

The Army and the Revolution, 1917

The control and use of coercive power was central to the dramatic events of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the bloody civil war that followed. The Bolsheviks would not have succeeded if they had faced concerted resistance on the part of the Imperial Russian armed forces. The army was of necessity a crucial actor in the revolution. The four sovereign power issues in which the military was involved were the February Revolution, the Kornilov affair in late August, the October Revolution, and the Civil War.

The February Revolution forced the abdication of the tsar in early March 1917. The military was thrust into the arbiter role by the three-way standoff between the tsar, the revolutionary forces, and the leaders of the political opposition in the State Duma, the Russian parliament. The military leadership refused to stand behind Nicholas II during the crisis because of their fear that if order was not soon restored the revolution would spread to the front and endanger the war effort.

The Kornilov affair refers to the conflict between the Commander in Chief of the army, General Lavr Kornilov, and the head of the Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky. In late August, Kerensky accused Kornilov of planning a coup and treason. Kornilov had not in fact been planning to seize power, but Kerensky's accusation drove him into open rebellion, and Kornilov and several other leading officers were arrested. Most officers, however, sat out the affair.

The military leadership was again faced with a major political decision when the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917. The military high command, with one significant exception, did initially follow Kerensky's orders to move troops to Petrograd to quash the Bolshevik uprising. However, once it became clear that the Provisional Government had collapsed, the military made no serious efforts to resist the Bolshevik take-over in Petrograd or at military headquarters a month later.

The final case is the Civil War, in which the Bolsheviks struggled to hold on to power in the face of the military challenges of the Whites, who were led

by former Tsarist officers. Former officers also were well represented on the Red side, and the ability of the Soviet government to mobilize these officers on their behalf was a crucial element in the Bolshevik victory.

Table 3.1 shows that the military was a key participant in all of these events. When examined in depth, however, the most striking thing about these cases is how *passive* the military was in the face of obvious threats to its fundamental interests. Even the Kornilov affair, coded as a case of military intervention, came about only after, through a bizarre series of circumstances, the Prime Minister reneged on his commitments to the military leadership and accused its top general of treason. The military was largely a reluctant participant in the events of the revolution, up until the outbreak of civil war in 1918, at which point all officers were forced to decide which side they were on. Throughout 1917, most officers were focused on the war with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire and sought to remain “outside politics.”

Army behavior is best explained through a combination of opportunities and motives. The weakness of the state during the revolution created the conditions under which military involvement in sovereign power issues arose. Organizational structure is a less reliable guide to behavior; the most important factor in these terms was the divide between officers and enlisted men, a cleavage absent from theoretical discussions of military coups. Corporate interest only in a very broad sense was an important motive behind army activity – the desire to keep the army and the state from collapsing in the midst of war. Organizational culture was a fundamental determinant of officer corps behavior in 1917, but it also was violated on several occasions by some officers, who believed that without military intervention the country would collapse.

Any attempt to account for military activity in this case, then, runs up against the basic problem that theories of military involvement in sovereign power issues were not designed to explain how an army would respond to a far-reaching revolution in the midst of total war.¹ Such extreme internal and external pressures on the military are historically rare. What these cases lack in comparative similarity, however, is more than compensated for by their drama and richness.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTION, 1917

Opportunities for military involvement in sovereign power issues were quite broad prior to 1917. These expanded even further during and after the February Revolution. It was the extreme weakness of the Russian state that led to army participation in domestic political struggles. At the same time, internal fragmentation within the armed forces made concerted action

¹ I know of only one book on the specific question of civil–military relations and revolution: Katharine Chorley, *Armies and the Art of Revolution* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973 (1943)).

TABLE 3.I. *Chapter Summary*

Observations	Opportunity		Motive		Outcome
	Domestic Structure	Organizational Structure	Corporate Interest	Organizational Culture	
Abdication of the Tsar	Intervention or arbitration likely.	Intervention unlikely. If arbitration, concerted action likely.	Intervention unlikely. If arbitration, will side with contender most likely to promote corporate interests.	Intervention unlikely. Praetorian subculture. If arbitration, first choice is neutrality and second choice is side with most legitimate contender.	Arbitration. Unable to remain neutral. Took position least likely to interfere with war effort. Troops and officers split.
Kornilov Affair	Intervention or arbitration likely.	Intervention unlikely.	Intervention likely.	Intervention unlikely. Praetorian subculture.	Intervention, but no coup plot.
October Revolution	Intervention or arbitration likely.	Intervention unlikely. If arbitration, internal splits likely.	Intervention likely. If arbitration, will side with contender most likely to promote corporate interests.	Intervention unlikely. Praetorian subculture. If arbitration, first choice is neutrality and second choice is side with most legitimate contender.	Nonintervention and arbitration. Internal split. Officer arbitrating took position that involvement was not military's job and would disrupt war effort.
Civil War	Intervention or arbitration likely.	Intervention unlikely.	Intervention likely.	Intervention unlikely. Praetorian subculture.	Intervention.

difficult. Most significant in this respect was the political mobilization of the rank and file after February.

Domestic Structure

The question of the political capacity of the Tsarist state on the eve of war and revolution is extremely contentious. The majority view is that the Tsarist state was quite weak in the early twentieth century; even without the war, further upheavals were likely. In this section I summarize the debate on the strength of the late-Imperial state and then turn to a closer examination of political capacity in the revolutionary year of 1917. There is quite widespread agreement that by 1917, and certainly after the February Revolution, the Russian state was extremely weak. There were clear opportunities for military activity. The domestic structure approach, then, would predict both military involvement and intervention in sovereign power issues during 1917.

The historiographical literature on the Russian Revolution asserts that until recently there was a strong consensus among Western historians that between 1905 and 1914 the Russian state had made important strides toward political and social stabilization. Only the outbreak of the war, according to the traditional view (sometimes called the “liberal” interpretation), detoured Russia’s constitutional development and led to the revolution of 1917.²

This interpretation, however, is not as dominant as most scholars contend. Leading historians associated with the traditional view, such as Leonard Schapiro and Robert Daniels, are quite cautious in their assessment of Russian political stability. Daniels, for example, concludes that the Russian Empire on the eve of World War I was characterized by “sickness at the top and the strains of a half-developed society below.”³ Other scholars sympathetic to this view, such as Richard Pipes, Dominic Lieven, and Martin Malia, also are quite pessimistic about the prospects for the development of constitutional democracy in Russia, even in the absence of war.⁴ Most agree that continued state weakness and political disorder were more likely in the coming decades than social and political stability.

² For this picture of the dominant orthodoxy, see Leopold Haimson, “The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905–1917 (Part One),” *Slavic Review*, 23 (1964), 619–623; Edward Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), pp. 35–39, 52–55; Richard Pipes, “1917 and the Revisionists,” *The National Interest*, 31 (1993), 70–72.

³ Leonard Schapiro, *1917: The Russian Revolutions and the Origins of Present-Day Communism* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 1–14; Robert V. Daniels, *Red October: The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967), pp. 8–9.

⁴ Pipes, “1917 and the Revisionists,” p. 72; Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), pp. 193–194; Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II: Twilight of the Empire* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), pp. 186–190; Dominic Lieven, *Russia’s Rulers under the Old Regime* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 277–308; Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 69–70, 81–87.

Recent so-called “revisionist” history has further demonstrated that the Russian state was marked by fatal contradictions even before 1914.⁵ By 1914, Russian society was dangerously polarized between the upper and lower classes in a manner that became evident in 1917. The war exacerbated but did not cause this fundamental split.⁶ The peasantry demanded the redistribution of noble estates, and agricultural reforms had probably increased, rather than decreased, peasant discontent. The working class was radicalized, partially because the regime restricted the development of free trade unions and thus helped transform economic grievances into political conflicts. The middle class was weak and divided, and the rural nobility was in serious decline. Even without the war, the revisionists conclude, the autocracy was in serious trouble.⁷

World War I placed further strains on the Russian polity. Russian military defeats in 1915 led to despair among the elites, who blamed Russia’s difficulties on bureaucratic incompetence. Rumors in Petersburg society about the influence of Tsarina Alexandra and the “holy man” Rasputin on government policy further weakened the autocracy. Most important, the war was causing increasing strains on the economy, evidenced by inflation, supply problems, and dangerous food shortages in the cities.⁸

By the end of 1916 the economic situation in Petrograd (the capital’s name had been changed from the German-sounding St. Petersburg) had become critical. Police reports from late 1916 and early 1917 predicted that inflation and food shortages were likely to spark riots. The number of strikes in Petrograd increased sharply in the fall and winter of 1916–1917, reaching levels comparable to the massive strikes of 1914. A police report from October 1916 concluded, “the ever growing disorder in the rear, or in other words in the entire country, which is chronic and cumulative, has now attained such an extraordinarily rapid rate of growth that it now . . . menaces shortly to throw the country into catastrophically destructive chaos and spontaneous anarchy.”⁹

⁵ The “revisionist” label is now something of a misnomer, since this interpretation of the Russian Revolution is currently the dominant approach. Two good introductions are Ronald Grigor Suny, “Toward a Social History of the October Revolution,” *American Historical Review*, 88 (1983), 31–52; Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution*.

