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Stephen D. Ramsey
University of Richmond

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IS THE WEST RESPONSIBLE FOR LENIN'S RISE TO POWER?

STEPHEN D. RAMSEY
EUROPEAN SEMINAR
DR. WILLIAM THORNTON
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The year 1917 is probably the most significant year in modern Russian history. Many people view this as the year of the Bolsheviks. Indeed, Lenin and his cohorts seized the reigns of government in November (all dates will be given in New Style) of that year and propelled Russia down an untrodden path of history. The effects of this revolution now permeate the globe. Some view that fateful day as the beginning of man's salvation from the exploitation of capitalism. Others view it as the birth of a pernicious disease which must be eliminated in a final apocalyptic battle to save mankind. However, far too few people study the actual events of 1917. While scholarly work on the period is voluminous, many of the works are skewed by the ideological perspective of the authors. Few people, aside from historians, are cognizant of the historical actions which finally resulted in the triumph of Bolshvism.

This paper will discuss the events leading to November 7, 1917. However, I will not focus on the activities of the Bolsheviks during the eight months leading to the November revolution. There are many accounts detailing this amazing rise to power. I will, instead, focus on a somewhat neglected facet of the Bolshevik revolution: that is the policies of the Provisional Government and specifically the policies of Alexander Kerensky. While much scholarship has been done on this period, I wish to concentrate on the Provisional Government's decision to remain committed to the Allied cause in World War I. I particularly wish to demonstrate that the

Allies were responsible, at least in part, for Kerensky's decision to remain in the War and that this in turn precipitated the Bolshevik Revolution in November. In demonstrating this I will implicate the Allies as partially responsible for the Bolshevik ascension to power. This implication has been raised by few scholars; most have been, instead, interested in demonstrating the pernicious nature of Bolshevism, the indecisive nature of Kerensky, or the historical necessity of Bolshevism.

This paper will chronologically detail the actions of Kerensky and the Provisional Government from its inception in March until its demise in November. The focus, as stated earlier, will be on the decision to remain in the war and the Allies' effect in determining that decision. Discussion will not be given to the motives of Allied policy, although it is obvious that the Allies were involved in a war and were naturally devoting their energies to the successful prosecution of that war. However, more prescient diplomacy may have prevented the Bolshevik rise to power. George Kennan, an eminent Soviet specialist, concludes that "The Russian Revolution and the alienation of the Russian people from the Western Community for decades to come were only a part of the staggering price paid by the Western people for their insistence on completing a military victory over Germany in 1917 and 1918."¹

In early 1917, the Russian people were tired of war, the suffering caused by the war and the government's bungling

war policies. As early as July, 1915 the Minister of War, General Polivanov, is quoted as saying that: "Faith in ultimate victory and in their leaders has been undermined."²

A western scholar writing in early 1922 commented that:

"Not only the army, but the rear guard of every army, the civil population, was sick unto death and weary of suffering."³

A Dutch diplomat dispatched to Russia in early 1917 perhaps summarized the atmosphere best: "The War had not gone well for Russia: an atmosphere of depression hung over the country."⁴

An American journalist residing in Petrograd reveals in his diary that he concluded on January 31, 1917 that "there is no doubt

that a revolution is coming."⁵ John Gaddis, an American diplomatic historian, remarks in retrospect that "three years of

of bloody and mismanaged conflict had so demoralized (Russia) as to render its new government capable of remaining in authority only by ending active participation in the war."⁶

Yet, Kerensky and the members of the Provisional Government did not realize the depth of anti-war sentiment among the people. This rising tide of anti-war sentiment finally rose and swept Kerensky out of power and replaced him with the only leader who promised peace, Lenin. Again, Kennan asks the reader to note "how intimately the causes of Kerensky's failure were connected with his effort to continue Russia's participation in WWI."⁷ He concludes that: "In every respect Kerensky's political position would have been eased, and his prospects for resistance to Bolshevik pressure would have been improved, had he been able to take the country

out of the war at once."⁸ Kennan admits that "I am not sure that I can answer" the question of why Kerensky kept Russia in the war.⁹ A close study of the political environment of the period and the actions of the Allies will illuminate the answer to this vexing question.

The end of the Romanov dynasty was the manifestation of the chaos which resulted in 1917 in the Bolshevik return to absolutism. There are many interpretations of the reasons for the Tsar's fall from power. It may be concluded that the Tsar's indecisiveness, weakness, and stupidity resulted in a complete decay of the centralized source of power. A great struggle ensued which finally was won by the Bolsheviks in November. A major reason for the Bolsheviks' victory may have been the misinterpretation by Kerensky and others within the Provisional Government of the reasons for Nicholas' demise as a political leader.

