² Nevertheless, this view was not shared by the general staff. Two days later Georges Clemenceau, premier and minister of war since November 1917, informed Pichon that the British initiative sending Lockhart to Petrograd would prevent the Austro-Germans from gaining a free hand in Russia and would permit the Entente to profit from any sudden favorable change of policy on the part of the Bolshevik government.¹³ The Quai d'Orsay, however, was not yet persuaded to adopt a less hostile attitude toward the Bolsheviks and still sought to prevent the complete abandonment of French efforts to organize an anti-Bolshevik coalition in the Ukraine.

¹¹ Delmas, p. 169.

¹² *Guerre*, vol. 668, *Russie, Action des Alliés, jan. 1918*, Pichon to Cambon, no. 191; and elsewhere, January 11, 1918, p. 86.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Clemenceau (General Antoine Gramat, Major Général du Groupe de l'Avant) to Pichon, no. 748 BS/3, January 13, 1918, p. 106. Names following in parentheses in War directives indicate the signature actually appearing at the bottom of the dispatch and will be cited where deemed important. If Clemenceau actually signed the directive, his name is in italics.

Nevertheless, toward the end of January, strong opposition to government policy in southern Russia began to emerge within the general staff. The 3^e Bureau of the Groupe de l'Avant¹⁴ prepared a memorandum which opposed any dismemberment of Russia by fostering the independence of its constituent nationalities (this was probably an indirect reference to the government's recognition of the Ukraine). The memorandum argued that a unified Russian state was essential to the maintenance of a European balance of power and suggested that the Bolsheviks, who represented a centralizing force, were the political elements most capable of holding Russia together. The 3^e Bureau therefore recommended that the government undertake semiofficial talks with the Bolsheviks in order to reach an accommodation and to bring about a rupture of Soviet relations with the Central Powers.¹⁵

The 3^e Bureau's memorandum appears to have formed the basis of a policy directive intended for the chief of the French military mission in Russia, General Henri Albert Niessel. This directive, which was sent to the Quai d'Orsay for final approval, contained clauses instructing Niessel to support *Bolshevik* (the Ministry of War's emphasis) efforts "aimed at preventing the Ukraine or any other part of Russia from concluding a separate peace" and to make it known to the Soviet government that France was prepared to support its attempt to create a unified Russian state. These instructions, had they been approved, would have constituted a clear reversal of previous French policy. However, a marginal note in Pichon's hand states that General Ferdinand Foch, the chief of the general staff, had consented at his request to remove the clauses concerning better relations with the Bolsheviks.¹⁶

Pichon did not record his reasons for opposing these policy recommendations. But a few days earlier, on January 22, the Quai d'Orsay had informed the French minister in Romania, Auguste de Beaupoil de Saint-Aulaire, that the government was still not prepared to encourage "a rapprochement between the Bolsheviks and the southern nationalities."¹⁷ At any rate, even though the War

¹⁴ The Groupe de l'Avant was the *état-major* of the French chief of staff and was responsible for the formulation of Russian policy in the Ministry of War during Clemenceau's tenure as premier.

¹⁵ Ministère de la Guerre, 16N 3023 (all "N" numbers are from the archives of the Ministry of War), *Grand Quartier Général (GQG), 3^e Bureau A. Sorties, 25 jan.–3 avril 1918*, "Note sur la conduite à tenir en Russie," no. 1665 BS/3, 3^e Bureau A, January 25, 1918.

¹⁶ *Guerre*, vol. 358, *Balkans, Roumanie, La crise roumaine . . . , jan.–mai 1918*, Clemenceau to Pichon, no. 76/HR, January 27, 1918, p. 272.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Pichon to Saint-Aulaire, nos. 136–37, January 22, 1918, p. 218.

directive which was eventually sent to Niessel on January 27 did not contain the objectionable clauses concerning a rapprochement with the Bolsheviks, it still signaled the beginning of an improvement in Franco-Soviet relations. Government policy did not change insofar as French agents were instructed to continue their efforts to delay the conclusion of a separate peace. But while General Henri Berthelot, the chief of the French military mission in Romania, was ordered to carry on in this sense with anti-Bolshevik groups in the south, Niessel was instructed to exercise his influence on the Bolsheviks in hopes of leading them to adopt a policy more favorable to Allied interests.¹⁸

In view of the Quai d'Orsay's opposition to an improvement of French relations with the Bolsheviks, the War directive of January 27, as finally agreed on, appears to have represented a rough compromise between Pichon and Foch insofar as it authorized closer ties with the Bolsheviks but allowed for continued relations with anti-Bolshevik groups in the south. The observations of Joseph Noulens, the French ambassador in Russia, confirm this impression, for he regarded the directive as an order to set up Generals Berthelot and Niessel in opposing camps.¹⁹ In any case, the exchange of views between the Quai d'Orsay and the Ministry of War regarding Russia indicates that the French government was to some degree divided in its attitude toward the Bolshevik regime and that the general staff took the initiative in calling for an improvement of Franco-Soviet relations.

Shortly thereafter, the Ministry of War acted to clear up the ambiguities of the January 27 directive by downgrading the importance of French action in southern Russia. Apparently without further consultation with the Quai d'Orsay, the Ministry of War instructed General Berthelot on February 3 to take a very reserved attitude toward the Ukraine and to avoid any action likely to provoke conflicts with the Bolshevik government.²⁰ This order, insofar as it turned around the priorities of French action in Russia, signaled the abandonment of efforts to form an anti-Bolshevik coalition in the south. In conformity with this new policy, Niessel was ordered on February 17 to offer his assistance to any groups what-

¹⁸ *Guerre*, vol. 696, *Russie, Ukraine, 28 jan.-9 fév. 1918*, Clemenceau (Foch) to Niessel, no. 1744 BS/3, January 27, 1918, p. 104.

¹⁹ *Guerre*, vol. 669, *Russie, Action des Alliés, fév.-mars 1918*, Noulens, no. 303, February 1, 1918, p. 2. In these notes references to incoming telegrams to Paris cite only the sender, since his civilian or military status indicates the recipient ministry.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Clemenceau (Foch) to Berthelot, no. 2171 BS/3, February 3, 1918, p. 5. These instructions were repeated on February 11 and 15 (see 16N 3023, War directives no. 2764 BS/3 and 2992 BS/3).

ever resisting the enemy.²¹ The Quai d'Orsay, finally falling into line with the general staff, instructed Noulens on the same day to make it known to the Bolsheviks that, if they resisted the Germans, France would lend its assistance in money and matériel.²²

While the French government adopted a more friendly attitude toward the Bolsheviks, events in Russia were unfolding with great rapidity. On February 10 the Bolsheviks broke off negotiations with the Central Powers, and six days later the German command announced that the armistice in Russia would be terminated on February 18. The new German advance went almost unresisted, and the Soviet government hastened to come to terms with the Central Powers. Although Trotsky and Niessel discussed the possibilities of cooperation against the Germans, nothing concrete developed from their meetings, and the Bolsheviks eventually signed a peace on March 3.