⁶ Haimson, “The Problem of Social Stability (Part One)”; Leopold Haimson, “The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905–1917 (Part Two),” *Slavic Review*, 24 (1965), 1–22.

⁷ Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution*, pp. 55–82.

⁸ Lieven, *Nicholas II*, pp. 204–233; Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1981), pp. 3–211.

⁹ Quoted in D. A. Longley, “Iakovlev’s Question, or the Historiography of the Problem of Spontaneity and Leadership in the Russian Revolution of February 1917,” in Edith Rogovin Frankel, Jonathan Frankel, and Baruch Knei-Paz, eds., *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 383, note 4. See also Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 198–211; S. A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917–1918* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 44–53;

There is a fairly broad consensus, then, that by the beginning of 1917 the Tsarist regime was quite weak. Most observers attribute this weakness to deep-rooted cleavages in Russian society, while some argue that they were caused by the war. With this background in mind, I now turn to a more systematic analysis of the indicators used to measure state strength. The data are mixed on the period before the February revolution, but after that point it is not surprising that all of the measures of political capacity indicate a very weak state.

Organizational Age. Organizational age has three components: the age of the juridical state, the age of the current constitutional order, and the number of top leadership successions in that order. The exact age of the Russian state is perhaps subject to debate; but even if one starts counting from the time of Peter the Great, the state was over 200 years old by 1917. The Russian constitutional order in 1917 was only eleven years old, because the Revolution of 1905–1906 had forced Nicholas II to grant a new constitution. The tsar's official title was still "autocrat," but the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the new legislature, consisting of the Duma and the State Council, represented potential rivals to the emperor. The tsar, however, appointed the Prime Minister, and Nicholas II was not inclined to turn executive decision-making authority over to his ministers. The new constitution also failed to create a political consensus between the state (the tsar and the bureaucracy) and society (represented by the Duma). The third measure of organizational age, the number of top leadership successions in that order, was technically zero, because Nicholas II remained the tsar under the new constitution. On the other hand, there had been four successful regime changes since the last irregular transfer of executive authority, the assassination of Paul I in 1801.¹⁰

Political Violence. Good statistics on the number of deaths from political violence in Russia for the period 1900–1917 are hard to come by. There were thousands of deaths during the revolution of 1905–1906; over 3,000 Jews died in pogroms alone during this period, and one source puts the number of total deaths at over 13,000. Two hundred fifty people were killed by government troops during the Lena goldfields massacre in 1912. Thousands more died during the 1917 revolution. In the civil war that followed, there were 800,000 combatant deaths, and a total of 7–10 million people died from all causes. The numbers on deaths from political violence are far from

Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914–1917* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), pp. 284–297; Peter Gatrell, "The Economy and the War," in Harold Shukman, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988), pp. 117–122.

¹⁰ On the post-1905 constitutional order, see Geoffrey A. Hosking, *The Russian Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma, 1907–1914* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, pp. 153–194.

comprehensive; and without a good comparative basis such as that provided by the *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators*, it is impossible to know whether political violence in Russia in the years leading up to the revolution (1907–1916) was particularly high.¹¹

Internal Conflict. Various forms of internal conflict are also potential measures of low state capacity, such as strikes, peasant rebellions, and separatist movements.

Strike patterns in late-Imperial Russia were extremely erratic, and industrial conflict in general was very volatile. Three massive waves hit Russia, in 1905–1907, 1912–1914, and 1916–1917. Patterns in Russia were quite different than in the rest of Europe, where there was less fluctuation from year to year. In its dealings with the working class, just as in the case of its interaction with elite society, the Tsarist regime had failed to create legitimate and stable institutions.¹²

Peasant unrest was another sign of political disorder in 1917. Until the February Revolution there had been very few disturbances in the countryside. After the fall of the tsar, however, many peasants believed that what they saw as the unjust property structure had been overturned. Government authority collapsed, and increasingly peasants took matters into their own hands. By the time of the October Revolution the traditional social and economic order in the countryside had been turned upside down, and almost all land was in the hands of peasants.¹³

A final important form of irregular challenges to the existing political order were the national autonomy and independence movements of 1917. The collapse of the autocracy led to the spread of demands for various forms of autonomy – cultural, administrative, political – around the Russian empire. The Provisional Government refused to recognize any of these demands, maintaining that they could be resolved only after a Constituent Assembly

¹¹ Shlomo Lambroza, “The pogroms of 1903–1906,” in John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, eds., *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 227–231; A. I. Denikin, *Put’ ruskogo ofitsera* (Moskva: Prometey, 1990), pp. 177–178, citing the Soviet historian Pokrovskiy; Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution*, p. 15; Shukman, *Blackwell Encyclopedia*, pp. 146, 201. John Keep’s study of the revolution has perhaps the most information on violence during the revolution, but it is descriptive and not quantitative: John L. Keep, *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976).

¹² Diane P. Koenker and William G. Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution in Russia, 1917* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Leopold H. Haimson and Charles Tilly, eds., *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in International Perspective: Strike Waves in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Smith, *Red Petrograd*, pp. 37–38.

¹³ Graeme J. Gill, *Peasants and Government in the Russian Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Keep, *Russian Revolution*, pp. 153–247, 383–471.

had been elected. These national conflicts contributed to the breakdown of state political capacity after the February Revolution.¹⁴

Strength of the State vis-à-vis Society. In its last decades the Tsarist regime was unable to change either social structure or private behavior in intended ways. The government was more capable of resisting private pressure, but at several points during the Revolution of 1905–1907 the tsar was forced to offer political concessions to powerful private actors. After the collapse of the autocracy the Provisional Government's authority was continually under challenge. The most important rival was the structure of local Soviets (councils), particularly the Petrograd Soviet. The inability of the Provisional Government to act without the approval of the Soviet came to be known as "dual power."¹⁵ As 1917 progressed, the Soviets grew stronger and the Provisional Government grew weaker, which culminated in the Bolshevik rise to power in October. Bolshevik rule, however, was only consolidated after several years of ferocious civil war.

Throughout the period under study, then, state political capacity was weak or nonexistent. The domestic structure approach predicts a high degree of military involvement in sovereign power issues in 1917.

Organizational Structure

The Russian state had no robust mechanisms for counterbalancing or penetrating the army to prevent military coups. On the other hand, the military had some serious internal cleavages that did make intervention difficult. The major problem was not splits within the officer corps, although these did exist. The real obstacle to concerted military intervention in politics was the vast gulf between the officer corps and the troops.

Counterbalancing. The Tsarist government never created a security force or paramilitary organization that would have been capable of counterbalancing a military coup. The closest existing organization was the Gendarmes Corps. But the Gendarmes were more of a surveillance organization than a paramilitary one. Their entire strength was less than 10,000 personnel, and they were lightly armed. Budgetary authority rested in the hands of the Ministry of War at all times, their commander and personnel were often former army officers, and in wartime they were operationally under the

¹⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 20–83; Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism 1917–1923*, Revised Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Shukman, *Blackwell Encyclopedia*, pp. 194–268.

¹⁵ On the origins of dual power, see Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 408–427.

control of the military. The Gendarmes could not have resisted a coup attempt, and they were not really designed for this role.¹⁶

Penetration. The government had more resources for detecting a coup than it did for preventing one underway. There were three separate but overlapping channels for collecting information on the mood of the officer corps: the Gendarmes, the Department of Police, and a separate group of agents under the Minister of War. Agents were quite active in the army after the 1905 revolution, but their usefulness is doubtful. Agents' reports primarily focused on officers' political views, such as pro-democracy leanings, or their personal conduct (gambling, womanizing, etc.). In most cases, suspicions directed against certain officers were forwarded to the military itself for handling, and in many cases the army took the side of the accused officer.¹⁷

There is no evidence that any of these spying networks uncovered a military coup plot. Indeed, they missed the few discussions that did take place in 1916 (see below) and played no role in any of the key episodes during the Revolution, such as the Kornilov affair. The main effect of these efforts, according to William Fuller, was to foment officer hostility against civilian bureaucrats in general and the Department of Police in particular.¹⁸

A new monitoring body appeared on the scene after the February Revolution. The Provisional Government, under pressure from the Petrograd Soviet, instituted political commissars to oversee the work of the military. Each army and front had a commissar appointed by the War Ministry, in consultation with the Soviet, and responsible to the War Ministry.¹⁹ The commissars were a source of irritation between the high command and the Provisional Government, and several of them played an important role during the Kornilov affair and the October Revolution. In general, though, they did not function as a method for preventing military intervention against the government.

