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Canada and the Siberian Intervention, 1918-1919*

GADDIS SMITH

RECENT scholarship has not yet mentioned a major factor in the tangled history of the intervention in Siberia at the end of World War I:¹ the participation of Canada as an intervening nation.

Canadian intervention, involving four thousand troops and a special economic mission, represents the initial episode in Canada's struggle for complete control of her foreign policy after World War I. As such it illustrates the changing relationships within the British Empire more realistically than the scores of constitutional documents that the Commonwealth statesmen self-consciously drafted between 1917 and 1931. The story also deserves to be told as a subsidiary but essential part of intervention as a whole, and as an example of the interplay of Canada, the United States, and Great Britain—the famous “North Atlantic Triangle”—at work in an unaccustomed quarter of the globe.

Canada's part in the Siberian intervention began in June, 1918, at a moment when the British government was exasperated by months of unavailing efforts to get the United States to approve a scheme of intervention as a means of bringing military pressure against Germany. To every entreaty President Woodrow Wilson had returned a rigid negative, basing his refusals on distrust of Japan, the only power with troops available for intervention in force. Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden of Canada knew about the thickening stalemate over intervention when he arrived in London, June 8, 1918, to attend the Imperial War Cabinet. What he did not know was that the British War Office, impatient over President Wilson's unshakeable attitude, was looking everywhere for enough troops to begin independent British in-

* A fellowship from the Samuel S. Fels Fund of Philadelphia made the research on this subject possible.

¹ Four recent works have treated different aspects of the intervention. John Albert White, *The Siberian Intervention* (Princeton, N. J., 1950) is an ambitious survey of the whole subject. Betty Miller Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition, 1918-1920: A Study of National Policy* (Durham, N. C., 1956) examines with precision the sinuosities of American policy. James William Morley, *The Japanese Thrust into Siberia, 1918* (New York, 1957) makes excellent use of recently available Japanese sources. George F. Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene* (Princeton, N. J., 1958), the second volume in his admirable study of *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920*, deals with events up to the arrival of troops in Siberia.

tervention. Not a man could be spared from the western front; in the Far East only a single regiment at Hong Kong was immediately available. Perhaps, reasoned the War Office, Canada might be willing to send troops directly from British Columbia across the Pacific to Siberia.

The idea had possibilities. The first step was to convince Sir Robert Borden of the necessity for intervention. Accordingly, on June 11 Leopold S. Amery, Borden's close friend and a member of the Secretary of War's personal staff, sent the Prime Minister a long memorandum by General Alfred Knox, former British military attaché in Petrograd, who was highly regarded as the British government's foremost Russian authority. Without immediate intervention, said Knox, the war would be lost:

Intervention from the Far East is our only chance of closing to the Central Powers in 1919 the material resources of Asia, and of bringing to bear against them a part of the enormous allied man power of that continent. It is our only chance of winning this war and of preventing another disastrous war in the near future.²

The same day on which Borden received the memorandum from General Knox he attended a meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet and heard British Prime Minister Lloyd George survey the war situation in terms of black despair. The possibility of complete defeat in France had to be considered, the latter stated, with the British Empire and the United States left standing alone, as England had been left in the days of Napoleon. Full attention, therefore, must be turned to beginning intervention in Russia as the one means, should disaster strike, of carrying on the war. But the attitude of the United States was still blocking action.³

In the days that followed, the members of the Imperial War Cabinet sat with worried brows while the diplomatic efforts to get President Wilson to change his mind continued and the inclination of the War Office to act independently was restrained. During the same month Sir Robert Borden was actively and bitterly criticizing British military leadership on the western front and blaming the blunders of British generals for the success of the German March offensive and for needless sacrifice of life, including the lives of thousands of Canadians. Borden's outspoken criticism provided Lloyd George with the opening he wanted for his own long-standing feud with the army "brass": the opportunity to set up the special Prime Ministers' Committee on War Policy, consisting of himself and all the Dominion premiers.⁴

² Memorandum by Knox, June 7, 1918, enclosed in Amery to Borden, June 11, 1918, Sir Robert Borden Papers, OC 515, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

³ Transcript of June 11, 1918, meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet, box 333, *ibid.*

⁴ *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs*, ed. Henry Borden (2 vols., Toronto, 1938), II, 809-15.