In spite of the Bolshevik capitulation to the Central Powers, the general staff continued to favor a policy of military collaboration with the Soviet regime. The Ministry of War observed in a letter to the Quai d'Orsay on February 20 that the Bolshevik acceptance of German peace conditions would not modify the military situation in the east. In fact, it was likely, said the letter, that the Soviet government intended to use the peace to extend and consolidate its authority in the rest of Russia. Germany would therefore have to occupy militarily the areas which it desired to annex or exploit, since the Bolsheviks could be expected to resist the German presence wherever possible. Because of the large expanse of territory involved and the complete disorganization of transportation and communications, such an occupation would be difficult, even if unopposed by organized resistance, and would require, at least for a time, the immobilization of a "notable" part of German forces in the east.²³ Although this argument was initially envisaged as a means of

²¹ *Guerre*, vol. 759, *Questions militaires, Missions françaises, Dossier général, fév. 1918*, Clemenceau (Foch) to Niessel, no. 3066 BS/3, February 17, 1918, p. 420.

²² *Guerre*, vol. 669, Pichon to Noulens, no. 285, February 17, 1918, p. 91.

²³ 16N 3023, Clemenceau (Foch) to Pichon, no. 3238 BS/3, February 20, 1918; also Clemenceau (Foch) to Lafont (French military attaché in Romania), no. 4569 BS/3, March 18, 1918. The question of the Central Powers being able to break the Allied maritime blockade by drawing foodstuffs from southern Russia was discussed at an April 3 meeting of the high-level Commission Interministérielle des Affaires Financières Russes et Roumaines. Attention was drawn to the reports of General Georges Tabouis, the former French high commissioner in Kiev, which indicated that, unless Germany wanted to occupy the country "village by village," the generalized chaos of the Revolution would prevent it from getting any significant quantities of grain out of the Ukraine. The commission concluded that the Allied blockade retained its efficacy (see Ministère des Finances, F30 1083, *Commission Interministérielle des Affaires*

persuading Romania not to make peace, it actually constituted the reasoning by which the Ministry of War sought to support even minimal Soviet resistance to the German occupation. In effect, the general staff regarded the Bolsheviks as a force for Russian unity²⁴ and, as such, an obstacle to German expansion in Russia.

Because of the Ministry of War's ongoing support for a rapprochement with the Bolsheviks, Franco-Soviet relations continued to improve. War directives were sent to Niessel on March 8 and again on March 11 instructing him to encourage Soviet resistance against Germany.²⁵ On March 20 Trotsky, newly appointed commissar of war, formally requested the cooperation of the French military mission in the rebuilding of the Russian army. General Jean Guillaume Lavergne, who had replaced Niessel as chief of the French mission a few days earlier, responded favorably, and by the beginning of April French officers were ready to assume advisory functions in the Red Army.²⁶ The Ministry of War approved Lavergne's actions and left the application of French assistance to his discretion.²⁷ This policy received further confirmation in a War directive of March 29 rejecting a Niessel recommendation that Paris choose clearly between a posture of outright hostility or of rapprochement with the Bolshevik government. The circumstances, said this directive, were too ambiguous for such a course of action. Nevertheless, the Ministry of War affirmed in unequivocal terms that French policy "must, above all, seek to support the Bolshevik government" in its attempted resistance to Germany. But Lavergne was warned not to expect "any outside support whatsoever" in the pursuance of this mission.²⁸ The limits of French cooperation with the Bolsheviks were thus drawn. Lavergne could prudently offer his assistance to Trotsky, but he would have to make use of the resources he could find in Russia to organize resistance to the Central Powers.

Financières Russes et Roumaines, Procès-verbaux, 1917-1919, session of April 3, 1918). For more information on the Commission Interministérielle, see Michael Jabara Carley, *The French Intervention in the Russian Civil War, November 1917-April 1919* (Ph. D. diss., Queen's University, Canada, 1976), pp. 216-17 and passim.

²⁴ 16N 3023, Clemenceau (Gramat) to various military attachés, no. 3192 BS/3, February 19, 1918.

²⁵ Ibid., Clemenceau (Gramat) to Niessel, no. 4042 BS/3, March 8, 1918; and *ibid.*, Clemenceau (Foch) to Niessel, no. 4194 BS/3, March 11, 1918.

²⁶ *Guerre*, vol. 760, *Russie, Questions militaires, Missions françaises, Dossier général, 1 mars-31 mai 1918*, Noulens, no. 100, April 12, 1918, p. 95; see also Delmas, p. 165.

²⁷ 16N 3023, Clemenceau (Foch) to Niessel, Lavergne, no. 4863 BS/3, March 24, 1918.

²⁸ Ibid., Clemenceau (General Henri Edouard Alby, who replaced Foch as chief of staff on March 26) to Lavergne, Niessel, no. 5090 BS/3, March 29, 1918.

In spite of the limited scope of the Franco-Soviet rapprochement, this policy had strong support in the Ministry of War. On April 5 the Groupe de l'Avant circulated a forceful note defending the accommodation with Moscow. The "French general staff," it was stated, opposed the idea that the Allies should give their support to "Russian patriotic elements" and turn openly against the Bolsheviks. These "so-called patriotic groups," the memorandum asserted, were discredited and lifeless. Those few men who had tried to act were beaten and in flight. As for the rest, either they had constituted the firmest support of Alexander Kerensky, the Socialist-Revolutionary leader of the deposed Provisional government, "who had prepared the [Russian] defeat," or they favored a German occupation in order to protect their expropriated material interests. Under the circumstances, it had in no way been established that the war against Germany could be waged more effectively by an anti-Bolshevik government.²⁹ On the contrary, it was possible to think that it was the Bolsheviks, "duped by the Central Powers and perhaps aware of past errors," who offered the best chance of organizing the last few partisans of resistance against Germany. Significantly, this note stressed that the German spring offensive, which had begun on the Western Front on March 21, was grounds to *support* the Bolsheviks in that only a revolutionary army could offer hope of posing even a minimal threat to the enemy in the east.³⁰

While the Ministry of War committed itself to a limited rapprochement with the Bolsheviks, opposition to this policy began to boil up in other quarters of the French government. In the first place, Noulens, who had initially opposed a complete rupture with the Soviet regime in hopes of preventing the conclusion of peace, turned openly against the policy of rapprochement after the signature of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In a series of telegrams commencing on March 9, he began to condemn the Bolsheviks as an obstacle to the reconstitution of a Russian state (unlike the Ministry of War) and as a serious menace to very large French economic holdings in Russia. Noulens therefore favored the adoption of a policy of

²⁹ It should be stressed that French agents in Russia had a very low opinion of the anti-Bolshevik opposition at this time and considered it incapable of overthrowing the Soviets without foreign intervention. Niessel, e.g., was extremely contemptuous of Russian officers, whom he characterized as bereft of any sense of duty or resolve. Two months later Lavergne went so far as to say that it would not be in French interests to see the Bolsheviks overthrown, since any government likely to replace them would be pro-German (see *Guerre*, vol. 358, Niessel, no. 8558, January 29, 1918, p. 286; and 6N 220, *Fonds Clemenceau, Rapports des attachés militaires, 1917-1919*, Lavergne, no. 1, March 29, received May 21, 1918 [by courier]).