Alexander Kerensky was both a socialist and a nationalist. He was a devoted republican who abhorred the autocracy and its omnipotence. As a lawyer, he had worked to defend dissidents and had been imprisoned himself for his dissident activity. Yet he remained a fierce nationalist. This nationalism colored his socialist view of the coming revolution and convinced him of a fallacious premise on which he based all of his policies. Years after the mind-boggling days of the summer of 1917, Kerensky was still convinced that the war "merely postponed temporarily the revolutionary movement which had been gathering increasing momentum. I am quite convinced

that but for the War the Revolution would have come not later than the spring of 1915, perhaps even at the end of 1914."¹⁰ In other words, to Kerensky the socialist dialectic would come to a stop while all Russians defended the Motherland. His nationalism skewed his vision and prevented him from seeing that the War was augmenting, not weakening, this movement towards revolution.

Kerensky, instead, blamed this growing revolutionist sentiment on dissatisfaction with the inefficiencies of the Tsar's government in pursuing the war, not in the Tsar's basic decision to pursue the war. In explaining the causes of the March Revolution he states: "The preservation of absolutism and the cause of successful resistance to the enemy stood in tragic contradiction to one another."¹¹ Yet Kerensky's skewed vision of the reasons for the revolution compelled him to attempt to eliminate absolutism and to try to pursue successfully the war instead. The result was a complete dissipation of all power, allowing extremists complete freedom to agitate and to multiply their ranks. A more realistic premise concerning the causes of the March Revolution may have given Kerensky reason to end Russia's participation in the War and to eliminate absolutism without inviting anarchy.

Kerensky was not alone in his interpretation of the revolution. Victor Chernov, leader of the SR's and historical "scholar of the period, concludes that the entire Provisional Government tried to treat the revolution as a Palace revolution and not as a social uprising demanding change."¹² One diplomat did conclude that those who ac-

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cepted the theory that the revolution was merely a move to ensure a better, more organized fighting force were "a lot of simpletons and are letting themselves in for a bitter disappointment."¹³ A newspaper reporter, Arno Dosch-Fleurot, writing in Petrograd at the time, had possibly the most incisive analysis of the situation.

A national revolution against autocracy was being turned into a factional revolution, against the existent order of society, and the success of the factional revolution was assured by the insistence of the nationally-minded revolutionists to go on fighting the war.¹⁴

The tsar's last orders were pleadings to the Provisional Government to remain in the War. "This unprecedented war must be carried through to final victory. He who thinks of peace at the present moment is a traitor to Russia."¹⁵ It is natural for people to associate leaders with the policies they advocate. Here a discredited leader advocates a certain policy. It would seem logical that the new leader would try to divorce himself from the fallen leader and his discredited policies. However, Kerensky tried to draw the distinction between the Tsar and his policies. He later admitted that "many Duma deputies did not realize how deep were the wrath and indignations of the masses in Petrograd against the chiefs and representatives of the old regime."¹⁶ What Kerensky failed to grasp was that these fallen leaders had also tainted the policies they had implemented. The people were demanding change and Kerensky only offered them more of the same on the war issue.

As the Tsar fell from power, two centers of power emerged. The former Duma, which had been dissolved by the Tsar, now met as a Committee of the Whole in the same building where they formerly met as official Duma members. Also emerging was a Soviet of Workingmen and Soldier Deputies. This soviet had first emerged at the instigation of Trotsky during the 1905 Revolution. Kerensky was the only person to serve in both the Provisional Government and the Soviet. He was soon appointed Minister of Justice in the inchoate Provisional Government and also served as Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. A great debate ensued among the socialist concerning Kerensky's role in the Provisional Government. Kerensky decided he would serve in both organizations and did so over many objections among the members of the Soviet. Kerensky later admitted that "from the first days of the Revolution my relations with the Soviet leaders were strained."¹⁷

Mass chaos pervaded the atmosphere as no one source of power could demonstrate any legitimacy to rule. Russia had not experienced such a void of leadership since the infamous Time of Troubles at the beginning of the 17th century. One need only read Richard Pipes's book Russia Under the Old Regime to understand the affects a dissolution of the monarchy would have on this patrimonial state. The Provisional Government desperately needed some source of recognition to demonstrate their legitimacy to rule.

The Provisional Government sought their source of legitimacy from the Allies. The Allies were glad to give this source

legitimacy, provided that the Provisional Government would take a strong stand in favor of a continued war effort.

According to Kerensky the Provisional Government initially had no official opinion on the war and its aims. "On this question of the War and its aims the Provisional Government was left absolutely free, taking upon itself no formal obligations, being at liberty to act as it wished and proclaim whatever war aims it deemed proper and necessary."¹⁸ The Allied ambassadors, however, immediately began to pressure the Provisional Government. Maurice Paleologue, the French ambassador, played a key role in pressuring the Government to pursue the war. Paleologue saw Paul Miliukov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, immediately after the abdication of the Tsar. He urged "very strongly that the Provisional Government should delay no longer in solemnly proclaiming its loyalty to the alliance and its determination to continue the war at any cost."¹⁹ The supercilious ambassador returned on March 18 to see Miliukov. "Whatever reasons you may have for going slowly with the hotheads of the Soviet, you must realize that I cannot tolerate any doubt about your determination to continue the alliance and carry on the war."²⁰

Miliukov published a statement of the Government's position on March 20 which Paleologue thought would satisfy the demanding ambassador. He stated that the "first task would be "to carry the war to a victorious conclusion" and promised "to fulfill unflinchingly the agreements concluded with the Allies."²¹ to carrying on the war to a victorious

However, the French ambassador was not satisfied. In Miliukov's words he "came running to me and pounced on me with indignation and bitter reproaches." He quotes Paleologue: "Germany is not mentioned at all! Not the slightest reference to our aims in the war!..."²² Miliukov tried to placate the ambassador by promising future confirmations of the Russian will to fight.