This Committee met in almost daily session and reached conclusions that vividly underline the pessimistic assumptions on which the plans for Siberian intervention were based. Disagreeing with the British General Staff, the Committee wrote into its report:

Rather than run the risk of failure to reach a decision on the Western front in 1919, with its disastrous results on the *moral [sic]* of the British and French, and perhaps even of the American Armies, the Committee would prefer to postpone an attempt until 1920.⁵

By the end of June, 1918, there was still no encouraging word from President Wilson. With Winston Churchill insisting that the time had arrived to act without the Americans, the Imperial War Cabinet decided to make one final appeal. A statement setting forth in full the reasons for intervention was prepared. Lloyd George brought the Cabinet's statement to the Supreme War Council on July 2 and the Council reworked it in the form of a long plea for Wilson's approval "before it was too late."⁶

Simultaneously it appeared that a crisis was building in Siberia. On June 29 Vladivostok had been seized by a portion of the Czechoslovak Legion then skirmishing across Russia against the Bolsheviks but reportedly in imminent danger of being annihilated by hordes of German and Austrian former prisoners of war. Here was the final and decisive excuse for beginning intervention without American cooperation: the Czechs needed help. During the first week in July the War Office acted. The regiment in Hong Kong was ordered aboard ship for Vladivostok and the Canadian government was formally asked to supply a contingent. On the heels of these British preparations came the startling and unexpected news that the imagined plight of the Czechs had also moved President Wilson and Secretary of State Robert Lansing, and that on July 6 they had decided on a joint United States-Japanese intervention. Great Britain had not been consulted and had no place in American plans. This was irritating in the extreme, but there was nothing to do but proceed with the plans for getting the Canadian troops to Siberia as quickly as possible.⁷

⁵ Report of the Committee of Prime Ministers on War Policy, August 15, 1918, Borden Papers, OC 628. Although this final report was not prepared until August, the Committee's important work was done in June.

⁶ Minutes of June, 1918, meetings of the Imperial War Cabinet, *passim*, Borden Papers, box 333; David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (6 vols., Boston, 1933-37), VI, 178.

⁷ George Kennan believes that the American decision for intervention prompted the British to act. "Thus the effect of Washington's unilateral action," he writes, "was not to keep the British out of Siberia but to propel them at once into that complicated situation. . . ." *The Decision to Intervene*, 408. Considerable evidence suggests that this interpretation is incorrect. The British government did not learn of the American decision until July 10, when a cable dispatched by Ambassador Lord Reading late on July 9 was received in London. In reply to Reading, Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour cabled: "We ourselves were so sensible to the immediate necessity of aiding the Czechs that before receiving your message, we had . . . given orders

If the War Office hoped that the dispatch of Canadian troops would be a simple matter of request made, approved, carried out, the War Office was to be disappointed. Immediately the Canadian government refused to play a subordinate part and began to ask questions. This proved to be a long process, for nearly half the Canadian cabinet at the moment was in London, the rest in Ottawa.⁸

Sir Robert Borden personally approved the idea of a Canadian expedition, but felt obliged to consult his cabinet colleagues before giving an answer. First to be consulted was General S. C. Mewburn, Minister of Militia and Defence, who brought up several questions that needed answering: Exactly what duties would the Canadians be expected to perform? Under whose control would the force finally come? How would the troops be recruited? The last question was especially pertinent, considering the explosive nature of the conscription issue in Canada at the time.⁹ While Borden discussed these problems the War Office grew impatient. Maladroitly it attempted to go over Borden's head with a direct cable to the Governor-General in Canada in order to get the expedition under way. Borden was furious. "No reply shall be sent to the British Government's message except through me," he cabled in anger.¹⁰