³⁰ 4N 41, *Conseil Supérieur de Guerre (CSG), Section française, Front russo-roumain, nov. 1917-oct. 1919*, dossier 2, "Note au sujet de la conduite à tenir dans l'Orient russe et asiatique," no. 5516 BS/3, signed Gramat, April 5, 1918.

intervention against the Soviet regime. He recommended that military action, by even small-sized inter-Allied forces, be undertaken in order to encourage the formation of centers of resistance around which indigenous elements favorable to French influence could form. To this end, Arkhangelsk and the railroad as far south as Vologda should be seized. The intervention of U.S. and Japanese troops in Siberia should also be encouraged. Noulens believed that French policy ought to have two principal objectives: (1) to obstruct the German penetration of Russia and (2) to protect French economic interests. He concluded that the formation of an Allied-influenced Russian government behind the protective cover of intervention would be the most effective way to secure these aims.³¹

Noulens, who left Petrograd for France after the Bolshevik capitulation to the Germans, found his passage blocked in Finland by civil war. As a result, he suggested to Paris that his party return to Russia and establish itself at Vologda, where contact could be made with those Russian parties favorable to the Allies. While awaiting approval of this proposal, Noulens continued to denounce the idea of a rapprochement and expressed concern that the French military mission might be helping to organize Soviet military forces. It was certain, he said, that such an army would only be used to perpetuate disorder or to oppose intervention. It would never wage war against Germany.³²

The Quai d'Orsay also began to voice opposition to the rapprochement with the Bolsheviks. On March 8 Philippe Berthelot, the influential deputy political director of the Quai d'Orsay, prepared a telegram for Cambon in London which condemned the activities of the British agent Lockhart aimed at achieving an entente with the Soviet regime. The Quai d'Orsay dispatch characterized Lockhart's activity as pernicious and British policy as weak. Berthelot condemned the Soviet government for having signed a separate peace with Germany and expressed the opinion that the Allies should intervene against the Bolsheviks rather than continue a policy of rapprochement with their regime.³³ Berthelot's cable, which was not

³¹ 4N 40, *CSG. Section française. Front russo-roumain, nov. 1917–nov. 1919*, dossier 2, Noulens, nos. 20–22, March 9, 1918; 16N 3185, *GQG. 3^e Bureau A. Entrées, Russie, jan.–août 1918*, Noulens, nos. 25–26, March 13, 1918; and *Guerre*, vol. 669, Noulens, no. 28, March 16, 1918, p. 177.

³² 4N 41, dossier 2, Noulens, nos. 31–33, March 19, 1918; and *Guerre*, vol. 760, Noulens, no. 35, March 20, 1918, p. 26.

³³ *Guerre*, vol. 751, *Russie, Sibérie. Intervention japonaise, mars 1918*, Pichon to Cambon, no number, March 8, 1918 (draft by Berthelot), p. 62; see also *Guerre*, vol. 669, Pichon to Conty (French minister in Copenhagen), no. 55, March 10, 1918, p. 153.

dispatched, was dated the same day as the War directive to Niessel instructing him to encourage Soviet resistance to Germany. Apparently, the Ministry of War did not share Berthelot's views concerning French relations with the Bolsheviks.

The Quai d'Orsay, however, did not remain silent. On March 30, taking advantage of Noulens's return to Russia the previous day, it dispatched a telegram which was in open contradiction with the substance and intent of the War directive of March 29 approving French military assistance for the Soviets. The Quai d'Orsay instructed Noulens to begin a reexamination of possible options for French action in Russia. Pichon observed that the government continued to exclude any possibility of recognizing the Soviet regime. Although one could not reject out of hand Trotsky's requests for assistance, as it was a question of the struggle against Germany, the "tainted origins" of the regime and the many disappointments which the Bolsheviks had caused made it necessary for French agents to use prudence in advancing their assistance. Outside of the Bolsheviks there existed elements with which France had a common interest in preventing the ruin of Russia's economic future. French policy should therefore have two objectives: (1) to protect the "menaced" economic holdings of France and (2) to encourage the organization of those parties "favorable to the reconstitution of a Russia[n state] where [French] diplomatic and economic influence would play its necessary part for the well-being of both countries." Nevertheless, Pichon indicated that military intervention in northern Russia, as recommended by Noulens, was momentarily impossible because of the German offensive on the Western Front and the exigencies of submarine warfare.³⁴ To be sure, this was not to say that the Quai d'Orsay disagreed with Noulens's general conclusion that the rapprochement with the Soviets should be terminated. On the contrary, Berthelot's March 8 draft indicates that sentiment in the Quai d'Orsay had begun to turn against the policy of military collaboration even before the dispatch of Noulens's first unambiguously hostile telegram on the Bolsheviks (on March 9).

In even stronger language two days later the Quai d'Orsay warned openly against the dangers of collaborating with the Soviet regime. It was to be presumed, said Pichon, that Trotsky was "less preoccupied in organizing a serious resistance against the Germans than in seeking to maintain Bolshevik domination." Collaboration in the constitution of a Red Army, he added, could lead to a French association "with the creation of an instrument of *guerre sociale*

³⁴ *Guerre*, vol. 669, Pichon to Noulens, nos. 18-24, March 30, 1918, p. 225.

designed to break opposition" to the Soviets. The government did not want to give the anti-Bolshevik parties who remained favorable to France reasons to reproach it for having strengthened the dictatorship of their enemies.³⁵ Because the Quai d'Orsay was reluctant to facilitate the formation of an army intended to serve the interests of social revolution "in Russia and in Europe," it opposed the extension of real assistance to Trotsky until the French government had obtained the necessary guarantees.³⁶

These Foreign Ministry dispatches appear to have been the first in six weeks to comment directly on the policy of military collaboration. The misgivings raised by the Quai d'Orsay must therefore constitute the primary reasons for its opposition to a Franco-Soviet rapprochement. Moreover, until the question of military collaboration had been settled, the issues discussed in the above telegrams were brought up repeatedly in outgoing Quai d'Orsay correspondence. To be sure, the danger of war supplies stockpiled at Arkhangelsk and Vladivostok falling into enemy hands, the menace of armed Austro-German prisoners of war on the loose in Siberia, and other related factors were invoked from time to time to hasten Allied military action in Russia. However, these issues, commonly associated with the decision to intervene, were in most cases not raised or were relegated to secondary importance in the series of Foreign Ministry telegrams aimed at halting the détente with the Soviets. Quite often, in fact, these questions were subordinated to the maintenance of the rapprochement. The Ministry of War, for example, estimated that any Allied military action undertaken in northern Russia should have Bolshevik approval and not be the source of new conflicts with the Soviet government.³⁷ Niessel observed that, if the Allies continued to pursue a policy of rapprochement, they would be obligated to leave the stockpiled supplies at Arkhangelsk in Bolshevik possession.³⁸ In early April Lavergne observed that many of the chiefs named to command the Red Army were former tsarist officers who would guarantee, presumably along

³⁵ *Guerre*, vol. 760, Pichon to Noulens, no. 31, April 1, 1918 (draft in Pichon's hand), p. 57. On the 3^e Bureau's copy of this telegram, in reference to Pichon's observation that a Red Army could be used against those "elements of action" (i.e., the anti-Bolsheviks) which France might employ to throw back the German invasion, is written the sarcastic marginal comment "Which ones?" (see 16N 3066, *GQG*, 3^e Bureau A, *Entrées du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*, 15 fév.-19 juillet 1918).

³⁶ *Guerre*, vol. 670, *Russie, Action des Alliés, avril 1918*, Pichon to Auguste Boppe (French minister in Peking), no. 169, April 1, 1918, p. 1.