The French ambassador was not alone in pressuring the young Government. After talking to Miliukov the American ambassador, David Francis, assured his government that "the administration of the new Government was right-thinking, sincere, and would prosecute the war fearlessly, regardless of its cost in blood and treasure." Rodzianko (former Chairman of the Duma) and Miliukov both assure me that the Provisional Government will vigorously prosecute the war."²³ The English Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan, received the following message soon after the March Revolution: "All your influence should be thrown into the scale against any Administration which is not resolved to fight to a finish."²⁴ Paleologue, again, symbolized the Allied position in 1917. When he was approached by an itinerant band of students celebrating the Revolution he responded to their inquiries by saying "I can render no better homage to Russian liberty than by asking you to join me in shouting 'Vive la Guerre!'"²⁵

The ambassador was obviously wrong. The demands of the political situation in Russia were in conflict with the demands of the Allied War effort. George Kennan refers to

the Allied policy of only pursuing the war as "myopic" and further states that the American policy was based on "ignorance."²⁶ He illustrates this conclusion by pointing to the Allied Diplomatic conference held in Petrograd, before the March revolution. The purposes of this conference were to stimulate the Russians to new war efforts and to plan for a spring offensive. Kennan feels that the Allies missed a grand opportunity to witness first-hand the internal chaos that had made Russia's continued war effort impossible. He points to the post-conference statements of Dourmorgue, the French Minister of Colonies, as evidence that the opportunity had been missed: "It is clear from all the conversations I had and all that I saw that Russia is filled with a unanimous will to pursue the war to a complete victory."²⁷ Obviously he had been deceived by others or by his own self-fulfilling wishes. Kennan criticizes this "myopia" and concludes that "to try to drive them to it (the war) was to provide grist to the mill of the agitator and the fanatic."²⁸

Kerensky became by mid-summer the "most influential" man in Russia. A western journalist wrote on March 20 that "Kerensky is the idol of the people and everything he does makes him more popular."²⁹ Paleologue also recognized Kerensky influence: "Kerensky is a man we must try to win over to our cause. He alone is capable of making the Soviet realize the necessity of continuing the war."³⁰ Paleologue did indeed convince Kerensky of the beneficence of the Allied policy and Kerensky succeeded in convincing the Soviet that the war should be

continued until a general peace could be found. In doing so, however, Kerensky extinguished debate on the crucial question of the masses. Without a party in power which represented their basic longing for peace, the masses turned to the only party that promised immediate peace, the Bolsheviks.

A western expert writing in 1926 expressed the opinion that the "bourgeoisie had been completely deceived and had wildly over-estimated the enthusiasm of the working class for the war."³¹ Another expert concludes that "out of touch with the real mood of the country, the liberal leaders had assumed a patriotic devotion where none existed."³² This expert cites Ckhrana reports from as early as 1916 which concluded that many among the masses believed that "the war cannot be concluded successfully, and ought to be ended now."³³ While Kerensky tried to restore the administrative apparatus of the state and fix the foundation of a new state and social order, he also proclaimed that "one of the main duties was to carry on the war."³⁴ Under these circumstances, with little support for the war among the lower classes, Kerensky was pursuing a policy doomed to fail.

A western observer concluded at the time that "there is no question that in the first days of the Revolution the only cry that went up from Russia was a cry for peace. A passionate desire for peace was universal."³⁵ Yet this desire was not reflected in the Provisional Government. The Petrograd Soviet even passed a resolution on April 13 favoring a successful prosecution of the war. Perhaps the efforts

of the Allies were affecting the policies of the Provisional Government which was still searching for its legitimacy to rule. Ambassador Francis cabled Washington that: "It has been my effort...to impress upon all the importance of a vigorous prosecution of the war and to subordinate thereto all questions as to the rights of races or the recognition of classes."³⁶ However, soon the beleaguered Soviet would begin to hear the cries for peace and thus precipitate the first crisis of the Provisional Government.

To many the notion of a separate peace was considered shameful and incompatible with the honor and dignity of Russia. This precipitated among some socialists, the development of Russian Zimmerwaldism. Instead of posing the question of "war or peace" they proclaimed the slogan "war or revolution." This policy was based on the premise that either the revolution will kill the war or the war will kill the revolution.³⁷ This theory resulted in a cry for a general peace based on the moral repudiation of the imperialist designs of all governments through a united international proletariat. This theory spurred efforts by some Russians to organize an international peace conference at Stockholm. These efforts will be discussed later; the immediate effect was intense pressure from the Soviet exerted on the Provisional Government to lead the way in announcing a policy of "peace without annexations or indemnities."