¹⁶ William C. Fuller, Jr., *The Internal Troops of the MVD SSSR*, College Station Papers No. 6 (College Station, TX: Center for Strategic Technology, Texas A & M, 1983), p. 2; Charles A. Ruud and Sergei A. Stepanov, *Fontanka 16: The Tsars' Secret Police* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), pp. 19, 23; Lieven, *Russia's Rulers*, p. 175.

¹⁷ William C. Fuller, Jr., *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 101, 212-218; Denikin, *Put' ruskogo ofitsera*, pp. 207-208; A. I. Denikin, *Ocherki Russkoy Smuty*, Vol. I, Part 1 (Moskva: "Nauka," 1991 [1921]), p. 11 (when citing *Ocherki I* use the page numbers from the original version, not the ones from the 1991 Soviet edition).

¹⁸ Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict*, pp. 216-218.

¹⁹ Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Road to Soviet Power and Peace*, Vol. II (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 22-24; Denikin, *Ocherki*, I(2), pp. 36-42.

Cohesion. The Tsarist officer corps on the eve of war and revolution was by all accounts extremely heterogeneous. This was true in terms of class, education levels, and conditions of service.

After the Milyutin reforms (see Chapter 2), the class make-up of the officer corps became increasingly less aristocratic. By 1912 the officer corps as a whole was almost fifty-fifty nobility and non-nobility. The very top of the officer corps was still largely noble, over eighty-five percent. Some branches of service were much more noble than others; the Guards were exclusively noble, and the Cavalry was seventy-five percent noble. The infantry, on the other hand, was a majority non-noble, with almost half of its officers being descendents of serfs.²⁰

During World War I the class composition of the officer corps changed markedly. The officer corps more than tripled in size from 1914 to 1917 (from about 41 thousand to 146 thousand). Given that by 1917 the army had lost nearly 63 thousand officers, Peter Kenez estimates that almost 170 thousand young men were brought into the officer corps during the war. The majority of these new officers were non-noble. In 1916, seventy percent of junior officers were of peasant background.²¹

Class background itself was not an important predictor of political orientation.²² Indeed, prominent White generals such as Kornilov, Anton Denikin, and Mikhail Alekseev were of humble background. More important was the fact that officers mobilized for the war were not socialized in the dominant organizational culture; this point is discussed below.

Other cleavages were also evident in the late-Tsarist officer corps. There were sharp differences between the branches of service, with the Guards at the top and the Infantry at the bottom. Education was another important division. General Staff officers (*Genshtabisty*) saw themselves as a separate and elite group. The Russian officer corps was also extremely heterogeneous in terms of wealth and conditions of service. Although part of the same officer corps, a noble Guards officer serving in St. Petersburg had little in common with a poor infantry officer from a lower-class background stationed in Siberia.²³

²⁰ Peter Kenez, "A Profile of the Prerevolutionary Officer Corps," *California Slavic Studies*, 7 (1973), 128–145; Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt*, Vol. I (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 19–25.

²¹ Kenez, "A Profile of the Prerevolutionary," 145–150; Wildman, *End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 100–102.

²² Kenez, "A Profile of the Prerevolutionary," 121. See also the discussion in Chapter 2.

²³ Kenez, "A Profile of the Prerevolutionary"; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 3–24; Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*, pp. 15–29; Matitiahu Mayzel, "The Formation of the General Staff 1880–1917: A Social Study," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, 16 (1975), 297–321.

The importance of these internal divisions is questionable. General Denikin maintained that these cleavages were no worse in the Russian army than in other militaries and that in wartime they rapidly evaporated.²⁴ The evidence from the cases will show that structural divisions in the officer corps were not the most important barrier to military intervention.

The one cleavage in the army that did play a significant role in 1917 was the one between the officer corps and enlisted personnel. At the beginning of 1917, soldiers outnumbered officers by roughly forty-five to one, a disparity compounded even more by the traditional weakness of the Russian non-commissioned officer structure.²⁵ The February Revolution gravely weakened the control officers had over their troops, who were largely of peasant background, tended to sympathize with the revolution, and desired a quick end to the war. The ability of officers to intervene after February was thus impeded by opposition from the rank and file.²⁶

This split, although important, is not predicted by the organizational structure approach. The theoretical literature on military coups focuses on officer behavior and ignores conscripts, who are assumed to be irrelevant in sovereign power issues. Ordinary soldiers generally are compelled or tricked into following the lead of their commanders. Rarely will the strains of war and revolution combine in a way that makes it possible for the rank and file to play a significant political role.²⁷

Prior to the February Revolution the bulk of the evidence suggests that the army was not seriously divided and that military intervention was possible. In February, however, the mutiny of the Petrograd garrison demonstrated the huge rift in the army between officers and troops. After February the military found it difficult to act in a concerted fashion because of organizational structure barriers. Given the extreme weakness of the state, culminating in its collapse, the lack of cohesion in the military is not surprising. Splits in the officer corps do not appear to have been significant enough to render it immobile, but the gap between commanders and the rank and file was a key problem. In general an organizational structure approach would predict a military able to intervene in sovereign power issues prior to February, unable to do so afterwards, and prone to split in cases of arbitration.

²⁴ Denikin, *Put' ruskogo ofitsera*, p. 55.

²⁵ Kenez, "A Profile of the Prerevolutionary," 145; Norman Stone, "The Historical Background of the Red Army," in John Erickson and E. J. Feuchtwanger, eds., *Soviet Military Power and Performance* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 7; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, p. 30, note 50.

²⁶ The two most important sources on the revolution in the army are Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*; M. Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya i revoliutsiya 1917–1918* (Munich: Logos, 1978).

²⁷ Bruce W. Farcau, *The Coup: Tactics in the Seizure of Power* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 11; Chorley, *Armies and the Art of Revolution*, pp. 108–127, 175, 243–244.

Opportunity: Summary

The opportunity structure facing officers during the revolution, then, was a complex one. State weakness made it likely that the military would be called upon to play a role in sovereign power issues, but internal divisions would seem to suggest an inability to intervene. Officers confronted forces both pulling them into domestic politics and hindering their ability to act effectively.

MOTIVES FOR INTERVENTION, 1917

Corporate interest motives and organizational culture cut against each other in 1917. The army's interests were under severe threat after the February Revolution. Its organizational culture, however, proscribed military participation in sovereign power issues.

Corporate Interests

The conventional image of the Russian empire as an armed camp would suggest that military interests generally were satisfied by the Tsarist government. In fact, however, the army was often a loser in bureaucratic political battles in the last decades of the regime.²⁸ However, on the eve of the war (roughly 1910–1914) the army was a more successful bureaucratic actor. During the war the military also received considerable resources and autonomy. After the February Revolution, however, military autonomy was under serious threat, and the corporate interest perspective would predict military intervention to protect the army's interests.

The two most important indicators of an army's political standing are its budget relative to other competing state tasks and its organizational autonomy. In both of these areas the late imperial period, except on the very eve of World War I, was not a happy one for the Russian army.

Resources Pre-War. An examination of state budget expenditures from the middle of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of World War I shows a steady decline in military, particularly army, spending (Table 3.2). Spending on the army dropped from over thirty percent of government spending in 1850–1852 to less than twenty percent immediately prior to World War I. There was a growing tendency to favor the needs of other ministries over the War Ministry. Given that this same period followed the unification of Germany and coincided with a major industrialization of warfare that required additional military spending, the Russian military leadership was alarmed by its declining share of the budget.²⁹

²⁸ See Chapter 2.

²⁹ Walter M. Pintner, "The Burden of Defense in Imperial Russia, 1725–1914," *Russian Review*, 43 (1984), 231–259; Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*, 47–74.