³⁷ 16N 3023, Clemenceau (Foch) to Pichon, no. 3850 BS/3, March 4, 1918.

³⁸ 4N 48, *CSG, Section française, Front russo-roumain*, dossier 1, *Ports du nord*, Niessel (Murmansk), nos. 67-69, March 26, 1918.

with French advisers, that the new military forces being raised by Trotsky would not be used as an instrument of *guerre sociale*. Whether or not Lavergne was correct in this regard, he did rightly observe that the nucleus of forces which could be organized in European Russia to oppose Germany would not constitute a threat to Japanese intervention in Siberia (then being discussed by the Allies).³⁹ In any case, the Quai d'Orsay chose to disregard these observations and pressed the acceptance of its own views.

The Quai d'Orsay cables of March 30–April 1 remained in contradiction with Clemenceau's directive of March 29 for five days until the Ministry of War acted to end the inconsistencies of French policy. A War directive to Lavergne, dated April 5 and signed by the new chief of staff, General Henri Edouard Alby, made reference to Pichon's recent communications with Noulens and warned of "the dangers which could arise from the creation of a Bolshevik army used as an instrument of *guerre sociale*" or as a weapon against Japanese intervention. Alby ordered Lavergne to Vologda to consult with Noulens and, while not suspending earlier War directives on military collaboration, instructed Lavergne to act "with extreme circumspection" toward the Bolsheviks.⁴⁰ Although the French military historian Jean Delmas asserts that the Ministry of War was only "retransmitting" the misgivings of the Quai d'Orsay,⁴¹ it would appear that the directive in question really signaled the beginning of a reversal in policy. The dispatch was much more cautious in its endorsement of military collaboration and introduced two new elements never before mentioned in prior orders: the fear of creating an instrument of *guerre sociale* or an obstacle to Japanese intervention.

The general staff, however, was not quite ready to abandon its policy of accommodation with the Bolsheviks. On April 5 it asked the Quai d'Orsay to permit Lavergne to retain "a certain freedom of action" vis-à-vis the French Embassy in order to allow him to pursue more easily his "important mission" in Russia.⁴² The general staff, sensing the growing opposition within the government to the

³⁹ 5N 179, *Cabinet du ministre, Russie, mars–juin 1918*, Lavergne, nos. 73–76, April 9, 1918.

⁴⁰ 4N 42, *CSG, Section française*, dossier 1, *Armée russe, nov. 1917–déc. 1919*, Clemenceau (Alby) to Lavergne, no. 5497 BS/3, April 5, 1918; see also 4N 8, *CSG, Section française, Travaux et études, 1917–1919*, dossier 2, "Note pour le général Vidalon, Situation sur le théâtre oriental de la guerre," CSG, 1^{er} section, Orient, April 7, 1918.

⁴¹ Delmas, p. 175.

⁴² 16N 3024, *GQG, 3^e Bureau A, Sorties, 4 avril–24 juin 1918*, Clemenceau (Alby) to Pichon, no. 5502 BS/3, April 5, 1918.

rapprochement with Moscow, appears to have made a covert effort to save its policy in Russia by preserving for Lavergne at least a degree of independence from Noulens. In this way, the French ambassador could be prevented from gaining control over the implementation of French policy on the spot and from blocking the détente. The continuation of the rapprochement therefore came to hinge on the question of the delimitation of authority between Noulens and Lavergne. Lavergne's inclination to lend assistance to Trotsky (although it should be emphasized that he had full authority to do so) put him in direct conflict with Noulens and mirrored the dispute on policy in Paris. Undoubtedly aware of the obstacle which Lavergne represented to the termination of the détente, Noulens began to press for a curtailment of his activities. On April 9 he requested that the military mission be officially disbanded and that Lavergne be put strictly under his own authority.⁴³ By ending Lavergne's independence, Noulens would gain a free hand and remove a potentially powerful influence for the policy of military collaboration with the Bolsheviks.

Although it took six days for Noulens's telegram to reach Paris, the Quai d'Orsay acted overnight to fulfill his request. In a letter to Clemenceau on April 16, Pichon requested that Lavergne be placed under Noulens's orders and that in the future the French ambassador have sole authority, on condition of governmental approbation, to determine the efficacy of extending military assistance to the Bolsheviks.⁴⁴ On the same day the general staff complied with Pichon's request.⁴⁵

The decision to abandon the policy of military collaboration thus effectively took place between April 5 and 16. Although it is not possible to establish with certainty the actual chain of events leading to this reversal of policy, the circumstances suggest that Clemenceau intervened in some way to end the dispute. Probably not as committed as the general staff to the rapprochement, Clemenceau, on the impulsion of the Quai d'Orsay, must certainly have authorized the April 5 order pulling the government back from military collaboration with Trotsky. General Alby, who actually signed this directive, did not have the authority or prestige to make independently a major revision in policy. Delmas speculates in this regard that, when Foch gave up his functions as chief of staff to become commander of the Allied armies in France, the policy of rapprochement lost its most

⁴³ 16N 3066, Noulens, no. 89, April 9, received April 15, 1918.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Pichon to Clemenceau, no. 1567, April 16, 1918.

⁴⁵ 16N 3024, Clemenceau (Gramat) to Lavergne, no. 6097 BS/3, April 16, 1918.

important advocate. He bases this view on the fact that Foch signed most of the orders dispatched on military collaboration and that Clemenceau, preoccupied with internal political problems, only sporadically interested himself in military affairs.⁴⁶ It is likely, therefore, that Clemenceau resolved the dispute over the government's attitude toward the Bolsheviks first by taking up the misgivings of the Quai d'Orsay and then by accepting Lavergne's subordination to Noulens. Neither the Ministry of War nor the Quai d'Orsay could have been unaware of the implications of this decision. To charge the French ambassador with full authority over the extension of military aid to Trotsky was to kill the rapprochement. This observation is reinforced by marginal comments made apparently by Colonel A. J. Georges, chief of the 3^e Bureau of the Groupe de l'Avant, on a memorandum opposed to the détente with the Soviets. These marginal notes favored a continuation of military collaboration and characterized any action which might be undertaken by Niessel, or by implication Noulens, at Vologda as "negative."⁴⁷

There is little likelihood and no evidence to indicate that the opposing attitudes of the Ministry of War and the Quai d'Orsay ever led to an outright dispute. The Bolsheviks were not highly regarded by either department, and the policy of military collaboration really represented a policy of last resort. Furthermore, the general staff was exceeding its authority by involving itself in what the Quai d'Orsay considered to be a political matter. It is improbable, therefore, that the Ministry of War would have risked a dispute with the Quai d'Orsay over the question of collaborating with a group of immoderate, dangerous revolutionaries, especially since this issue could raise the sensitive problem of delimiting political and military responsibilities between the two ministries. It is equally improbable that such a dispute would have been permitted to come into the open, given its potentially dangerous repercussions on growing left-wing dissidence in France.⁴⁸ In any case, the general staff moved

⁴⁶ See Delmas, pp. 44, 149, 297.

⁴⁷ See these marginal notes in 16N 3185 on the memorandum "La Russie au lendemain de la paix" (written by Colonel Jacques Langlois, General Niessel's chief of staff), March 30, 1918.