A serious crisis developed as Kerensky and Miliukov argued over the publication of Russia's war aims. Miliukov

published a statement of war aims consistent with the slogan "no indemnities, no annexations" on March 28. However, this statement was made only for domestic consumption. It did stimulate some dissent among the members of the Soviet because of references to Russia's "observance fully (of) the obligations which have been adopted with respect to our allies."³⁸ This was a reference to the now famous "secret treaties" which Russia had signed earlier giving her control of the Dardanelles and Constantinople after a successful completion of the war. This opposition smoldered for some time and was then revised by Kerensky in April. He began proclaiming that only he among the members of the Provisional Government supported fully the slogan "no indemnities, no annexations."³⁹ The Soviet soon began to demand that Miliukov send an address to the Allies proposing that they renounce all "annexations and indemnities."

Miliukov finally agreed to send the Allies a note merely informing them of Russia's war aims. Miliukov, however, inserted a statement which read:

Certain of the victorious conclusion of the war, united to our Allies, it is equally sure that the issue raised by this war will be settled in the sense of the realization of a secure and lasting peace, and that the advanced democracies inspired by the same desires, will find means to obtain the sanctions and guarantees necessary to avoid further sanguinary conflicts in the future.⁴⁰

This statement obviously tried to obviate the purpose of the note: to renounce Russia's imperialistic treaties. A great debate ensued between Kerensky and Miliukov. The

Allies played a key role in this debate. Paleologue firmly supported Miliukov but Buchanan sided with Kerensky. Also, the socialist delegation from France, headed by Albert Thomas, who would soon replace Paleologue, sided with Kerensky. Officially, Miliukov was supported. He proclaimed to Thomas: "I was too victorious."⁴¹ Actually, however, the rift had emboldened those who wished to form a coalition government. This resulted in more socialists coming into the Government, Kerensky's rise to Minister of War, and Miliukov's resignation the day before Paleologue left for his return to France. Miliukov had tried to walk a tight-rope between offending the Allies and offending the Soviet. He had failed. A new phase of the revolution had begun but still Russia had not extracted itself from that dreadful war. Time was growing short.

Before Paleologue's departure one of his "primed and of judicious" sources confessed that:

However painful such an admission must be to me, I feel I'm only doing my duty in coming to tell you that the war cannot go on. Peace must be made at the earliest possible moment... Necessity is the law of history.⁴² No one is compelled to do the impossible.

Paleologue responded:

You may be quite sure that the moment Russia betrays her Allies, they will repudiate her... Your Allies also have the power of the purse which is about to be doubled if not tripled by the help of the United States. We shall thus be in a position to continue the war for as long as is necessary. I must admit, however, that I have met the same pessimism on all sides during the last few days.⁴³

Yet the Allies continued to push the Russians to fight.

America appropriated \$100 million in credits and \$15 million

in cash to entice Russia to stay in the War. Francis still felt that the world situation "demanded activities on my part to assist the Russian Government to keep the Russian armies fighting. My constant effort is to keep her in the War..."⁴⁴ No doubt such a policy backed by hard cash would have a significant impact on the Kerensky decision to remain in the War.

The German High Command, in April, began to follow a new tactic vis-a-vis Russia. A virtual armistice ensued and the Germans began a direct appeal to the Russian soldiers and people to end the war. Propaganda leaflets were circulated which claimed Germany did not covet Russian land, but only wished to live in peace. This plan was aided by Bolshevik agitators who encouraged fraternization between forces as a means to an immediate peace. These efforts were quite successful and were followed with diplomatic initiatives by Germany to Russia. Kerensky reveals later that: "It was the plan of the German High Command that this armistice be followed by a separate peace... Berlin's efforts to come to a direct agreement with Russia were begun as early as April."⁴⁵ Under heavy pressure at the time from the Allies, Kerensky and the Government not only rebuffed these German appeals for a separate peace, but they began to accede to the long standing Allied demand that they begin an offensive. Kerensky reveals in his memoirs that "having rejected the idea of a separate peace, which is always a misfortune for the country concluding it, the return to new action became

unavoidable."⁴⁶ The Provisional Government was beginning to come to a consensus to begin an offensive and allay Allied concerns about their reticence to fight. The effects of this offensive would be catastrophic, for the struggling government^{and} would begin the slide to oblivion for Alexander Kerensky.

Meanwhile, the general peace initiatives of the Siberian Zimmerwaldist were gaining momentum. This policy of "just defensism" while working for peace was quite popular among the more moderate socialists of the Revolution. A Soviet delegation left in June to travel around Europe and to stimulate interest in the Stockholm Peace Conference. This group at first met with limited acceptance of their appeal, especially in France. Eventually they convinced the Italian Socialists to favor the Conference. They then received the greatest possible boost to their efforts. Sir Arthur Henderson, a socialist member of the British cabinet, convinced the British Labour Party to support this conference.⁴⁷

The Allied governments had at first treated these delegates as itinerant dreamers of no consequence. The support of the British Labour Party, however, signalled that there might be some chance for the socialists to bring this peace conference to fruition. The Allies immediately colluded to squash this peace movement. The day after the British Labour Party vote, the British Government voted to rescind the passports of all those who wished to attend this conference. The effects were fatal to this nascent movement for peace.⁴⁸

The effects of this decision also had a tremendous impact on domestic Russian politics. Ambassador Buchanan told his government that "Kerensky begged me this morning to urge His Majesty's Government not to refuse passports to our Socialists."⁴⁹ The failure of this mission undercut the position of the moderate socialists in Russia. Having arrived in western Europe with great hopes, they returned bitterly disappointed. Rex Wade, a western scholar, concludes that the:

moderate socialists (had) made... a negotiated peace through Stockholm the cornerstone of their foreign policy program and (had) sent the delegation abroad to further this cause. Their empty-handed return contributed to and symbolized the failure of the moderates in 1917.

