

Timeline of Allied intervention in Russia between 1917 and 1920.

Autumn 1914 The Russian Imperial army advanced into Germany but the poorly equipped conscript troops were easily defeated. The Russian army lost 300,000 men. The Russians made more progress further south against Austria Hungary.



1915 Russia had 6 1/4 million men under arms but over a third were without rifles. German offensives drove the Russians out of Galicia and Poland. Warsaw fell. Over 2 million men were lost, half captured as prisoners of war. Desertion rates were high and Russia was desperately short of munitions. Tsar Nicholas the second took personal command of the army in September 1915 which meant he also took direct blame for defeat.



1916 A failed northern spring offensive against the Germans took pressure off the French on the Western Front but resulted in the loss of 120,000 men. Russia lost a further million men in the failed offensive between June and October. Britain and France sent supplies to the white seaports of Archangel and Murmansk and Vladivostok in Siberia, desperate to keep Russia in the war.



1917 A popular revolution prompted by military defeat, food shortages and seething discontent lead to the abdication of the Tsar in March. The liberal leaders who headed the new Provisional Government were committed to carrying on the war but were undermined by the parallel structures of worker- peasant- soldier councils (Soviets) who wanted to end it and extend the revolution. A last Russian military offensive failed. In the meantime the Royal Navy was shipping 3 million tons of supplies to Russia each year by 1917. Archangel and particularly Murmansk were built up to become larger ports to receive British supplies and a rudimentary railway was built to Petrograd, the Russian capital. A small British naval force under Admiral Kemp was based at Murmansk. **The main purpose behind the British naval presence was to protect British war material from capture by the Germans.**

1917 On 7th November the Bolsheviks, a revolutionary group seized power under Lenin and Trotsky. Admiral Kemp`s force at Murmansk was strengthened as peace negotiations started between the Germans and the new Bolshevik government.

Between November 1917 and April 1918 the Allies maintained relations with **both** the Bolsheviks and groups who opposed them in the hope that the Eastern Front against Germany could be reopened. **Allied concern mounted that the Germans might capture war material stored in North Russian ports and Vladivostok in Siberia or use Murmansk as a naval base for U-boats to target Allied shipping.**

1918 In January, as both the Japanese and Americans, commercial and imperial rivals in the Far East refused to send forces to protect Allied war material in Vladivostok, the British unilaterally sent HMS Suffolk with a small military force to guard stores there. The Japanese also then sent ships to Vladivostok.



April 1918 Alarming reports reached the Allies that freed German and Austrian prisoners of war might seize the Trans-Siberian railway and be able to transport war material from Vladivostok to the Eastern Front. British and Japanese soldiers briefly landed in Vladivostok to restore order. The Czechoslovak Legion was given permission by the Bolsheviks to travel along the Trans-Siberian railway to Vladivostok for evacuation to the Western Front. The Allies were still considering coming to terms with the Bolsheviks.



May 1918 6000 Czech troops arrived in Vladivostok. Fighting broke out between the Czechs and the Bolsheviks on the journey and the Allies supported the Czechs.

June 1918 On June 29 the Czechs seized Vladivostok . They appealed for Allied support in keeping control of the port and the Trans-Siberian railway.

August 1918

In early August the British with French support occupied Archangel but with only 1500 men. They were joined by around 6,000 US troops.

Having finally reached agreement on Allied intervention over 8,000 American and 18,000 Japanese troops landed in Siberia. The Japanese committed more troops than they said they would. The Americans wanted a short occupation in support of the Czech Legion and to be seen as a neutral by the Russians. The Japanese were intent on extending their control and influence in Siberia by a long occupation and offered their support to weaker anti-Bolshevik groups as a way of maintaining control. The British were represented by the 25th battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, a low-grade unit composed of men unfit for service and commanded by 52-year-old Lt-Colonel John Ward MP, a trade union leader. The Middlesexes were derided by other soldiers as the "hernia battalion" while Ward himself was dismissed as "a gasbag". Despite this the battalion performed well in the fighting wrong alongside Japanese troops.