⁴⁸ There is clear evidence in the *consignes* of the Bureau de la Censure that the French government wished to avoid the exacerbation of "class" disputes by way of the press in France. News of strikes and demonstrations was almost completely banned. Moreover, dispatches from Russia concerning revolutionary measures of socialization and property seizures were ordered "largely censored in view of the pernicious influence they could exercise in France" (see the *consignes* of the Bureau de la Censure at the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Nanterre, F 270 réserve C for the period November 1917–May 1918, and especially Georges Mandel's order of February 3, 1918).

rapidly into conformity with Quai d'Orsay opinion. A late April memorandum from the 3^e Bureau noted that, because of the dangers involved in the creation of a Red Army, it would be impossible "to give the Bolshevik government the effective assistance in the reorganization of its army which it appeared to desire."⁴⁹

While the French had decided by the middle of April to terminate the rapprochement, the British began to take a greater interest in an accommodation in order to gain Soviet consent for intervention. In spite of the activities of Noulens aimed at sabotaging the détente, some important negotiations continued to take place in Moscow during April and early May, principally between Lockhart and Trotsky. Although the Quai d'Orsay did not respond favorably to these talks, London was prepared to negotiate. Trotsky was not unreceptive but stated that he could not invite the Allies into Russia without adequate guarantees. A certain exchange of views took place, and the British were sufficiently satisfied with the progress of the talks to ask Paris to curb the activities of Noulens. A. J. Balfour, the British foreign secretary, felt that Noulens's interest in protecting French investments in Russia was diverting his attention from the purely military question of intervention.⁵⁰ In an interview with Cambon, Balfour explained that the British government had never believed in the possibility of an "explicit and sincere entente" with the Bolsheviks against Germany. However, he believed that it would be imprudent to provoke a rupture of relations which would throw the Bolsheviks into the arms of the Central Powers. The situation was not clear and would undoubtedly expose the Allies to disagreeable incidents. But this was preferable to a clear situation where the Entente would watch the Soviets come to terms with the Germans. "If one did not want either rupture or accord with the [Soviet government], it [was] necessary to resign oneself to poorly defined relations full of disadvantages, but which in the present circumstances offered a minimum of security."⁵¹

Noulens reacted with disdain to the exchanges between the British and Trotsky. He pointed out that the conditions under discussion gave advantages to the Bolsheviks but furnished none to the Allies. In fact, the guarantees of territorial integrity and noninterference (proposed by the British) would only reinforce the power of the Bolsheviks against those parties most favorable to the Allied cause

⁴⁹ 4N 42, dossier 1, "Note sur la réorganisation d'une Armée Rouge," no. 6503 BS/3, 3^e Bureau A, April 25, 1918.

⁵⁰ *Guerre*, vol. 671, *Russie, Action des Alliés, mai 1918*, British Embassy to Pichon, May 4, 1918, p. 33.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Cambon, nos. 589-90, May 7, 1918, p. 47.

without giving the Soviet government the real force of which the Entente could make use. To this end Trotsky had made only "vague" promises, such as to constitute an army, oppose exports to Germany, and generally to accept Allied aid only to the extent that it was consistent with the interests of Russia. Furthermore, while the French were asked not to intervene in the domestic affairs of Russia, no similar engagement had been required of the Bolsheviks, who openly declared their intention to foster social revolution in other countries.⁵²

Noulens's attitude toward the question of collaboration was closely connected with his concern in preventing the anti-Bolshevik opposition from moving into the German camp. According to Noulens in a telegram of April 7, Allied representatives in Russia had initially agreed to Trotsky's request for military assistance in hopes of provoking a rupture between Russia and the Central Powers. However, on April 12 he observed that, before Soviet military reorganization could be completed, it would provoke a German counterresponse (that is, it would achieve the ends hoped for by Allied agents in Russia as stated in Noulens's April 7 dispatch). Noulens remarked that the work was condemned from the outset and would only compromise the French in the eyes of their "best friends." The Bolsheviks were not capable of opposing a "serious resistance" to Germany, said Noulens, because "all national sentiment excluded it." Therefore, any force which Trotsky succeeded in forming would serve only as "an instrument of domestic oppression" and a weapon of class war. Noulens implied that a resumption of the war in Russia would be undesirable with the Bolsheviks in power in Moscow because any extension of the German occupation would prompt the anti-Bolshevik opposition to come to terms with the Central Powers.⁵³ This view was reinforced by anti-Bolshevik spokesmen who were alarmed by Allied contacts with the Soviets, and they warned French agents that these continued ties could well lead to just such an eventuality.⁵⁴ In short, Noulens and the Quai d'Orsay were disinclined to treat with a government intending to liquidate those political and economic groups on which French influence had been based before the war or one likely to drive these reconstructive parties into an accommoda-

⁵² *Ibid.*, Noulens, no. 145, May 5, 1918, p. 38.

⁵³ *Guerre*, vol. 670, Noulens, nos. 63-66, April 7, 1918, p. 47; and no. 85, April 12, 1918, p. 71.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., *Guerre*, vol. 671, Noulens, nos. 239-40, May 9, 1918, p. 63; no. 255, May 11, 1918, p. 86; also *Guerre*, vol. 670, F. Grenard (French consul general in Moscow), nos. 204-6, April 9, 1918, p. 60; and nos. 222-26, April, 13, 1918, p. 77.

tion with the Germans. In either case, future French interests in Russia would be ruined. As Noulens put it, if the Allies committed the error of seeking a rapprochement with the Soviets, they would deliver Russia into the hands of the enemy and lose any hope of maintaining "their situation" there.⁵⁵

The final link in the chain of circumstances leading to the French decision to overthrow the Soviet government was the question of the Japanese intervention in Siberia. This issue was first raised at the Inter-Allied Conference of Paris in December 1917. The British and French were eager proponents of such an operation, but the intervention was blocked by Japanese-American rivalry. Nevertheless, the question continued to be discussed, and in January 1918 there was talk of an Allied occupation extending gradually to the Ural Mountains. At the same time, however, Paris was poorly informed, and the Quai d'Orsay was obliged to admit that the Allies needed to have more detailed intelligence before they could proceed to the formulation of a policy for action in Siberia.⁵⁶

In February there was a flurry of activity as the Allies tried to reach agreement on a mutually acceptable policy. By the end of the month the French and British almost succeeded in getting the American president, Woodrow Wilson, to permit Japanese intervention. According to Kennan, a telegram from the French ambassador in Tokyo, Eugène Regnault, was largely responsible for this near reversal in U.S. policy. This dispatch, as forwarded to the American government, reported that the Japanese foreign minister, Viscount Ichiro Motono, "was ready to pledge his country to act so far as the Ural Mts." and to promise a public declaration of disinterestedness (in order to calm Russian and American misgivings about Japanese intentions in Siberia).⁵⁷ However, Regnault's actual dispatch to Paris states only that Motono had indicated that Japan was prepared to go to Irkutsk and "even beyond."⁵⁸ When Philippe Berthelot passed on this information to the French ambassador in Washington, J. J. Jusserand, he misrepresented Motono's declaration in attributing to him the understanding that the Allies would only approve intervention if Japan would give a public guarantee of disinterestedness and would engage to go to the Urals to fight the Germans.⁵⁹ "Even beyond" thus became "so far as the Urals Mts.," and a

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Noulens, no. 248, May 9, 1918, p. 62.