The admission that the Stockholm Conference would not meet in the near future was also an admission that the peace program of Soviet majority, tied as it was to a general peace via the conference, was collapsing, leaving them without any meaningful program in this vital area.⁵⁰ In another article, Wade goes so far as to conclude that the failure of this mission "was one of the main causes of the failure of the moderates, socialists and of the victory of the Bolsheviks."⁵¹ The Allies cannot escape blame for this failure as they continued their "myopic" interpretation of events without regard for the domestic repercussions in Russia.

In Russia, meanwhile, a new military strategy was evolving. Kerensky later admitted that "it was quite futile to think of victory... in the summer of 1917."⁵² Kerensky, explained, however, that a new strategy was appropriate.

But a victory was not necessary! As President Wilson declared categorically before Congress, it was the Russian Revolution which made it possible for America to enter the War and thus alter fundamentally the ratio of the contending forces in the War... In the summer of 1917 it became necessary only to keep going until the arrival of the American army on the Western Front, with all its tremendous resources. This general Allied task exposed itself, so far as Russia was concerned, in a new strategic aim: we were no longer required to engage in a general offensive, but to compel the Germans to keep as many divisions as possible on the Russian Front until the autumn...⁵³

Obviously, the Allies, the U.S. specifically, played a significant role in Kerensky's decision to stay in the war.

Rex Wade, again, concludes that because of the policies of the Allies the Russians "were gradually forced into a position of simply trying to hold on while the war took its course."⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the Bolsheviki continued to agitate among the lower classes.

The strategy^{of} holding on perversely resulted in the decision to initiate an offensive against the Germans. The interpretations of the reasons for this offensive are many. However, most of those interpretations indicate that there was a significant role played by the Allies to encourage this action. Edmund Walsh writes that Kerensky was, in part

"responding to the Allies when he ordered an attack."⁵⁵ An observer felt at the time that Kerensky was convinced that "the war must be waged at any cost."⁵⁶ Tsereteli, the leader of the Zimmerwald movement, cited nebulous "external factors" and supported the offensive.⁵⁷ George Kennan concludes that the offensive was an effort to

"impress the Allies."⁵⁸ Another expert speaking at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in 1968 said that the effort was a "final and futile sacrifice for the Allies."⁵⁹ This speaker also posits that Kerensky hoped to gain leverage through a successful offensive which he could use to bargain with the Allies for revised war aims.⁶⁰

Perhaps of crucial importance to this decision was the visit of the Root Mission to Russia in June of 1917. This group, representing President Wilson, was headed by Elihu Root, a distinguished American but hardly an expert in Russian affairs or for that matter particularly interested in Russian affairs. In short, the goal of this mission was "to drive home the thought that the degree of American support for the Provisional Government would depend strictly on the vigor of Russia's war effort."⁶¹ An author, writing at the time, concluded that the "obvious mission" of Root was "to make Russia fight."⁶² Walsh concluded that "extraordinary pressure was brought to bear on Kerensky by the Allies, who urged him to give a practical proof of Russia's solidarity with the war aims of the Entente."⁶³ In short, Root conveyed the message to Kerensky "No fight, no loan."⁶⁴

Kerensky later stated that his main task as Minister of War was "to restore by all means at hand the fighting capacity of the army. To accomplish this I was to move the army to an offensive... which would bring about a sharp change in the attitude and sentiment of the army."⁶⁵ Kerensky also felt that there was a need to "wipe out the shame."⁶⁶

Who else would elicit this shame except the Allies?

Finally, Kerensky felt that only the Socialists could inspire the war-weary army to fight.

He proved to be utterly wrong. Although the Russian army met with success in the first few days of battle, it was soon forced to retreat haphazardly. The long awaited offensive, which the Allies had pushed so hard for, was a fiasco within days of its beginning. In the wake of this catastrophe Kerensky was appointed premeir as Prince Lvov resigned. Kerensky tried to emphasize that everyone had supported this offensive. On this point he is almost correct. This failed offensive had now tainted all the socialist moderates in office with the policy of a continued war. Only the Bolsheviks had opposed the offensive. The Government continued to alienate the lower classes and force them to the open arms of the Bolsheviks.

In the aftermath of this fiasco, Kerensky appointed L. Kornilov, over the objections of many, as supreme military commander. Kerensky viewed Kornilov as one who could help restore order to a quickly disintegrating society. In truth, he had precipitated a chain of events which would lead to his downfall.