TABLE 3.2. *Distribution of State Budget Expenditures, 1850–1914*

Year	Army (%)	Navy (%)	Total Military (%)	Remainder (%)
1850–1854	31.2	6.2	37.4	62.6
1855–1859	35.6	5.4	41.0	59.0
1860–1864	30.6	5.5	36.1	63.9
1865–1869	29.0	4.3	33.3	66.7
1870–1874	28.0	4.0	32.0	68.0
1875–1879	28.8	4.2	33.0	67.0
1880–1884	26.8	3.9	30.7	69.3
1885–1889	22.8	4.4	27.2	72.8
1890–1894	23.8	4.3	28.1	71.9
1895–1899	18.7	5.5	24.2	75.8
1900–1904	17.3	5.2	22.4	77.6
1905–1909	18.9	4.4	23.3	76.7
1910–1914	19.0	6.2	25.2	74.8

Source: Pintner, “The Burden of Defense in Imperial Russia,” 248.

The military’s declining budget share was the result of a conscious decision on the part of the government to favor other areas of spending. The Ministry of Finance, the most powerful and influential government ministry, saw military spending as the biggest impediment to its plans for state-sponsored industrialization and railway construction. Although in principle these goals were consistent with military goals, in practice the Ministry of War had little influence over either sphere of state policy. Railways were built not for strategic reasons (i.e., the movement of troops) but for economic ones (i.e., the movement of goods). Indeed, when railways were built for strategic reasons it often was due to the pressure of the French government, and not the War Ministry. This in itself is indicative of the bureaucratic power of the army during this period.³⁰

On the eve of the war the Russian military did receive a new infusion of money. Duma support for the army led to the adoption of the “Small Program” of 1910 and the “Big (or Great) Program” of 1914, both of which foresaw important increases in military expenditures and the size of the armed forces. The outbreak of war, of course, interrupted these plans for peacetime development.³¹

³⁰ Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*, pp. 58–71, 224; Theodore H. Von Laue, *Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); Peter Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy 1850–1917* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1986), 150–154; D. C. B. Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 103.

³¹ David R. Jones, “Imperial Russia’s Forces at War,” in Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness. Volume I: The First World War* (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 257–260, 277–278; Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*, pp. 222–227.

Autonomy Pre-War. For most of the last several decades of the Tsarist regime, the military leadership felt that its autonomy was even more under threat than its share of the state budget. The major reason for this loss of autonomy was the increasing involvement of the army in domestic repression. Troops were called to the aid of civil power with increasing frequency from 1890 to 1904. During the revolution of 1905–1906 the army leadership basically lost control over its local commanders. The War Ministry again found itself on the losing end of a bureaucratic battle, this time with the Interior Ministry. The army's virtual loss of control over its own troops, by any measure an extreme infringement of organizational autonomy, lasted until 1908.³²

Once the revolutionary crisis had abated, the military fought to regain control over its troops. War Minister General V. A. Sukhomlinov (1909–1915) asserted the need to free army units from domestic missions, and he was backed wholeheartedly by local commanders. Sukhomlinov gained the support of Nicholas II, and by 1914 military involvement in aid to the civil power had dropped dramatically.³³

The picture with respect to organizational autonomy, then, was roughly similar to the budget story. From the 1880s until the 1910s the armed forces had experienced budget cuts and severe encroachments of organizational autonomy. From 1910 to 1914, however, the army had won important victories in both the budgetary and autonomy spheres. William Fuller, however, concludes that the preceding decades had seriously damaged civil–military relations. Fuller states, “in the eyes of the army leadership, the Russian state did not serve military interests before all else and did not in fact satisfy the most pressing of the army's needs.”³⁴

The outbreak of world war in the summer of 1914 seemingly vindicated the War Ministry's demands for increased funding and freedom from domestic missions. For the next three years all the efforts of the Russian state were directed toward the war. Did the armed forces receive the resources and autonomy they needed to wage the war effort? The two issues of resources and autonomy will be covered in turn.

Resources during War. The summer of 1915 was a debacle for Russia as it was pushed out of Galicia and Poland (the “Great Retreat”). The Great Retreat is sometimes blamed on a “shell shortage,” but most historians now reject the claim that poor Russian military performance in 1915 was due to a lack of resources. By 1916, Russia's military situation seemed to be improving. The Commander of the Southwest Front, General A. A. Brusilov, even achieved a major breakthrough in late May of that year before his offensive petered

³² Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*; John Bushnell, *Mutiny amid Repression: Russian Soldiers in the Revolution of 1905–1906* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985).

³³ Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*, pp. 244–258.

³⁴ Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*, p. xxi.

out. The material shortages of the previous year had been largely overcome. Indeed, the government was pouring so much into the war economy that it was creating serious imbalances and shortages in the civilian economy. The military could not make a plausible claim that it was not being provided the necessary resources to wage the war.³⁵

Autonomy during War. A major consequence of the political recriminations following the Great Retreat was Nicholas II's decision in August 1915 to assume the responsibilities of Supreme Commander. Nicholas could serve as a crucial "linchpin" connecting the military effort at the front with civilian administration in the rear. The officer corps apparently approved of Nicholas's decision. A crucial element in this support was the appointment of General M. V. Alekseev as Chief of Staff. Alekseev became de facto commander-in-chief and performed well in this role. Nicholas II, all observers agree, did not interfere in military decision making.³⁶

There had been clashes between the Supreme Headquarters of the Russian Army at the front, or *Stavka*, and the civilian government over spheres of responsibility in 1914–1915, but these were caused by the regulations on wartime administration that gave the army too much power in the war zone and areas of the rear. Arguably the army had too much autonomy, not too little.³⁷

If the armed forces could be basically satisfied with the degree to which their organizational autonomy was respected during the war from 1914 to 1917, this changed drastically after the February Revolution. One of the most momentous consequences of the overthrow of the government was the adoption on March 1 by the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of the justifiably famous Order No. 1. This decision completely disrupted military command authority. Order No. 1 sanctioned the formation of soldiers' committees and declared that government orders in the military sphere should only be executed if they were consistent with decisions of the Soviet. Although as written the order applied only to the Petrograd garrison, it had a highly disruptive effect on discipline at the front as well. From this point

³⁵ Jones, "Imperial Russia's Forces at War"; Stone, *Eastern Front*; Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 24–39; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 80–94; Lieven, *Nicholas II*, pp. 208–217; Gatrell, "The Economy and the War."

³⁶ David R. Jones, "Nicholas II and the Supreme Command: An Investigation of Motives," *Sbornik: Study Group on the Russian Revolution*, 11 (1985), 47–83; Jones, "Imperial Russia's Forces at War," 291–295; Lieven, *Nicholas II*, pp. 212–215; Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 31; George Katkov, *Russia 1917: The February Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 141–142, 241; Denikin, *Put' russkogo ofitsera*, p. 289; A. A. Brusilov, *A Soldier's Notebook 1914–1918* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishers, 1976), pp. 170–172, 217, 226–227.

³⁷ Daniel W. Graf, "Military Rule Behind the Russian Front, 1914–1917: The Political Ramifications," *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas*, 22 (1974), 390–411.

forward the autonomy of officers to make decisions was severely compromised. The Provisional Government also became deeply involved with decisions that hitherto had been purely military matters, such as command assignments. After the February Revolution, military corporate interests were seriously threatened.³⁸

In summary, the decline of government support for military interests in the last decades of the Imperial regime suggests that military intervention should be considered likely. However, from 1910 to 1917 the armed forces had fewer reasons to complain about government support for their corporate interests. Prior to February 1917, this approach would predict that military intervention was unlikely. After the February Revolution, however, this perspective clearly predicts military intervention. In instances of military arbitration the army should side with the contender for power who is most likely to support the military's corporate interests.

Organizational Culture

There is widespread agreement in the primary and secondary literature on the apolitical nature of the late-Imperial Russian officer corps. This picture of an apolitical officer corps is in general correct, but there also were troubling signs of politicization during the war and the presence of distinct, more interventionist, subcultures.

Beliefs and Socialization. The memoir literature on the late-Imperial officer corps notes the disinterest of the military not only toward sovereign power issues, but indeed toward all political issues. Denikin, for instance, stresses the complete apathy of officer candidates to political issues, in strong contrast to their politicized cohorts in civilian universities. Although there were some secret officers' organizations, they were small and insignificant because they were "foreign" to the nature of the army. Denikin maintains that the slogan "the army is outside politics (*armiya – vne politiki*)" was taken too far and was applied not only to the active participation of officers in political affairs, which Denikin considered a correct prohibition, but also to even an elementary knowledge of social and political questions. Denikin contends, "the state order was for the officer corps a predetermined fact, eliciting neither doubts nor different interpretations."³⁹

Sukhomlinov paints a similar picture of army attitudes. He notes that as a military cadet in 1870–1871 he and his fellow cadets did not read

³⁸ Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 182–192; Denikin, *Ocherki*, I(1), pp. 87, 130; I(2), p. 5.