⁵⁶ *Guerre*, vol. 746, *Russie, Sibérie, Dossier général*, 27 nov. 1917–31 jan. 1918, Pichon to Clemenceau, no. 251, January 24, 1918, p. 272.

⁵⁷ G. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917–1920: Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton, N.J., 1956), 1:475.

⁵⁸ *Guerre*, vol. 750, *Russie, Sibérie, Intervention japonaise*, 22 nov. 1917–28 fév. 1918, Regnault, no. 66, February 23, 1918, p. 63.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Pichon to Jusserand, no. 510, February 26, 1918 (draft by Berthelot), p. 82.

declaration of disinterestedness was imputed to Motono when in fact none appears to have been offered. It would therefore seem that Berthelot and Jusserand were responsible for an intentional distortion of Motono's words, calculated to reduce U.S. misgivings about the efficacy of intervention in Siberia as a creditable menace to Germany and to overcome Washington's reluctance to facilitate the extension of Japanese influence in east Asia.

This incident, as described by Kennan, is important because it conveys the impression that the French were thinking in terms of a far-reaching military operation in Siberia by the Japanese. This was not, however, the case. In the first week of March the Quai d'Orsay received important indications that Japan did not regard intervention in Siberia as urgent and would not envisage operations beyond Irkutsk except on the formal promise of "territorial and other advantages."⁶⁰ The Quai d'Orsay rapidly absorbed this information and passed it on in a major policy review to Jusserand. The French attitude, Pichon noted, was affected first of all by the belief that Japan was bound to intervene in Asia in defense of its interests. If it went ahead in Siberia without Allied approval, it would act against the interests of the Entente and would not delay in coming to terms with Germany. He maintained that only an inter-Allied accord would permit the acquisition of guarantees assuring that Japanese action would not violate Russian sovereignty, would oppose German expansion, and would assure the maintenance of Russian unity, "which necessarily impl[ie]d the reestablishment of order." Intervention was essential because indigenous Russian groups were incapable of putting an end to the anarchy running unchecked in the country. Pichon envisaged that Japanese military action would secure the Trans-Siberian to Chita and reestablish the anti-Bolshevik government at Irkutsk and Tomsk. A wider-ranging operation against the Germans in European Russia, on the other hand, was a much more difficult and distant question. The Japanese general staff had indicated that it was ready to study the problem but that any military action beyond Irkutsk would require a year's preparation and the financial assistance of the Allies. Pichon observed, however, that Japan could not commit itself to such a vast enterprise without the stipulation of "territorial advantages." Present negotiations should not be concerned with this matter, but the question should be studied, as the Allies could not know what the war might still have in store.⁶¹

⁶⁰ 4N 47, CSG, *Section française, Intervention des Alliés en Sibérie, déc. 1917-déc. 1919*, dossier 1, folder 1, Regnault, nos. 74-76, March 1, 1918.

⁶¹ *Guerre*, vol. 751, Pichon to Jusserand, nos. 629-33; and elsewhere, March 9, 1918, p. 78.

Pichon's telegram indicates that the Quai d'Orsay had a relatively realistic understanding of the limits of Japanese intervention, especially in comparison with the British, who, according to Ullman, "persistently refused to recognize the purport" of Japanese statements clearly outlining their limited intentions in Siberia.⁶² The French more or less took Japanese signals of intent at their face value, hoping eventually to secure a greater commitment. It should also be pointed out that Pichon's directive regarded the "reestablishment of order," which meant the destruction of the Soviet government, as a prerequisite to the reconstitution of a Greater Russia. The Ministry of War, it will be remembered, considered the Bolsheviks a force for Russian unity given the successful extension of their authority and, as such, a potential menace to the Germans. To be sure, the Quai d'Orsay and the Ministry of War agreed on the importance of intervention in Siberia, and even on its aims. But the Ministry of War tended to ignore the obvious consequences of this policy on their relations with the Bolsheviks, or preferred to treat European Russia and Siberia as two entirely separate theaters of action.⁶³ Perhaps having recognized the difficulty in reconciling Japanese intervention to collaboration with the Bolsheviks, the Ministry of War preferred not to choose clearly between these two policies. The Quai d'Orsay, however, showed no such reticence in this regard.

Even in early March Berthelot drew attention to the essential incompatibility of seeking both collaboration with the Bolsheviks and intervention by Japan. He characterized Lockhart's attempt to get Soviet consent for a Japanese presence in Siberia as both "contradictory and absurd." Tokyo had taken a clearly hostile position vis-à-vis the Bolsheviks, he observed, and its intervention would be directed against Bolshevik anarchy to reestablish order and facilitate the reconstitution of a free Russia.⁶⁴ French views in this respect were only reinforced by complaints from Tokyo about the Allied "flirtation" with Moscow.⁶⁵ Noulens, whose views accurately reflect-

⁶² Ullman, 1:128-30. For a somewhat different view of the British attitude on Japanese intervention, see David R. Woodward, "The British Government and Japanese Intervention in Russia during World War I," *Journal of Modern History* 46 (December 1974): 663-85.

⁶³ *Guerre*, vol. 753, *Russie, Sibérie, Intervention japonaise, mai 1918*, "Note sur l'action des Alliés en Extrême Orient," no. 7975 BS/3, 3^e Bureau A, May 20, 1918, p. 149.

⁶⁴ See n. 33 above; and also *Guerre*, vol. 752, *Russie, Sibérie, Intervention japonaise, avril 1918*, Pichon to Cambon, no. 1529, April 16, 1918 (draft by Berthelot), p. 129; as well as numerous other directives in this volume, most of which were prepared by Berthelot.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Regnault, nos. 151-52, April 17, 1918, p. 131. The Japanese had been exercising this kind of pressure on the French since January 1918.

ed those of the Quai d'Orsay,⁶⁶ observed that Japan would act with or without Allied support, and he stated plainly that it was better to abandon the idea of a rapprochement with the Soviets than to risk the alienation of the Japanese and the anti-Bolsheviks, both of whom could turn to the Central Powers. In any case, the Bolsheviks hated the Allies as much as the Germans, but feared the latter, and thus yielded to their demands. It was impossible to suppose, said Noulens, that a government which abjectly sacrificed national interests to pursue class war could ever be an ally or represent a real force.⁶⁷

As Berthelot put it in an April memorandum, the reconstructive parties would be incapable of successfully opposing either the Germans or the Bolsheviks without the financial and military assistance of the Allies. Japan offered the only hope of providing this support, and the Americans would incur a "grave responsibility" if they continued to oppose Japanese action in Siberia.

It is above all a question of intervening in Siberia in the name of the [anti-Bolshevik] Siberian government, and it is therefore absurd to ask the opinion of the Bolsheviks since it is against them, their violence, their anarchy, and their scornful refusal of any normal consultation of the [Russian] population, that we would be intervening to reestablish order.

The attitude of the American government has completely confused the issue and led the British government to follow the recommendations of its semiofficial agent in Moscow who is pursuing the illusion of an entente with the Bolsheviks. . . .

Only the French and Japanese governments have since the beginning, in agreement with one another, properly defined the terms of the problem, which is not only political and military, but economic as well: we can bring to Russia not only order and liberty, but we can also furnish the manufactured goods which [the Russian population] so desperately needs. . . .