Kerensky immediately scheduled a Moscow State Conference of representatives of all facets of Russian society, which he hoped would result in a new unified commitment among all of Russia's disparate power groups. The Conference failed and only "illuminated the disunity of the nation."⁶⁷

Soon after Kerensky appointed Kornilov he began to view him as a rival for power. Indeed, Kornilov was a dynamic figure around whom the conservative forces of the nation could rally. Ambassador Francis found Kornilov's appointment "reassuring."⁶⁸ The Dutch ambassador, ~~on the other hand~~ considered Kornilov a "personal friend," and he was pleased with his appointment.⁶⁹

In preparation for the Moscow Conference Kornilov proposed several repressive measures which he wished to announce at the Conference. On August 23 Kornilov visited Kerensky to try to persuade him to approve these measures. The fact that Kornilov brought his own guard to this meeting only added to the tension pervading the confrontation. Kerensky, however, still refused to accept these measures. Therefore, the Provisional Government entered the Conference with no "definite program" and only promises for more of the same.⁷⁰ Kornilov is reported to have said: "I only wish to save Russia, and will gladly submit to a strong Provisional Government, purified of all undesirable elements."⁷¹ Kerensky began to fear that Kornilov would "gobble up" the Government.⁷² In the wake of the conference to unify the nation "rumors about possible coups d'etat were rampant."⁷³ Around Kerensky there grew a "terrifying vacuum."⁷⁴ His days as the central figure in the Russian drama were coming to a close, as his country polarized and he sat paralyzed, fearing above all the outbreak of civil war.

After the Conference, more and more conservatives began to beseech Kornilov to restore order. Conspiracies were

plenty. Kerensky later blames the Allies for urging Kornilov to usurp power.⁷⁵ There does seem to be evidence that the British embassy printed and distributed posters which proclaimed Kornilov as a national hero.⁷⁶ Kerensky even charges Lord Milner, British War Minister, with sending a letter to Kornilov urging a coup.⁷⁷ It would not be illogical, given the previous actions and positions of the Allies, to conclude that they were at least amenable to a Kornilov coup. However, before Kornilov could initiate this coup a man whom later investigators would hold "responsible for the tragic course of events" entered the picture and precipitated this crisis.⁷⁸

This man, V.N. Lvov, former Procurator of the Holy Synod, saw Kerensky on September 4. Kerensky denies authorizing him to speak to anyone on his behalf. However, Lvov left Kerensky and traveled to military headquarters to see Kornilov. Lvov implied that he had been sent by Kerensky to present Kornilov with three options for a future government. Kornilov, believing Kerensky was abdicating his power, indicated he would prefer the third option which would have made Kornilov the sole dictator of Russia.

Lvov returned to Kerensky and said that Kornilov wanted to be the supreme dictator of Russia. Kerensky anonymously confirmed this by telegraph with Kornilov. Kornilov thought Kerensky was only confirming the offer made by Lvov and readily admitted that he was prepared to take power. Kerensky arrested Lvov and fired Kornilov. The Central Executive Com-

mittee of the All-Russian Soviet declared Kornilov a traitor and called on the army to resist his order.

Kornilov is said to have responded:

Russians, our great fatherland lies dying, its hour of death is near. Forced to act publicly, I, General Kornilov, declare that the Provisional Government, under pressure of the Bolshevik majority of the Soviet, acts in complete harmony with the plans of the German General Staff... I swear to lead the people on the path of victory over the enemy... 80

With those words Kornilov ordered his protegee, General Krymov, to march on Petrograd.

A letter written by Kerensky's personal secretary to his wife in London as Krymov approaches Petrograd may serve as an indicator of Kerensky's thoughts during this crucial time.

Kornilov the other night openly raised the banner of rebellion. His regiments are marching on Petrograd... A battle is imminent. It is impossible to foresee the issue of the battle. If Kornilov wins- which is likely- our fate will be settled, while a state of anarchy will be inaugurated throughout Russia. If our troops win things may be better, but even then the general situation will be worse than ever, as it is certain that famine, riots, ect. are inevitable. As you see I am in the mess and I am unable to get out of it. Altogether the situation is gloomy. 81

This document facilitates an understanding of why Kerensky turned to anyone who would help him oppose Kornilov.

Lenin leaped at the opportunity. According to Kerensky, who may be suspected as biased, Lenin said: "General Kornilov has opened for us quite unexpected perspectives! We must act at once!" 82
The Soviets immediately organized to defeat

this counter-revolution. General Krymov's troops melted away into the arms of Bolshevik agitators before he even reached Petrograd. Voicing the predominant view, one scholar concludes that "it was due to the efforts of the Soviets, not of the government, that the rebellion was squashed."⁸³

Kerensky and the moderates were undermined by this attempt at counter-revolution: "Fear of counter-revolution had produced a decisive shift to the left among the working classes."⁸⁴ In addition, Kerensky had been forced to distribute arms and ammunition among the Bolsheviks. It was as if he had been forced to entrust his defense to a boa constrictor. One expert best states the effect of this affair. "The Kornilov rebellion was essentially a test of strength between Kornilov and Kerensky; the victor... was Lenin."⁸⁵

From this point forward Kerensky's fate was sealed. One diplomat felt that the "population became convinced that the Bolsheviks were going to have it all their own way."⁸⁶ Six days after Kornilov's defeat the Bolsheviks took control of the Soviet and proposed to use the same army that had risen against Kornilov in a new surge for power against Kerensky.