At this point a greater problem appeared: the United States and Great Britain were pursuing different, even contradictory, Siberian policies. While the British urged Canada to participate in a vast strategic scheme to re-establish the eastern front and spoke of the need to defend India,¹¹ the United States condemned military intervention with uncompromising Wil-

for relieving the Czechs [*sic*] garrison at Vladivostok with such British as were available." Balfour to Reading, July 10, 1918, Sir William Wiseman Papers, folder 91, Yale University Library. Further evidence is found in the fact that General Tom Bridges, head of the British Military Mission to the United States, traveled to Ottawa during the first week in July in order to make arrangements for the Canadian contribution to the intervention. General P. deB. Radcliffe to Newton W. Rowell, July 9, 1918, Borden Papers, OC 518.

⁸ The situation was complicated by another War Office request, issued July 12—this one for a full infantry battalion to be used in northern Russia. The Canadian government flatly refused this request on the grounds that no infantry could be spared from the Canadian corps in France. (Letters and memoranda on this decision are in the Borden Papers, OC 518.) Canada did, however, approve War Office requests to send small groups of volunteer officers and noncommissioned officers to northern Russia as instructors, and in August sent an artillery brigade of 497 men to that theater. Leonid I. Strakhovsky, "The Canadian Artillery Brigade in North Russia, 1918-1919," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXIX (June, 1958), 125-46. The present article deals only with the Siberian intervention because it alone commanded the full and anxious attention of the Canadian government. The operations in northern Russia went comparatively unnoticed by the Canadian government and press.

⁹ Mewburn to Borden, July 12; Mewburn to General W. G. Gwatkin, July 12, 1918, Borden Papers, OC 518.

¹⁰ Borden to Acting Prime Minister Sir Thomas White, July 25, 1918, *ibid.*

¹¹ The best of many expositions of British motives is the General Staff memorandum dated June 19, 1918, entitled "Allied Intervention in Russia," Canadian Expeditionary Force, Siberia, Records, folder 17, S 2. Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

sonian prose. Said the famous *aide-mémoire* addressed to the Allied ambassadors in Washington on July 17, 1918:

It is the clear and fixed judgment of the Government of the United States . . . that military intervention . . . would add to the present sad confusion in Russia rather than cure it . . . and that it would be of no advantage in the prosecution of our main design, to win the war against Germany. It can not, therefore, take part in such intervention or sanction it in principle.¹²

The United States was acting solely to safeguard the Czechs. By implication all other motives were nefarious.

By early August, 1918, the lack of understanding between the United States and Great Britain had become for several key members of the Canadian cabinet the dominant factor in the Siberian situation. There were almost no limits to the possible difficulties. Different policies could lead to friction; where would that leave Canada? Conceivably Canada might be forced to violate the basic principle of her external policy: friendship and cooperation with the United States as well as with Great Britain. Furthermore, what of Japan? Conflict between the Japanese and Americans in Siberia was not unlikely. Canadian public opinion would surely demand that the Canadian expeditionary force align itself with the Americans. But Great Britain, bound by the Anglo-Japanese alliance and traditionally more friendly than either the United States or Canada toward Japan, might demand Canadian neutrality. Was not the best course for Canada to stay out of Siberia altogether? Newton W. Rowell, president of the Privy Council, distilled all these uncertainties into a cable to Borden in London. The exact relationship of the Canadian expedition to the American and Japanese forces, said Rowell, must be defined and made public.¹³ No definition was ever offered from London, but it is worth noting that in the months that followed the cabinet in Ottawa acted in agreement with American declared policy and not with the views of the British War and Foreign Offices.

Borden had no answer to these objections. Undeniably potential difficulties existed, but a peculiarly Canadian factor in itself justified sending a force to Siberia—economic interest. As Borden expressed it:

Intimate relations with that rapidly developing country will be of great advantage to Canada in the future. Other nations will make very vigorous and determined efforts to obtain a foothold and our interposition with a small military force would tend to bring Canada into favourable notice by the strongest elements in that great community.¹⁴

¹² United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia* (3 vols., Washington, D. C., 1931-32), II, 287-90.