³⁹ Denikin, *Put' ruskogo ofitsera*, pp. 42, 52–53, 64–65 (quote, p. 52); A. I. Denikin, *Staraya Armiya*, Vol. I (Paris: "Rodnik," 1929), pp. 60, 69, 115, 142; General A. Denikin, *Staraya armiya*, Vol. II (Paris: "Rodnik," 1931), pp. 37–38, 89–91; Denikin, *Ocherki*, I(1), p. 12.

newspapers, and it was considered bad form to talk about politics. Sukhomlinov states, “I thought that a soldier, from a private to a general, should be a stranger to all forms of politics . . . the military is a force on which the existing state order is based.”⁴⁰

Imperial Russian army officers who went on to serve the Soviet regime also comment on the apolitical nature of the officer corps before the revolution. A. A. Ignat’ev notes that when he was an elite Guards cavalry officer no one mentioned politics at receptions and balls. He calls himself a “politically disarmed, helpless aristocrat” and emphasizes that he was “completely politically ignorant” in the pre-war period.⁴¹

In sum, as William Fuller puts it, “Tsarist military memoirs almost in unison insisted that the Russian officer corps was apolitical.” Fuller notes that there was a small group of military intellectuals that advocated defense reform, but they had no interest in societal choice or sovereign power issues. The secret police were unable to uncover subversive officers in the army, despite persistent attempts. He concludes, “the majority of army officers were ill-educated, apathetic, and unlikely to possess coherent political ideologies.” General P. O. Bobrovskiy, a leading expert in the late-Imperial officer corps on military education, noted the complete absence of political or ideological indoctrination of future officers.⁴²

Behavior. Officer obedience to the tsar extended beyond the sovereign power realm. Russian military leaders stressed their subordination to the tsar in other domains of civil–military relations, including in the formation of foreign and security policy. Referring to decisions made by Russia in the July crisis of 1914, Sukhomlinov noted in his memoirs:

As War Minister I did not have a right to protest against such a decision – a move on the chessboard of power politics – even though it threatened war, because politics was not my affair. It was equally not my job as War Minister to decisively restrain the Tsar from war. I was a soldier and had to obey, because the army exists for the defense of the fatherland, and not to get involved in discussions.⁴³

The Russian officer corps on the eve of World War I believed that the army’s primary mission was external defense of the state. At the same time,

⁴⁰ V. A. Sukhomlinov, *Vospominaniya Sukhomlinova* (Moskva–Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1926), pp. 15, 181.

⁴¹ A. A. Ignat’ev, *Pyat’desyat let v stroyu*, Vol. I (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1988 (1955)), pp. 84, 409.

⁴² Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*, pp. xx, 194, 196–207, 212–218, 259–263; Yu. Galushko and A. Kolesnikov, *Shkola Rossiyskogo Ofitserstva: Istoricheskiy spravochnik* (Moskva: “Russkiy mir,” 1993), pp. 127–128. See also Lieven, *Russia’s Rulers*, pp. 173–175; S. V. Volkov, *Russkiy ofitserskiy korpus* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1993), pp. 286–288; Kenez, “A Profile of the Prerevolutionary,” 155–156.

⁴³ Sukhomlinov, *Vospominaniya Sukhomlinova*, pp. 182, 223. For a similar example, see Lieven, *Russia’s Rulers*, p. 175.

soldiers in the imperial Russian army swore an oath to defend the regime against both external and internal enemies. Internal repression had been a mission of the Russian armed forces for centuries. Most officers agreed that, if properly limited, aid to the civil power was a legitimate mission. The army was used similarly elsewhere in Europe. But officers often clashed with civilian officials over the extent to which the army could be used internally.⁴⁴

Civil–military conflict over internal usage became particularly acute during the revolution of 1905–1906. The War Minister, General A. F. Rediger, complained to the Prime Minister about excessive demands put on the troops by local civilian officials, thus taking the army away from training and external defense. Officer corps’ opposition to internal missions led to a concerted effort after the revolution of 1905–1906 to free the armed forces from domestic usage. In 1911 the War Ministry imposed strict limits on the use of the army in aid to the civil power missions. By 1914 the military leadership had largely succeeded in its efforts to free the army from internal missions. Fuller concludes, “by having its attentions focused on military developments beyond Russia’s borders, the Russian army was at last truly ‘*vne politiki*’ (out of politics).”⁴⁵

The Russian officer corps on the eve of World War I, then, had a strong commitment to an apolitical organizational culture. They believed in the importance of subordination to civilian authority, noninterference in sovereign power issues, and a focus on external defense. As Peter Kenez states, “they repeated *ad nauseam* the doctrine according to which the Army stood above politics.”⁴⁶

War and New Subcultures. The outbreak of war in 1914 obviously provided an overwhelming incentive for the armed forces to concentrate on the task of external defense. At the same time, the regulations on wartime administration did give the high command a broad range of responsibilities in the theater of military operations. This expansion of military authority into the societal choice domain during the war did lead the army into much greater involvement in traditionally civilian spheres of activity. Daniel Graf concludes, “the basis was laid for the growing politicization of the military high command, both at *Stavka* and the front headquarters.”⁴⁷

Two other important changes took place during World War I that slightly eroded the army’s traditional apolitical culture. The first change involved the

⁴⁴ Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*, pp. 76–77, 106–107, 144, 267.

⁴⁵ Fuller, *Civil–Military Conflict*, pp. 155, 244–258 (quote, p. 258). See also Robert H. McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855–1914* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), pp. 57–58, 72, 77; B. M. Shaposhnikov, *Vospominaniya* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1974), p. 206; Galushko and Kolesnikov, *Shkola Rossiyskogo Ofitserstva*, p. 108.

⁴⁶ Peter Kenez, “The Ideology of the White Movement,” *Soviet Studies*, 32 (1980), 61.

⁴⁷ Graf, “Military Rule,” 411.

composition of the officer corps, the second was related to Russia's performance in waging the war.

Changes in the composition of the officer corps during the war came about because of the extremely high casualty rates suffered by the Russian military during the war. By 1917 less than ten percent of the officer corps were regular officers who had been in the service prior to 1914. Although the military leadership continued to be dominated by officers raised and trained in the Imperial army, most junior officers by the end of the war were not products of this environment, and they had not been socialized into the dominant apolitical organizational culture. At least some of the new wartime officers had been politically active in progressive and revolutionary organizations before the war. A secret police report from January 1917 noted ominously that there was a big difference between "cadre" and "war-time" officers and that only cadre officers could be expected to remain loyal to their oath in the event of mass demonstrations and protests.⁴⁸

The second important change during World War I relevant to the organizational culture of the Russian armed forces was the effect of Russia's military performance on civil-military relations. Specifically, the domestic political confrontations between the autocracy and liberal members of elite society about the regime's managing of the war effort spilled over into the Russian officer corps. Rumors about the pernicious influence of the tsarina and Rasputin on the tsar and government policy spread not only in elite circles in Petersburg but also at *Stavka* and among the army, undermining the tsar's authority. A secret police report on the mood of the army in January 1917 stated that many officers were very dissatisfied with the government and complained about the influence of the "German party."⁴⁹

Based on these rumors, the feeling began to spread among army officers, including the high command, that pro-German elements in the government were undermining the war effort. Some Duma members began to seek out officers who might participate in a palace coup to remove the tsarina from Petersburg, or even topple the tsar in favor of another member of the Romanov family. Historians disagree about how serious these plots were, but there is general agreement that the military leadership was unprepared to support a palace coup. The Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevich was approached, but he rejected the idea because he believed the army would not go

⁴⁸ Kenez, "A Profile of the Prerevolutionary," 145-149; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 100-102, 106-107; Jones, "Imperial Russia's Forces at War," 282-284; Stone, *Eastern Front*, pp. 166-167; Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 169-170; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, pp. 22, 26; Lieven, *Nicholas II*, p. 211; "Russkaya armiya nakanune revolyutsii," *Byloye*, No. 1(29), 1918, 151-152.