It is difficult to conclude what specific tasks the Allies undertook to embolden Kornilov to make his move for power. However, there is some evidence that at least the British were involved in some sort of encouragement of Kornilov and other conservative elements who wished to restore order. At the least, one may conclude that the Allies did not discourage this move and in fact may have been

conspicuously quiet on the matter. Concerned only with the war effort, the Allies were seeking all means to insure a stable pro-war government in Russia. The result was the antithesis of their desires.

November 7 quickly approached. A Russian general is reported by Chernov to have concluded that "Kerensky and his group are not at present up to the demands of the situation." The masses are turning to the Left, while the intelligentsia are turning Right... Kerensky stands still and beneath him an abyss is forming."⁸⁷ Very soon the Bolsheviks made their move to obtain power. They were met with little resistance. Kerensky had depended on the support of the Cossacks; but the Cossacks had seen their hero, Kornilov, betrayed by Kerensky and they, therefore, decided to do nothing to defend Kerensky. Kerensky continued to call for their help and they continued to say "yes, yes, we're coming, as soon as we saddle our horses."⁸⁸ They never came and Kerensky was forced to flee. The Bolsheviks had come to power and they were determined to restore order to the society, that is a Bolshevik order of communism.

Allied policy in Russia had resulted in Abject failure. Kerensky's private secretary writing in England in mid-December of 1917 indicated that one of the main reasons for Kerensky's fall from power was the Allies' "neglect of the public opinion of the Russian democracy upon which Kerensky's administration was based."⁸⁹ The Manchester Guardian was one of the few Western newspapers to indict Allied policy in the aftermath of Kerensky's failure. On November 10 they

editorialized that "Allied support could have removed Russia from the war peacefully" and avoided the rise to power of Bolshevism.⁹⁰ Kerensky, himself, later admits that he knew "the soldiers were not quite sure whether it was necessary to die when there, in the rear, the fond dreams of generations were being realized."⁹¹ Yet he continued to accede to Allied pressure by launching the July offensive. Kerensky also makes the final indictment of his own and Allied policy by concluding that "the trump card of the Bolsheviki was peace, peace, immediate peace!"⁹²

This paper has not sought to detail Kerensky's life, nor has it sought to detail the policies of the Provisional Government; it has sought to detail the effect of the Allied policy of insisting on a continued war effort by Russia and to link this Allied policy with the causes for the rise of Bolshevism. It is not contended that this Allied policy was the sole cause of Kerensky's fall from power. Kerensky may have harbored ambitions of attaining the dream of all previous Russian leaders, the acquisition of Constantinople. In acceding to the Allies' demand that he not withdraw from the war, he probably weighed all of the possible monetary gains he could accrue if he only "held on" in the war against the likelihood of the Bolsheviks' rising to power. He decided to place his bet on the continued war effort and he lost. There can be little doubt that the Allies had a significant effect on this decision and they therefore must be held accountable as well. The Allies lost their bet as much as Kerensky lost his. Current policy-makers should

learn from this experience that myopic policy without regard to the domestic repercussions in other countries can quite easily lead to disaster in the long term interests of both countries.

NOTES

¹George F. Kennan, Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), p. 36.

²quoted in Victor Chernov, The Great Russian Revolution, trans. Philip E. Moseley (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 150.

³Edmund A. Walsh, The Fall of the Russian Empire, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1928), p. 300.

⁴William J. Oudendyk, Ways and By-Ways in Diplomacy, (London: Peter Davies, 1939), p. 205.

⁵James L. Houghtelling, Diary of the Russian Revolution, (New York: Dodd and Meade and Co., 1918), p. 18.

⁶John Lewis Gaddis, Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States: An Interpretive History, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1978), p. 58.

⁷Kennan, Russia and the West, p. 34.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Alexander Kerensky, The Catastrophe, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1927), p. 81.

¹¹Ibid., p. 80.

¹²Chernov, The Great Russian Revolution, p. 200.

¹³Louis de Robien, The Diary of a Diplomat, (London: Michael Joseph, 1969), p. 223.

¹⁴Arno Dosch-Fleuret, Through War to Revolution: Being the Experiences of a Newspaper Correspondent in War and Revolution, 1914-1920, (London: The Bodley Head Limited, 1931), p. 133.

¹⁵quoted in Maurice Paleologue, An Ambassador's Memoirs, v. 3, trans. by F. A. Holt, (New York: George n. Doran Company, 1925), p. 259.