In view of the urgent necessity of pulling Russia out from under Germany's domination, and in view of the probability of unleashing the forces of resistance in Russia and all its healthy elements, it is necessary that the European Allies take decisive action in Washington both in order to denounce the error of attempting to reach an entente with the Bolsheviks . . . and in order to bring about intervention.⁶⁸

If the Quai d'Orsay's *démarches* to Washington and London were

⁶⁶ Pierre Margerie, the political director of the Quai d'Orsay, noted that Noulens's views on Lockhart (i.e., collaboration with the Bolsheviks) conformed exactly to those of the French government (see *Guerre*, vol. 671, Pichon to Cambon, no. 1816, May 8, 1918, p. 51).

⁶⁷ *Guerre*, vol. 752, Noulens, nos. 138-40, received April 24, 1918, p. 157; and nos. 177-78, April 28, 1918, p. 214.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, "Intervention japonaise" (in Berthelot's hand), April 1918, p. 234. As Jean Gout, chief of the Asia section in the Quai d'Orsay, put it, the provisional Siberian government would serve as a "useful screen" behind which to launch the Japanese intervention, and it would be unfortunate not to make use of it (see *ibid.*, unlabeled note, n.d., signed Jean Gout, p. 239).

not as strongly worded as the above note, it was only because, as Berthelot pointed out, the French government wished to allow the British and Americans to recognize for themselves "the inanity and danger" of collaboration with the Bolsheviks.⁶⁹

There can be no question that the Berthelot memorandum represented a basic statement of the Quai d'Orsay's attitude toward the Soviets.⁷⁰ Berthelot wrote most of the existing draft telegrams concerning the détente with the Bolsheviks and the need to intervene against them. Pichon simply signed these cables without revision. Moreover, in a general sense Berthelot's influence in the Quai d'Orsay has long been conceded by historians and other political commentators.⁷¹ During Clemenceau's tenure as premier, this influence became all the greater because of the unassertiveness of Pichon, whom Clemenceau later described as "very weak [and] unable to make up his own mind on anything."⁷² Likewise, the British ambassador in Paris, Lord Derby, rather contemptuously observed in late 1918 that Pichon could say "nothing but ditto to his chief [Clemenceau]."⁷³ Pichon appears to have acted in much the same way with Berthelot. Although the two men were "old friends," Berthelot, at least at this time, dominated their relationship.⁷⁴ Derby and his predecessor, Lord Bertie, commented many times on the weakness of Pichon and the pervasive, almost diabolical influence of Berthelot in the Quai d'Orsay.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ *Guerre*, vol. 753, Pichon to Cambon, nos. 1765–67; and elsewhere, May 4, 1918 (draft by Berthelot), p. 49.

⁷⁰ There are at least three other memoranda and one lengthy draft cable concerning the Siberian intervention written by Berthelot between February and August 1918, all of which are entirely consistent with outgoing Quai d'Orsay directives on this question (see MAE, Papiers Pichon, vol. 5, *Affaires russes . . . , 1914–1918*, "Le problème russe et l'intervention japonaise, 1^{re} note Berthelot," n.d. [probably February 1918], p. 58; *Guerre*, vol. 753, "Intervention japonaise . . .," May 31, 1918 [in Berthelot's hand], p. 210; MAE, E—Sibérie, vol. 2, *La Sibérie et la guerre, juin–juillet 1918*, "Politique en Sibérie, note de M. Berthelot," June 26, 1918, p. 81; and MAE, Z—Russie, vol. 217, *Action des Alliés dans le nord, 29 mai–17 août 1918*, Berthelot to Jusserand, non-envoyé, August 3, 1918, p. 291).

⁷¹ See, e.g., R. D. Challener, "The French Foreign Office: The Era of Philippe Berthelot," in *The Diplomats, 1919–1939*, ed. G. A. Craig and F. Gilbert (New York, 1965), 1:49–85.

⁷² British Museum, London, Balfour Papers, dossier 49743, entry from the diary of the British ambassador in Paris, Lord Derby, Sunday, August 18, 1918; see also Paul Cambon, *Correspondance, 1870–1924* (Paris, 1946), 3:199, 203–4.

⁷³ British Museum, Balfour Papers, dossier 49743, Derby to Balfour, November 20, 1918.

⁷⁴ Paul Morand, *Journal d'un attaché d'ambassade, 1916–1917* (Paris, 1963), p. 190. I would like to thank Mr. Joel Blatt for bringing this source to my attention. See also MAE, Papiers Margerie, *Lettres particulières de diplomates*, Pichon to Margerie, November 29, 1918.

⁷⁵ Beaverbrook Library, London, Lloyd George Papers, F/52/2/38, Derby to Bal-

This gray eminence of French foreign policy was also said to be a diplomat given to "clear solutions," who "spoke his mind" on all questions.⁷⁶ Berthelot's aversion to ambiguous situations no doubt increased his opposition to any dealings with the Bolsheviks. Interestingly enough, the Soviet historian, M. I. Levidov, once stigmatized Noulens as "the father of the intervention" in Russia.⁷⁷ But this characterization more appropriately applies to Berthelot, who appears to have been the guiding spirit of Quai d'Orsay opposition to the Allied-Soviet détente and who, according to Paul Cambon, deluged French posts abroad with long telegrams condemning any accommodation with the Bolsheviks.⁷⁸

Berthelot's April memorandum on which most, if not all, of these telegrams were based represented a recapitulation of the arguments already set out in the Quai d'Orsay dispatches of March 30–April 1 and subsequently put forward by Noulens. The Soviet regime was condemned for having signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Yet the Quai d'Orsay was entirely aware that the reconstructive parties which the French hoped to maintain on the Allied side might well turn to the Central Powers should the Entente fail to support them against the Bolsheviks. Moreover, Niessel had reported the observation in March that any government in Moscow would have to submit initially to German military and diplomatic intimidation.⁷⁹ Given Niessel's observation and the Quai d'Orsay's own views, its condemnation of the Soviet regime for having signed a German peace was at least partially self-serving, since the reconstructive parties were regarded as even more enfeebled than the Bolsheviks and more partial to the Central Powers. Noulens after all did not initially condemn the Bolsheviks as German agents but, rather, as revolutionaries trying to maneuver between two equally hostile great-power coalitions.⁸⁰ Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that Trotsky's "vague" promises, as they were characterized by Noulens, concerning the preparation of Russian resistance against Germany would have sufficed to assure French support had they been made by an anti-Bolshevik government. Berthelot stated that the French desired to bring Russia "order and liberty," but what they

four, n.d.: F/52/2/52, Derby to Balfour, December 14, 1918; see also F/51/4/66, Bertie to Balfour, December 11, 1917; and F/52/2/?. Bertie to Balfour, November 18, 1917.

⁷⁶ Cambon, 3:260–61; and Morand, p. 120.

⁷⁷ Levidov, p. 116.

⁷⁸ Cambon, 3:258, 260–61. Most of these telegrams can be found in *Guerre*, vol. 752.

⁷⁹ 16N 3185, Niessel, nos. 3653–57, March 16, 1918.

⁸⁰ *Guerre*, vol. 752, Noulens, nos. 177–78, April 28, 1918, p. 214; see also 16N 3185, Grenard, nos. 202–3, April 8, 1918.

really sought was to save their menaced interests. The problem posed by the Japanese intervention appears to have acted as a catalyst in the development of this thinking. Japanese pressure brought to bear against the Allied-Soviet rapprochement and French fears that Japan might act unilaterally only crystallized the Quai d'Orsay's opposition to any arrangement with the Soviets.