¹³ Rowell to Borden, Aug. 9, 1918, Borden Papers, OC 518.

¹⁴ Borden to Mewburn, Aug. 13, 1918, *ibid.*

By thus invoking the vision of future Siberian trade Borden was playing a theme popular in Canadian industrial circles since the beginning of the war.¹⁵ Since 1914 the government, too, had discussed from time to time various ways of acquiring advantages in Siberia for Canadian exporters, and in 1915 had sent two trade commissioners to Russia.

During the summer of 1918, while the cabinet hesitated, it was the chief Canadian trade commissioner, Conradin F. Just—recently returned from Russia—who expounded most vividly the great Siberian dream. In a note to Sir George Foster, the Minister of Trade and Commerce, Just wrote:

The Americans we may suppose will make the most of this opportunity, and one would think that we might find a way to have at least a small share of such advantages. . . . I think I see here a possible opportunity for the participation of the Government in association with leading financial institutions on behalf of Canadian trade interests.¹⁶

Soon Just had worked out a full program for Canadian economic penetration of Siberia. In a detailed report he observed that geographically Canada and Siberia were similar, a popular cliché in Canada at the time. What an opportunity, therefore, for the application of Canadian skills and experience in transportation, large-scale agriculture, fishing, mining, forestry! What enormous potential markets for Canadian railroad equipment, river and coastal steamers, canning machinery, tractors, combines, flour mills, grain elevators, dairy equipment! What a chance to undertake “the exploitation of Siberian forests under Canadian direction and with Canadian appliances and machinery!”¹⁷ Just advocated the dispatch of a special Canadian economic mission—which was soon done—and in addition described how every officer and NCO in the Canadian expeditionary force could be given special instructions on how to search out and report “new markets for Canadian manufacturers.”¹⁸

Time proved that the dreams of Prime Minister Borden and the Canadian Department of Trade and Commerce were fantastic, but in the summer of 1918 the belief that an economic rainbow arched across the Pacific to Siberia was strong enough to overcome or override all political and military objections to a Canadian expedition. The definite decision to go ahead was made in mid-August, and Brigadier General J. H. Elmsley was named commander.

¹⁵ The great Canadian opportunity in Siberia was a favorite subject for articles and editorials in *Industrial Canada*, the monthly journal of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association. In the year 1915, for example, the subject was discussed in the January, April, August, September, and December issues.

¹⁶ Just to Foster, no date; probably early Aug., 1918, Sir George Foster Papers, subject file 73, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

¹⁷ Economic Mission to Siberia, memorandum by Just, Aug. 29, 1918, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Siberian Trade, memorandum by Just, Oct. 9, 1918, *ibid.*

There followed a sharp controversy with the War Office over who was to be in ultimate control of the Canadian troops: the Canadian government or the War Office. When the Canadian government said in effect, "No control, no troops," the War Office capitulated. Ottawa had control and the War Office salvaged the right to issue "orders" which did not have to be obeyed.¹⁹

At last General Elmsley and the first Canadian troops sailed for Vladivostok, where they arrived October 27, 1918. Now for the first time the Canadian government had its own independent, direct source of political and military information from Siberia. Two weeks later the signing of the Armistice in Europe completely destroyed the original military justification for intervention. Coming together, these two events brought consternation to the Ottawa cabinet.

General Elmsley's reports were consistently disconcerting. Siberia was a chaotic mass of intrigue and suspicion. The Americans and Japanese were particularly hostile toward each other. "And the Russians as a whole appear to be indifferent to their country's needs, so long as they can keep their women, have their vodka, and play cards all night until daylight."²⁰ But Elmsley's greatest troubles were with General Knox, who had arrived before him from London as head of the British Military Mission. Knox, zealous for a major campaign against the Bolsheviks, despised the Americans and said that the sooner they were excluded from all consideration the better; he placed little emphasis on the need for protecting the Czechs and proclaimed instead that "every British soldier is as much a factor of trade and Empire as Clive's men were."²¹ Such views—bellicose, imperialistic, militantly anti-Bolshevik, anti-American—were not designed to convince the doubtful within the Canadian cabinet that the dispatch of the expedition had been a wise move, economic arguments or not.