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- ¹⁶Kerensky, The Catastrophe, p. 37.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 29.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 55.
- ¹⁹Paleologue, Memoirs, p. 244.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 248.
- ²¹Paul Miliukov, Political Memoirs 1905-1917, trans. by Carl Goldberg (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 436.
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³David R. Francis, Russia from the American Embassy, 1916-1918, (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1921; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1970), p. 88.
- ²⁴L. P. Morris, "The Russians, the Allies and the War, February-July 1917", Slavonic and East European Review, 50, (1972), p. 35.
- ²⁵Paleologue, Memoirs, p. 226.
- ²⁶Kennan, Russia and the West, p. 19.
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 21.
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 20.
- ²⁹Houghtelling, Diary, p. 158.
- ³⁰Paleologue, Memoirs, p. 234.
- ³¹quoted in Morris, Slavonic and East European Review, p. 31.
- ³²Ibid.
- ³³Ibid.
- ³⁴Kerensky, The Catastrophe, p. 107.
- ³⁵Claude Anet, Through the Russian Revolution, (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1917), p. 15.
- ³⁶Francis, American Embassy, p. 99.

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- ³⁷Miliukov, Political Memoirs, p. 429.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 434.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. 436.
- ⁴⁰Anet, Russian Revolution, p. 165.
- ⁴¹Miliukov, Political Memoirs, p. 449.
- ⁴²Paleologue, Memoirs, p. 273.
- ⁴³Ibid.
- ⁴⁴Francis, American Embassy, p. 125.
- ⁴⁵Kerensky, The Catastrophe, p. 207.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 209.
- ⁴⁷Rex A. Wade, "Argonauts of Peace: The Soviet Delegation to Western Europe in the Summer of 1917", Slavic Review, 26, (1967), p. 461.
- ⁴⁸Ibid.
- ⁴⁹Sir George W. Buchanan, My Mission To Russia, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1923; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1970), p. 164.
- ⁵⁰Wade, Slavic Review, p. 465.
- ⁵¹Idem, "Irakli Tsereteli and Siberian Zimmerwaldism", Journal of Modern History, 39, (1967), p. 425.
- ⁵²Kerensky, The Catastrophe, p. 210.
- ⁵³Ibid.
- ⁵⁴Wade, "Why October? The Search for Peace in 1917", Soviet Studies, 20, (1968), p. 44.

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- ⁵⁵Walsh, Russian Empire, p. 239.
- ⁵⁶Anet, Russian Revolution, p. 217.
- ⁵⁷Morris, Slavonic and East European Review, p. 47.
- ⁵⁸Kennan, Russia and the West, p. 29.
- ⁵⁹Alex Rabinowitch and Robert Feldman, "The First World War and the Russian Revolution", Oral tape of papers given at the 1968 meeting of the American Historical Association, Los Angeles: Pacific Tape Library.
- ⁶⁰Ibid.
- ⁶¹Kennan, Russia Leaves the War, (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 22.
- ⁶²Dosch-Fleuret, War to Revolution, p. 162.
- ⁶³Walsh, Russian Empire, p. 263.
- ⁶⁴Kennan, Russia and the West, p. 32.
- ⁶⁵Kerensky, The Catastrophe, p. 184.
- ⁶⁶Ibid., p. 212.
- ⁶⁷Abraham Ascher, "The Kornilov Affair", Russian Review, 12, (1953), p. 245.
- ⁶⁸Francis, American Embassy, p. 143.
- ⁶⁹Oudendyk, Diplomacy, p. 235.
- ⁷⁰Ascher, Russian Review, p. 241.
- ⁷¹Ibid.
- ⁷²Chernov, Russian Revolution, p. 363.
- ⁷³Ascher, Russian Review, p. 244.

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- ⁷⁴Chernov, Russian Revolution, p. 371.
- ⁷⁵Kerensky, The Catastrophe, p. 315.
- ⁷⁶James D. White, "The Kornilov Affair", Soviet Studies, 20, (1968), p. 191.
- ⁷⁷Kerensky, The Catastrophe, p. 315.
- ⁷⁸N. Ukraintsev, Novoe Russkoe Slovo, October 28, 1956; reprinted in Soviet Studies, 25, (1973), p. 294.
- ⁷⁹Walsh, Russian Empire, p. 248.
- ⁸⁰Oudendyk, Diplomacy, p. 235.
- ⁸¹quoted in Barry Hollingsworth, "David Soskice in Russia in 1917", European Studies Review, 6, (1976), p. 94.
- ⁸²quoted in Kerensky, The Catastrophe, p. 315.
- ⁸³Ascher, Russian Review, p. 249.
- ⁸⁴Ibid., p. 252.
- ⁸⁵Ibid.
- ⁸⁶Oudendyk, Diplomacy, p. 236.
- ⁸⁷quoted in Chernov, Russian Revolution, p. 387.
- ⁸⁸quoted in Hollingsworth, European Studies Review, p. 94.
- ⁸⁹Ibid.
- ⁹⁰Elisabeth H. Schillinger, "British and U.S. Newspaper Coverage of the Bolshevik Revolution", Journalsim Quarterly, 43, (1966), p. 14.
- ⁹¹Kerensky, The Catastrophe, p. 219.
- ⁹²Ibid., p. 347.

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First-hand account of March Revolution. Author biased towards Kerensky. However, very pro-war. Only talked to people of upper class. Of limited use to this paper.

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