By the end of April 1918 Paris was thoroughly committed to overthrowing the Bolshevik regime. The basic assumptions on which this decision had been made remained unchanged: that the reconstitution of an Eastern Front was impossible⁸¹ and that the anti-Bolsheviks were too weak to challenge the Soviet regime.⁸² The central objectives of government policy, therefore, continued to be: (1) the obstruction of German expansion in the east and (2) the reestablishment of French influence in "a regenerated Russia."⁸³ Significantly, this final shift of policy in Paris began at the high point of the Allied-Soviet détente. Kennan points out that the Bolsheviks, out of recognition for the need of disciplined armed forces and out of fear of Japanese intervention which they hoped to forestall, "were never more cooperative, correct, and obliging than in their dealings during the last days of March and the first days of April with that portion of the Allied official colony in Moscow which they felt was well inclined toward them and favoured the development of military collaboration."⁸⁴ Ullman makes the same point.⁸⁵ Delmas notes that in March there was "a clear amelioration of relations" between the French military mission and the Soviet government and that Foch "believed" in the goodwill of Trotsky to reconstitute a Russian army and "believed" it possible for French officers to participate in this effort.⁸⁶ The general staff's note of April 5 clearly implied a certain confidence in the Bolsheviks and made the connection between the German offensive in France and the need for even a minimal diversion in the east in order to support and not oppose the policy of military collaboration.

Kennan states that "liberal or left-wing opinion" has been inclined to accuse the Allies of having "spurned either from shortsightedness

⁸¹ *Guerre*, vol. 670, Pichon to Jacques de Fontenau (French minister at Corfu), no. 27, April 13, 1918 (draft by Margerie), p. 80.

⁸² *Guerre*, vol. 671, Pichon to Conty, nos. 99-100, May 4, 1918, p. 23.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, "Situation en Russie et la ligne de conduite à adopter par l'Entente dans le pays," no. 7609 BS/3, 3^e Bureau A, May 13, 1918, p. 99. The conclusions of this note were approved by Clemenceau (see 4N 42, dossier 3, "Urgence de régler la question des tchèques de Russie," no. 8278 BS/3, signed Alby, May 26, 1918).

⁸⁴ Kennan, *Decision to Intervene*, pp. 108-9.

⁸⁵ Ullman, 1:136.

⁸⁶ Delmas, pp. 152-53, 297.

or from motives of imperialist greed, a perfectly acceptable alternative to the intervention they later undertook against the wishes and resistance of the Soviet government.”⁸⁷ Although Kennan rejects this point of view, the evidence indicates that the French government did turn away from a rapprochement with the Bolsheviks at a time of improved Soviet-Allied relations. Paradoxically, Trotsky appears to have been best informed on French intentions. In 1925, when asked why these negotiations for collaboration had failed, he replied that “Lavergne had ‘apparently’ received instructions from Paris that the coming struggle was to be *against*, not *with* the Bolsheviks.”⁸⁸

It should also be kept in mind that this rejected policy was not simply the pipe dream of unimportant agents in Russia. Ullman and Kennan, for example, dismiss the concept of Soviet-Allied military collaboration as an ill-conceived idea or as something built up out of all proportion by certain unofficial, overenthusiastic Allied agents.⁸⁹ Although this characterization as it refers to British and American attitudes may be quite correct, it does not accurately describe French thinking. Military collaboration was government policy for approximately nine weeks, and the offer of French aid was unconditional as long as the Bolsheviks began to organize against the Central Powers.⁹⁰

Why then did the French abandon a pragmatic policy toward Russia for one of inflexible hostility toward the Soviet regime? Why was the French government unwilling to settle for an “ambiguous” relationship with the Bolsheviks, as Balfour put it in May, in order to avoid one of outright hostility? Why did Paris turn away from a rapprochement at the high point of Allied-Soviet cooperation? The answer would appear to be that, from the French perspective, much more was at stake than just the question of restored eastern resistance to Germany. Had this not been so, the general staff’s policy of military collaboration would in all likelihood have continued, since in its view the Bolsheviks were the only Russian political elements capable of leading any further resistance to the Central Powers. Certainly, when it appeared that the Bolsheviks would not sign a peace, the Quai d’Orsay was also prepared to aid Soviet resistance. However, in a situation where neither the Bolsheviks nor their political opponents could openly continue the war, it became preferable to support the anti-Bolshevik opposition. The Quai d’Orsay,

⁸⁷ Kennan, *Decision to Intervene*, p. 129.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸⁹ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, p. 471; Ullman, 1:136–37.

⁹⁰ Delmas, p. 169.

unlike the Ministry of War, looked beyond the simple military problem posed by the collapse of Russia. It feared that anti-Bolshevik, so-called patriotic, elements would be lost to the Germans or wiped out should the government continue the policy of rapprochement. France's former "friends" would be thrown from influence by the Bolsheviks, who, if their government survived, would never permit the French to reestablish their former preponderant positions in Russia. If the Soviets did not survive, which was more likely, the French would only succeed in alienating the anti-Bolsheviks and in fostering cooperation between these elements and the Central Powers. Even if the Entente should win the war, the anti-Bolsheviks would probably retain power and thus constitute a potential ally for a resurgent Germany. Essentially, the Quai d'Orsay regarded the future disposition of these reconstructive parties as central to the safeguarding of the French position in Russia, and any limited military advantage to be gained from collaboration with the Bolsheviks was not worth the sacrifice of long-term political, strategic, and economic interests. To be sure, the Quai d'Orsay was not totally disinterested in organizing new resistance to the Central Powers in the east, but from its point of view the Russian question had ceased to be primarily military in nature. To save French influence in Russia and, conversely, to fight the spread of Germany's was essentially a political objective not served by a policy of military collaboration with the Soviet government.

Ironically, the French were the first of the Allies to move toward a rapprochement with the Bolsheviks, and then the first to veer away. In late January the French general staff initiated the period of détente; in late March the Quai d'Orsay acted to end it. Having discredited the policy of rapprochement within the French government, the Quai d'Orsay badgered and pulled at the sleeves of its allies to follow its example. The uprising of the Czech Legion in late May 1918 furnished the French with the necessary pretext to draw their British and American allies into a position of unambiguous hostility toward the Soviet regime. Working on the principle that "the enemies of our friends are our enemies,"⁹¹ the Bolsheviks were henceforth branded as instruments of Germany, and other factors contributing to French hostility toward the Soviet government were pushed into the background until nearly the end of the war.

Finally, the newly available material in the archives in Paris to some degree substantiates early "liberal or left-wing" views concerning the origins of the intervention in Russia. The French exam-

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

ple, however, does not entirely fit this old-left stereotype. The French general staff, influenced by military considerations, favored rather than opposed a rapprochement with the Soviet regime. But the Quai d'Orsay regarded the policy of military collaboration as incompatible with the restoration of French diplomatic and economic influence in Russia and therefore prevailed on the Ministry of War to put an end to the détente. The French government eventually concluded that, to save its preponderant interests in Russia, it must overthrow the Bolsheviks and put down the *jacquerie*. The intervention was the fruit of this presupposition.