A running cablegram argument ensued between Borden, now back in London for the British preliminaries to the Paris Peace Conference, and the cabinet in Ottawa. Sir Thomas White, the acting prime minister, opened by cabling that the cabinet wanted the troops to be brought back. Borden said this could not be done; he appealed once more to "the economic considerations," which, he stated, were "manifest." If the troops were withdrawn, the special five-man economic commission under the exuberant C. F. Just would

¹⁹ The purport of the voluminous correspondence on this issue of control is summed up in a cable from Mewburn to the War Office, with amendments by Borden, Sept. 11, 1918. Borden Papers, OC 518.

²⁰ Elmsley to Mewburn, Nov. 2, 1918, Newton W. Rowell Papers, folder 71, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

²¹ Knox to War Office, Nov. 4, 1918; Knox to British consul at Irkutsk, Nov. 5, 1918, copies in "Elmsley Secret File," Canadian Expeditionary Force, Siberia, Records, folder 17:2.

be left dangling in Siberia or "would have to be recalled to our possible detriment in the future."²² To this White and the cabinet cabled back: "Canada has no such economic or business interest as will justify the employment of a Canadian force composed of young men whose parents and friends desire should return at once to their ordinary occupations."²³ Borden also suggested that Canada's honor was at stake. Great Britain was counting on Canada. To back out now would be a breach of faith and a serious blow "to Canada's present position and prestige." This argument was received with skepticism.²⁴

If Borden would not change his mind the cabinet in Ottawa could at least place restraints on the use of the Canadian troops in Siberia. This was done by cabling the War Office that the Canadian force would not be allowed to engage in military operations and could not leave Vladivostok for "up country" without the express consent of Ottawa.²⁵ Under these orders the Canadian troops did no fighting and never budged from their base while in Siberia.

The Canadian government also asked for a clear statement of policy from the British government. "It has been constantly asserted by His Majesty's Government," came the reply, "that it is for the Russians to choose their own form of Government and that His Majesty's Government have no desire to intervene in the domestic affairs of Russia."²⁶ This at least was encouraging news, and Rowell quickly drafted an official declaration designed to calm public uneasiness and to counter the strong impression that intervention had an anti-Bolshevik purpose. As a matter of courtesy the British government was asked if it could be quoted. "No," came the answer. "The Russian Soviet Government would be considerably encouraged thereby."²⁷ Now was confusion twice compounded. It was impossible to suppress the strong suspicion that the British were after all bent on using intervention against the Bolsheviks. Rowell's draft for a public declaration was tucked away in the files and never issued. The cabinet returned to its demands that the troops be withdrawn.

In Siberia, meanwhile, General Elmsley was having more trouble with General Knox of the British Military Mission. Elmsley, agreeing fully with

²² White to Borden and Borden to White, Nov. 20, 1918, Borden Papers, OC 518; also Borden to White, Nov. 20, 1918, *Borden Memoirs*, II, 869.

²³ White to Borden, Nov. 25, 1918, Borden Papers, OC 518.

²⁴ Borden to White, Nov. 24, 1918; White to Thomas A. Crerar (Minister of Agriculture) and Crerar to White, Nov. 28, 1918, *ibid.*

²⁵ Canadian General Staff to War Office, Dec. 22, 1918, *ibid.*

²⁶ Colonial Secretary to the Governor-General, conveying statement of Foreign Secretary Balfour, Dec. 12, 1918, Rowell Papers, folder 71.