⁴⁹ "Russkaya armiya nakanune revolyutsii." See also Ignat'ev, *Pyat' desyat let*, Vol. I, p. 625; o. Georgiy Shavel'skiy, *Vospominaniya poslednego protopresvitera russkoy armii i flota*, Vol. I (New York: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1954), p. 10. For an objective discussion of the political influence of the tsarina and Rasputin, see Lieven, *Nicholas II*, 164-170, 226-228.

along with it. The only general clearly implicated in these plots was General A. M. Krymov, who believed that the country was headed toward ruin if drastic steps were not taken. The prominent Duma deputy Aleksandr Guchkov later wrote of these plots that “I did a great deal for which I could have been hanged, but little of real achievement, because I could not succeed in involving anyone from the military.”⁵⁰

Two leading historians of the February Revolution, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa and George Katkov, agree that there was little military support for these plots. Hasegawa gives two major reasons for military unwillingness to participate in any palace coup. First, officers’ primary consideration was the war effort, and they were concerned that such a momentous change in the political order would be disruptive. Second, Hasegawa states, “all the military leaders of the tsarist army were trained in the old school, which emphasized that military men were not to be involved in politics. Their inbred skepticism and disdain for domestic politics must have contributed to their refusal to join the conspiracies.”⁵¹

Russian officer corps’ commitment to a norm of civilian supremacy was very high in the late-Imperial period. Officers were socialized to believe that they had no role to play in sovereign power issues and that they should be focused on external defense. During the war, however, this commitment was somewhat eroded, because of the influx of new officers, expanded military responsibilities at home, and the threat of Russian defeat in the war. A more praetorian organizational subculture appeared, but intervention still remained unlikely. In cases of military arbitration, an apolitical army will first try to sit the conflict out; and then if forced to decide, it will side with the contender it perceives is most legitimate and thus most likely to keep the military from further involvement in politics.

Motives: Summary

The motives of the officer corps during the Revolution were mixed. Prior to February neither corporate interest nor organizational culture was an impetus to intervention. After February there were strong corporate motives for a coup, but the dominant organizational culture believed the army should be “outside politics.” On the other hand, praetorian sentiments had appeared in

⁵⁰ Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 47, 185–197 (quote, p. 191); Katkov, *Russia 1917*, pp. 39–42, 173–177, 181–187; General Baron P. N. Vrangél’, *Vospominaniya Generala Barona P. N. Vrangeya* (Frankfurt: “Posev,” 1969), p. 11; Jones, “Imperial Russia’s Forces at War,” p. 257; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 110–113; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, pp. 21–22, 28–29; Denikin, *Ocherki*, I(1), pp. 35–39, 72, note 2.

⁵¹ Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 192; Katkov, *Russia 1917*, pp. 42, 182, 187; Shavel’skiy, *Vospominaniya*, Vol. I, p. 27; A. N. Verkhovskiy, *Rossiya na golgofe (iz pokhodnago dnevnika 1914–1918 g.)* (Petrograd: 1918), p. 64.

the military leadership, and many junior officers did not share the dominant apolitical culture.

THE OFFICER CORPS AND THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

The February Revolution and the resultant collapse of the Romanov dynasty came with a suddenness that shocked contemporary Russian observers. Despite the many weaknesses of the regime, no one really expected what happened in February 1917. The military high command played a significant role in bringing about the abdication of the tsar.

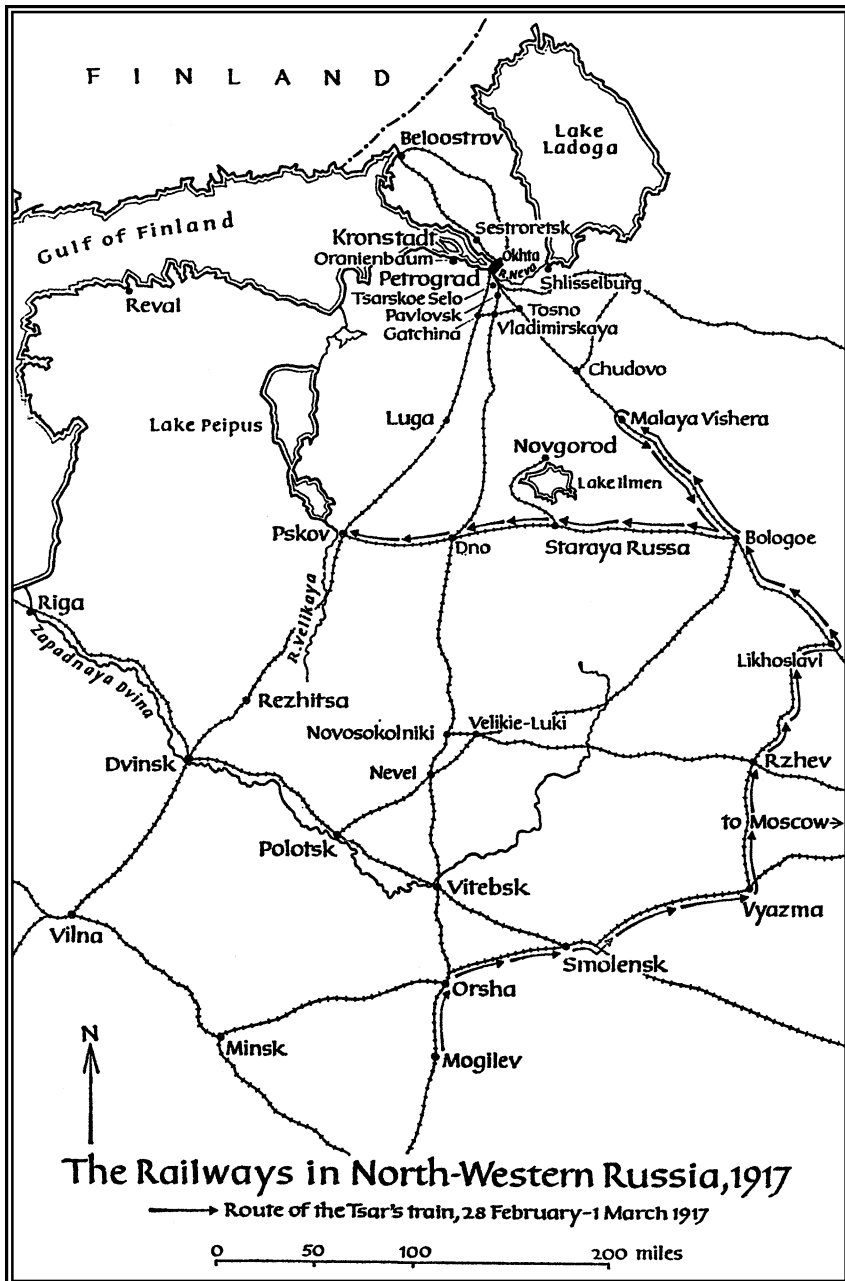
This section has two parts. I first present a brief narrative of the key events of the February Revolution, focusing on the actions of the military leadership. I then turn to an analysis of the behavior of leading officers. Despite the disinclination of the military leadership to become involved in politics, they were thrust into the role of arbiter of a sovereign power dispute. Their behavior was strongly motivated by a desire to see order quickly restored, thus permitting the military leadership to return to the war effort.

The February Revolution and the Abdication of the Tsar

The February Revolution began on February 23 with a series of strikes and street demonstrations in Petrograd. These protests grew in intensity over the next several days, and by the twenty-fifth there was a general strike. The tsar was notified on the evening of the twenty-fifth of the disturbances, and he demanded that complete order be restored in the capital the next day. The twenty-sixth, a Sunday, was marked by violent street clashes in which around 100 people died. Troops from the Petrograd garrison (the total strength of the garrison was 180,000) were employed in the operation to repress the demonstrations. Although the government won the day on the twenty-sixth, on the twenty-seventh over 65,000 troops of the garrison mutinied. By March 1 almost the entire garrison (over 170,000 troops) had joined the insurrection.⁵²

The tsar received word of the garrison mutiny on the afternoon of February 27. Nicholas decided to send an expeditionary force from the front to suppress the revolution and to leave the next morning for Tsarskoe Selo, the royal residences near Petrograd. General N. I. Ivanov was put in charge of the troops from the front, and chief of staff Alekseev began to send out orders for reinforcements. A force of several divisions was to be assembled from units of the Northern and Western Fronts in Tsarskoe Selo, which was to serve as Ivanov's headquarters when he arrived there on March 1 (see Map A of the railroads between *Stavka* and Petrograd). Nicholas, meanwhile, left *Stavka* headquarters in Mogilev for Tsarskoe Selo on the morning

⁵² Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 215–310; Schapiro, 1917, pp. 35–44; Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution*, pp. 107–128; D. A. Longley, “Iakovlev’s Question.”