From the 16th August to 14th Sept British forces took part in the occupation of the Southern Russian city of Baku, delaying an attack by Turkish troops in to the Caucasus and helping to protect British India from any attack by the Central Powers.



August 1918 The British overthrew the local Soviet in Archangel, establishing a White Russian government in North Russia.

Sept 1918 General Ironside took command of the garrison at Archangel. Sir Henry Wilson said "*Your business in North Russia is to hold the fort until the local Russians can take the field. You are to prepare for a winter campaign. No joke that!*" The main British aim of intervention in North Russia now was to recruit a White Russian army to fight the Bolsheviks and potentially link up with the Czech Legion and the Japanese in Siberia. In fighting with the Bolsheviks 100 miles south of Archangel, a company of Royal Marines mutinied. 93 were court-martialled.

November 1918 On Nov 11th an armistice was signed with Germany. **The main justification for Allied intervention in Russia had been removed since there was now no need to reopen the Eastern Front. It was replaced (as far as the British and French were concerned) by a drive to crush Bolshevism and prevent its spread in Europe. Also to prevent a revived Germany from intervening in Russia.**

On 14th November the British re-occupied Baku as Turkish forces withdrew.

December 1918 The French occupied Odessa in Southern Russia and began to invade the Crimea and parts of Ukraine with Greek support. American soldiers began writing home from North Russia demanding their withdrawal.



January 1919 Allied leaders gathered at Versailles to draw up a peace treaty with Germany. The British considered three policy options towards Russia;

- Withdrawal of all Allied troops and recognition of the Bolshevik regime
- Launch a full-scale intervention to crush the Bolsheviks
- Support the White Russians and create a protective chain of small states along Russia`s western border.

The French wished to crush Bolshevism completely as did Winston Churchill but Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson were more in favour of a negotiated peace. There were too few troops to spare for massive intervention and great war- weariness. The compromise policy was that all Russian factions would be invited to a conference at the Principo Islands in Turkey in February after a ceasefire. If the conference failed then Allied forces would be withdrawn from Russia afterwards.

February 1919 The Principo Conference did not take place. The Bolsheviks accepted an invitation to attend but the Whites refused. The US sent a secret and unofficial diplomatic mission to Russia to sound out Bolshevik intentions. The British cabinet agreed to withdraw from North Russia and review the situation in due course.



April 1919

The French withdrew from Odessa and Crimea in defeat and humiliation. The crews of some French warships mutinied.



The British Government (at Churchill's persistent nagging) finally published "A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia", a propaganda report of alleged Bolshevik atrocities. Churchill then whipped up enough concern in the British press and among M.P.'s to justify the recruitment of a "North Russian Relief Force" that would be sent out to support the evacuation of British forces from North Russia. He also hoped it might actually be used as an intervention force if policy changed. Churchill was now at serious odds with the Prime Minister, Lloyd George.

The Relief Force recruited hard up and unemployed ex-servicemen in Britain "with medal ribbons on their waistcoats", some of whom were distinguished former officers or medal winners. Some officers were told that "North Russia abounded in game, and were advised to take fishing rods and guns, the better to enjoy a summer holiday". Part of the force were "volunteered" from the Regular Army. All taking part were promised two months leave at the end of the expedition and extra allowances.

May-June 1919 The North Russia Relief Force replaced Canadian , French and US troops in North Russia over time. Churchill still hoped British troops could be kept in North Russia. At the same time in Moscow the Bolsheviks were under such military pressure that Lenin said “only a miracle can save us”

July-August 1918 British and White forces in North Russia defeated the Bolsheviks in several engagements but mutinies among White troops convinced Ironside to evacuate without delay.

21st Sept 1919 The last British troops were evacuated from Archangel. Their positions were taken by White Russian soldiers.

12th October 1919 The last British troops were evacuated from Murmansk. Their positions were taken by White Russian soldiers.

Sept-Oct 1919 Six volunteer British tank crews took part in the attack on Petrograd with General Yudenitch`s White Russian forces.



Feb 1920 The British Army Council decided to withdraw British troops from Siberia.

March 1920 The last British troops left South Russia.

April 1920 The last US troops left Siberia.

1922 The Japanese finally evacuated Siberia (occupation was too costly).