²⁷ Colonial Secretary to the Governor-General, Jan. 13, 1919, *ibid.*

the American commander General William S. Graves, considered it folly to fight Bolshevism with force of arms.²⁸ But Knox preached war and lamented that the Canadian and British troops had not begun to fight their way to Moscow.²⁹ Where Elmsley insisted on the importance of working with the United States, Knox called Americans "eye-sores."³⁰ Worst of all, Knox was openly contemptuous of Ottawa and the views of the Canadian government and had a disquieting habit of acting behind Elmsley's back. So strongly did General Elmsley feel that he cabled his views directly to the War Office in London. "The past has shown," he wrote, "that neither you nor the French can take an unduly prominent part in Russia's affairs without danger of having the brand Imperialism placed upon your actions, and thereby giving our home Bolsheviks material for . . . initiating industrial unrest. . . . Adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards America, Japan, and Canada. Modern nations can be led but not driven."³¹ Later, when there was a threat of serious conflict between the Americans and the Japanese, Elmsley informed the War Office that his officers and men were in sympathy with the Americans and probably would not stay neutral in any clash between the Americans and the Japanese.³² For this the War Office rebuked Elmsley, told him that the Americans were the only discordant element, and warned him to move his troops away from the scene of any possible friction and thus avoid trouble.³³

It was against such a background of uneasy tension in Siberia that Sir Robert Borden broke the long impasse which had existed between himself and the cabinet in Ottawa. His earlier dreams of economic glory in Siberia had not survived the nightmare of Siberia as it actually was. Thus the decisive motive for the Canadian expedition no longer existed. As the opening of the Paris Peace Conference approached, moreover, Borden had been thinking carefully about Canadian external policy, particularly about Canada's relationship to the United States as a coparticipant in a new era of world affairs, and had reached an important conclusion that he announced to the Imperial War Cabinet on December 30, 1918: If the future policy of the British Empire meant working with some other nation against the United States, that policy would not have the approval of Canada. This declaration was directly linked with the Siberian situation. Continuing, Borden made a specific recommendation for a new departure in Russian policy. It was sense-

²⁸ This rapport is described from the American point of view by William S. Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure, 1918-1920* (New York, 1931), 82-84.

²⁹ Knox to Elmsley, Nov. 27, 1918, CEF, Siberia, Records, folder 1712.

³⁰ Knox to War Office, Nov. 24, 1918, *ibid.*

³¹ Elmsley to Radcliffe, Jan. 19, 1919, Canadian Expeditionary Force, Siberia, Records, folder 1711.

³² Elmsley to War Office, Mar. 18, 1919, *ibid.*

³³ War Office to Elmsley, Mar. 27, 1919, *ibid.*

less, he said, to keep troops in Russia. The thing to do "was to induce the Governments of the various States in Russia to send representatives to Paris for a conference with the Allied and associate nations. These could then bring pressure, if necessary, upon them to restrain them and control aggression, and to bring about conditions of stable government."³⁴

Borden's unrealistic suggestion was based on an imperfect knowledge of conditions in Russia, but it seemed a good way out of an uncomfortable spot not only for Canada but for the greater powers. Lloyd George welcomed it eagerly and on January 3, 1919, made it the basis of a formal proposal to the United States, France, Italy, and Japan.³⁵ At the Paris Peace Conference the proposal was modified and emerged as the famous abortive scheme for a conference with all Russian factions to be held February 15, 1919, on Prinkipo Island in the Sea of Marmora.³⁶ Lloyd George called on Borden to be the chief British delegate at Prinkipo,³⁷ but the conference, of course, was never held. Borden, however, acted in the spirit of his proposal by informing Lloyd George that the Canadian troops would be withdrawn as soon as possible.³⁸ Lloyd George, who by this time was strongly opposed to continued intervention, approved of Borden's decision and said it would have considerable effect on British policy in regard to Russia.³⁹

Winston Churchill, then Secretary of War, tried vigorously to argue Borden into keeping the Canadian troops in Siberia, but Borden would not reconsider.⁴⁰ As soon as the grip of winter departed from Vladivostok harbor the first of the four thousand Canadian troops embarked for the trip back to Canada; by June 5, 1919, the last had departed.⁴¹ By the autumn of 1919 the British contingent of approximately two thousand, having lost the possibility of Canadian support and without hope of reinforcements, was also withdrawn.⁴² The last of the American forces left on April 1, 1920.⁴³ Siberia was left to the Russians and to Japan, whose troops lingered on until 1925, when

³⁴ Minutes of Imperial War Cabinet, Dec. 30, 1918, Borden Papers, box 333.