Map A. Railroads between *Stavka* and Petrograd (*Russia 1917: The February Revolution* by George Katkov).

of February 28, ignoring the suggestions of Ivanov, Alekseev, the leader of the Duma (M. V. Rodzyanko), and Grand Duke Mikhail that political concessions should accompany the military effort to restore order in Petrograd. Nicholas's effort to travel to Tsarskoe Selo, however, was greatly disrupted by reports that pro-revolutionary forces had seized key train stations en route. The tsar's train was redirected to Pskov, an intermediate point between Mogilev and Tsarskoe Selo that was the headquarters of the Northern Front. The tsar finally arrived at Pskov on the evening of March 1.⁵³

The political situation had changed rapidly while Nicholas and Ivanov made their separate ways toward Tsarskoe Selo. Two new political bodies and conflicting authority structures had come into existence on February 27. The Duma had been suspended on February 26, and the next day an unofficial meeting of the Duma created a Provisional Committee of the Duma, which took responsibility for restoring order in Petrograd. On March 1 this Provisional Committee decided to form a Provisional Government (the tsar's Council of Ministers had resigned on February 27). The other body created on the twenty-seventh was the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which came into being at the initiative of members of the socialist intelligentsia, with the support of soldiers and workers.⁵⁴

Alekseev had been in touch with Petrograd, particularly with the War Minister, General M. A. Belyaev, the commander of the Petrograd garrison, General S. S. Khabalov, the General Staff, the Naval Staff, and Duma Chair Rodzyanko throughout the February 27–March 1 period. By the morning of February 28 it was clear that the city was in the hands of the revolutionaries and that the authorities, including Belyaev and Khabalov, had completely lost control. On March 1 Alekseev came to the conclusion that Ivanov's expeditionary force was likely to meet stiff resistance and that the Duma Provisional Committee had succeeded in establishing order in Petrograd and over the railroads. Alekseev thus telegraphed Ivanov with instructions to delay his march on Petrograd and convey this news to Nicholas. The tsar, however, never arrived in Tsarskoe Selo.⁵⁵

Nicholas II, rather, arrived at Pskov on the evening of March 1. The Commander of the Northern Front, General N. V. Ruzskiy, met the Emperor. On the basis of information he had received from Alekseev, Ruzskiy met with the tsar for several hours and tried to persuade Nicholas of the futility of trying to put down the revolution with force and the need for political compromise with the Duma. A telegram from Alekseev to Nicholas arrived at about 11 P.M., in which Alekseev urged the tsar to issue a manifesto granting a constitutional monarchy with a government formed by the Duma. Nicholas eventually agreed.

⁵³ Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 431–441, 459–473.

⁵⁴ Schapiro, 1917, 44–47; Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 313–427.

⁵⁵ Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 442–486.

On the morning of March 2, however, Ruzskiy had a four-hour “conversation” with Duma leader Rodzyanko over the Hughes apparatus, a kind of primitive teleprompter. By this point Rodzyanko had lost control of the Duma, and the Provisional Government was established on March 1 without his participation. Rodzyanko told Ruzskiy that the tsar’s manifesto was too late and that the monarchy itself was in question. Ruzskiy sent a copy of the conversation to Alekseev, who polled all the front commanders. They unanimously endorsed the solution of Nicholas’s abdication in favor of his son, Aleksey, with a regency headed by Grand Duke Mikhail. Nicholas agreed to this on March 2, but later that day he decided that his son should abdicate as well and that his brother Mikhail should become emperor. Mikhail, however, refused the throne the following day, March 3, after a lengthy discussion with the Provisional Government and the Duma Committee. The Romanov dynasty had come to an end.⁵⁶

Explaining the High Command’s Behavior during the February Revolution

Why did the military high command seemingly change its behavior so quickly, moving from support for repressing the Petrograd uprising on February 27–28 to endorsement of the tsar’s abdication a mere two days later? This rapid change in stance is sometimes explained as the product of some sort of conspiracy between the leading generals and the Duma Committee. The evidence for this interpretation is extremely weak, however. I follow the general conclusion put forward by Hasegawa in his comprehensive account of the February Revolution: “[T]he actions and policies of the Duma Committee leaders and the military leaders are presented, not as conspiracies, but as their reaction to the over-all revolutionary situation in the capital.” The high command was forced to respond to the events in Petrograd and the news they received from there as best they could, and they played a largely reactive role throughout the crisis. This conclusion is supported by primary sources that are available for process tracing the thoughts and actions of the army leadership.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 487–515, 546–568.

⁵⁷ Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. xvi. Two major sources form the backbone of this section. First, all the key documents of communications between *Stavka*, the Northern Front, and Petrograd have been published. See “Fevral’skaya revolyutsiya 1917 goda,” *Krasnyy arkhiv* [hereafter KA], Nos. 21 and 22, 1927, 3–78, 3–70. I have verified the completeness of these records in the Russian State Military History Archive (RGVIA) in Moscow: fond 2003 (*Stavka*), opis 1, dela 1751–1754. Hereafter I follow conventional citation rules: i.e., RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1751, followed by the page (l.) number. The other major source, which includes some of the key telegraphs as well as some relevant memoir excerpts, is P. E. Shchegolev, ed., *Otrecheniye Nikolaya II: Vospominaniya ochevidstev, dokumenty*, 2nd ed. (Moskva: Sovetskiy pisatel’, 1990 [1927]).

Perhaps the most extreme version of the conspiracy theory is put forward by Matitiahu Mayzel. Mayzel asserts, “the high command (and the officers behind it) wished to get rid of the tsar.”⁵⁸ Yet it is clear that on February 27th and 28th the high command, under Nicholas’s orders, took a series of important steps toward putting down the revolution in Petrograd. On the twenty-seventh Alekseev communicated the need to send four (“the most solid and reliable”) divisions to hook up with Ivanov, adding that “we must do everything to speed the arrival of solid forces. Our future depends on it.” A similar number of forces were sent from the Western Front. On the afternoon of the 28th, Alekseev telegraphed the front commanders, “on all of us lies our sacred duty to the Emperor and the motherland to maintain loyalty to their duty and oath among the troops of the front armies, to secure the movement of the railways and the flow of food supplies.” Alekseev also ordered Brusilov, the commander of the Southwestern Front, to prepare additional troops as a reserve force if necessary.⁵⁹

To the extent the military leadership took a political stance on February 27–28, it was the recommendation of Generals Alekseev, Ruzskiy, and Brusilov to Nicholas not only to rely on force to restore order in Petrograd, but also to grant the concession of a cabinet that enjoyed the support of the Duma. This course of action had been urged on the tsar many times before from a wide range of political actors, and it was also recommended to Nicholas by Rodzyanko and Grand Duke Mikhail on the twenty-seventh. At the same time, the military leadership continued to follow the tsar’s orders on sending troops. The high command was most concerned that order be restored in Petrograd and on the railways, since continued disorder threatened to disrupt the war effort.⁶⁰

Alekseev’s determination to use force was curtailed by news he received from Petrograd on the evening of the twenty-eighth. The Naval Staff informed *Stavka* that the Duma was trying to return the troops to the barracks, but that a government decision appointing a cabinet enjoying public confidence was necessary, and that without such a decision soon there was a danger that a worker–socialist organization could come to power. Alekseev also received news that a Provisional Government headed by Rodzyanko had been formed. Finally, Alekseev received a telegram dispatched to all railway stations by the Duma member A. A. Bublikov, who had seized control of the Ministry of Transport and arrested the former Minister. The “Bublikov telegram,” as it came to be known, declared that the State Duma had taken power into its hands. From the point of view of *Stavka*, the essential part of

⁵⁸ Matitiahu Mayzel, *Generals and Revolutionaries: The Russian General Staff during the Revolution: A Study in the Transformation of Military Elite* (Osnabruck: Biblio-Verlag, 1979), p. 73.

⁵⁹ “Fevral’skaya revolyutsiya,” *KA*, No. 21, 9–10, 22–24.

⁶⁰ Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, 459–463; “Fevral’skaya revolyutsiya,” *KA*, No. 21, 7, 13.

the Bublikov telegram was that it called for all railway workers to stay at their posts and double their efforts to keep the trains moving.⁶¹

At around 1 A.M. on March 1 Alekseev telegraphed General Ivanov at Tsarskoe Selo, although Ivanov actually did not arrive there until nine o'clock that night. Alekseev stated that he had information that the Provisional Government was reasserting control and that a compromise based on the "stability of the monarchical principle" and new elections and a new government was possible. Alekseev advised Ivanov to "change his methods of action" and that negotiations could lead to "conciliation" and the "avoidance of shameful civil strife, so desired by our enemy." Alekseev asked Ivanov to report all of this to the tsar and expressed his wish that Nicholas would accept such an outcome, which would strengthen Russia. Alekseev's evident optimism has confounded historians, since it was apparently based on very little reliable information about the state of affairs in Petrograd. Alekseev, in particular, had not received any information about the "stability of the monarchical principle." The most likely explanation for Alekseev's change of mood is that he seized upon a couple of indicators of a change for the better, particularly the news about the railroads, and filled in the blanks in a manner consistent with his own thinking. He also knew that the tsar had not yet arrived in Tsarskoe Selo, that Ivanov's reinforcements were not in place, and that the garrison in Petrograd was completely unreliable. It is not surprising that Alekseev asked Ivanov not to proceed until news about the changed situation in Petrograd had been communicated to Nicholas.⁶²

When the tsar finally arrived in Pskov on the evening of March 1, things finally came to a head. The high command continued to hold the view, as expressed by Quartermaster General A. S. Lukhonskiy, that "it is impossible to conduct a war while a revolution is taking place in Russia" and that the tsar should "issue an act that can calm the population." Alekseev sent a telegram to the tsar in Pskov on the afternoon of the first, to be delivered

⁶¹ "Fevral'skaya revolyutsiya," *KA*, No. 21, 29, 32–33, 35.