³⁵ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919, Russia* (Washington, D. C., 1937), 2-3.

³⁶ United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1919, The Paris Peace Conference* (13 vols., Washington, D. C., 1942-47), III, 676-77.

³⁷ *Borden Memoirs*, II, 904.

³⁸ Statement by Lloyd George at meeting of the Council of Ten, Jan. 21, 1919, *The Paris Peace Conference*, III, 666.

³⁹ Philip Kerr (Lloyd George's private secretary) to Borden, Feb. 16, 1919, Borden Papers, OC 518.

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Eighth Meeting of the British Empire Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, Feb. 17, 1919, Foster Papers, folder 143; Churchill to Borden, Mar. 17, 1919, Borden Papers, OC 518.

⁴¹ Canadian Expeditionary Force, Siberia, Records, HQ War Diary, drawer D-89.

⁴² Winston S. Churchill, *The Aftermath* (New York, 1929), 256.

⁴³ Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition*, 183.

the last Japanese soldier left the northern half of Sakhalin Island.⁴⁴ Thus ended intervention.

At first glance the story of Canada's part in the Siberian intervention seems annoyingly inconclusive. Like the larger history of intervention, it reads like a chronicle of indecision and human folly. But from the confusion certain conclusions may be drawn.

The policy of the Canadian government restrained British action in Siberia. If the Canadian troops had not been restricted to Vladivostok and instead had been subject without qualification to the British War Office and amenable to the wishes of General Knox, intervention in Siberia might well have taken a different turn. The Canadians might have become involved in serious fighting against the Bolsheviks. In that event it is worth considering what the American contingent would have done, how the Japanese would have acted, and what repercussions would have developed in Canada.

If General Elmsley had shared Knox's and the War Office's distrust of Americans, friction between the United States and Great Britain would have been more acute than it was—possibly with serious injury to British-American relations. To say that Canada in Siberia was acting the linchpin or interpreter between the United States and Great Britain is to overstate the case, for the American government was blind to the fact that Canada was following a separate policy. Great Britain had no desire to display the disconcerting independence of the senior Dominion member; and the Canadian government, lacking separate diplomatic representation in Washington, had no easy means of making Canada's position clear. The subsurface interplay of the three "North Atlantic Triangle" nations, nevertheless, was a factor in the Siberian intervention. By responding to her own interests Canada acted as a buffer between the United States and Great Britain. In so doing, she presented an unmistakable North American point of view to the British government and restrained the impetuosity of the War Office.

For its own sake Canada's experience in Siberia is an excellent illustration of the process by which events compelled Canada to assume control of her own foreign relations. While the Canadian government grappled with the problem of Siberia it was not distracted by the theoretical debate over Canada's legal and constitutional right to have a foreign policy. There was no time to decide whether or not Canada possessed separate international status or to wring hands over the difficulty of conducting foreign affairs without a foreign service. Nor did the Canadian government pause to note how its actions contradicted the fashionable platitude of the time about the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

nations of the British Empire speaking with one voice on foreign policy. An immediate problem called for solution. Purely Canadian decisions had to be weighed in the making of policy: Canada's relations with the United States, the uneasy attitude of both Canada and the United States toward Japan, the necessity of keeping Canadian control over Canadian troops, and—not to be forgotten—the mirage of economic opportunity that beckoned and then vanished. In such circumstances policy could not be left in the hands of the British Foreign and War Offices.

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