⁶² "Fevral'skaya revolyutsiya," *KA*, No. 21, 31. Several prominent historians, including Allan Wildman and George Katkov, have suggested that Alekseev was verging on insubordination by sending such a telegram to Ivanov. We are now into the realm of counterfactuals, but I do not find this argument persuasive. There is no reason to think that Alekseev would have disobeyed a direct order from Nicholas if Nicholas had insisted that Ivanov continue his mission. Given the extent of Alekseev's authority as Chief of Staff, the fact that he had not communicated with the tsar all day, and that the situation in Petrograd had apparently radically changed, Alekseev's decision that a highly risky repressive operation against Petrograd, with unclear prospects for success, should be delayed until the tsar could assess the situation for himself was not unreasonable. It is also somewhat of a moot point, since Nicholas himself telegraphed Ivanov asking him to halt his operation at midnight on March 1 (a mere three hours after Ivanov arrived in Tsarskoe Selo), and Ivanov's reinforcements had not yet arrived. This telegram is "Fevral'skaya revolyutsiya," *KA*, No. 21, 53. For Wildman and Katkov's views, see Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 205–207; Katkov, *Russia 1917*, pp. 302–305, 313–317.

by Ruzskiy when Nicholas arrived. Alekseev pointed out that the disorder had spread to Moscow and that it would be impossible to keep the railroads running and deliver supplies to the front in such a condition. This would be “fatal” for Russia and could lead to “a shameful conclusion of the war, with all the corresponding difficult consequences for Russia.” It would be impossible, Alekseev argued, to isolate the army from revolution in the rear. He considered it his duty to inform the emperor that it was “necessary to take immediate measures to calm the population and restore normal life in the country.” Alekseev believed that without such a decision by the tsar it was possible that extremist elements would come to power. He said, “I beg your highness, for the sake of saving Russia and the dynasty,” to appoint a prime minister enjoying public confidence with the authority to form a cabinet.⁶³

Northern Front commander Ruzskiy was entrusted by Alekseev with the task of persuading the tsar to accept a political compromise. Originally Rodzyanko had planned to come from Petrograd to negotiate with Nicholas, but he had failed to do so. Ruzskiy met with Nicholas on the evening of March 1 in Pskov. Ruzskiy later remarked that he understood that the most serious hour of his life had arrived, “when from a front commander-in-chief he was turned into a purely political actor.” Ruzskiy began his conversation with the tsar by noting “that it was difficult for him to speak, because his report was beyond the limits of his competence” and he asked Nicholas to bear in mind that because the decisions to be made dealt “not with military questions, but those of state administration,” he would understand if the tsar found it objectionable to listen to his report. Nicholas told Ruzskiy to speak with complete openness. Ruzskiy then set to work to persuade the emperor of the need to form a cabinet that would be responsible to the Duma. Ruzskiy eventually was able to persuade the tsar to grant the political concession of a responsible ministry.⁶⁴

About this time a second telegram arrived from Alekseev also urging this concession. Alekseev reminded the tsar of “the growing danger of the spread of anarchy across the entire country, the further disintegration of the army,

⁶³ “Fevral’skaya revolyutsiya,” *KA*, No. 21, 36–37, 39–40. See also Nicolas de Basily, *Diplomat of Imperial Russia 1903–1917: Memoirs* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 103–148.

⁶⁴ The details of this meeting are based on Ruzskiy’s recollections, available in two second-hand accounts (of S. N. Vil’chkovskiy and A. V. Romanov) and one brief newspaper interview. See General S. N. Vil’chkovskiy, “Prebyvaniye Nikolaya II v Pskove 1 i 2 marta 1917 g.,” in Shegolev, *Otrecheniye Nikolaya II*, pp. 146–168; General N. V. Ruzskiy, “Beseda s zhurnalistom V. Samoylovym ob otrechenii Nikolaya II,” in Shegolev, *Otrecheniye Nikolaya II*, pp. 142–145; “Iz dnevnika A. V. Romanova,” *KA*, No. 1(26), 1928, 201–208. See also “V dni otrecheniya (Iz dnevnika Nikolaya II),” in Shegolev, *Otrecheniye Nikolaya II*, p. 34; “Fevral’skaya revolyutsiya,” *KA*, No. 21, 41–42; Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 450–458; Katkov, *Russia 1917*, pp. 318–321.

and the impossibility of continuing the war” under these conditions. He “implored” the emperor to grant a responsible ministry headed by Rodzyanko. Alekseev had tasked the Foreign Ministry representative at *Stavka*, Nicolas de Basily, with preparing the text of such an act. Nicholas agreed to the text without changes. Nicholas seemed so indifferent that Ruzskiy asked again “if he would be acting against the wishes of the emperor if he were to inform *Stavka* and Petrograd of Nicholas’s agreement to the manifesto.” The tsar replied that it was a difficult decision for him but that he took it in the best interests of Russia.⁶⁵

Most historians have concluded that, in the words of George Katkov, Ruzskiy “gave the emperor no choice” but to agree to these political concessions. It is impossible to know what Nicholas was thinking, but it should be stressed that neither Ruzskiy nor Alekseev ever suggested to the tsar that they would not follow his orders if he decided differently. In the crucial Alekseev telegram that arrived in the middle of Ruzskiy’s discussion with Nicholas, Alekseev wrote, “I zealously implore your Imperial Majesty, if you please,” to agree to the manifesto prepared at *Stavka*, hardly a coercive choice of words. The pressure of the circumstances certainly forced Nicholas’s decision as much as any threat of military insubordination, which would have been quite out of character for either the tsar or the high command to contemplate.⁶⁶

Ruzskiy’s relief at persuading Nicholas to accept this political concession was quickly dissipated when he contacted Rodzyanko the morning of March 2 to tell him of the tsar’s decision. Rodzyanko replied that Ruzskiy and Nicholas II were obviously not aware of the most recent developments in Petrograd, where “the most frightening revolution” was taking place. He stated that “the dynastic question has been put point blank,” and that Nicholas needed to abdicate in favor of his son. Ruzskiy replied by noting the threat of anarchy to the country in general and the war effort in particular. He emphasized, “the crisis needs to be liquidated as soon as possible, in order to give back to the army the possibility of looking only forward in the direction of the enemy . . . if the anarchy of which you are speaking spreads to the army and commanders lose the authority of power – think, what will become of our motherland then?”⁶⁷

The army, having already been forced to arbitrate between the Duma Committee and the tsar on the question of a responsible ministry, was immediately thrust again on to center stage. The contents of the Ruzskiy-Rodzyanko conversation were immediately relayed to *Stavka*. Around noon on March 2, Alekseev began to inform the other front commanders about

⁶⁵ “Iz dnevnika A. V. Romanova,” 204; “Fevral’skaya revolyutsiya,” *KA*, No. 21, 53–54; de Basily, *Diplomat of Imperial Russia*, pp. 116–117; Vil’chkovskiy, “Prebyvaniye Nikolaya II,” 153–154.

⁶⁶ Katkov, *Russia 1917*, p. 324; Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 494–495.

⁶⁷ “Fevral’skaya revolyutsiya,” *KA*, No. 21, 55–59.

the previous night's developments. Alekseev communicated his opinion that there was no other option than for the tsar to abdicate in favor of his son, under the regency of Grand Duke Mikhail. Alekseev argued that there was no other choice because the Provisional Government in essence had control over the functioning of the railways and the future of the army. "It is necessary to save the army in the field from collapse," Alekseev stressed, "to continue the struggle with the external enemy to the end and save the independence of Russia." De Basily later remarked that Alekseev endorsed abdication because "to oppose it would have been to add civil war to external war." Alekseev asked all of the front commanders, if they agreed with his views, to send them to the tsar as soon as possible. Alekseev concluded:

Among the high command of the front armies there needs to be a unity of views and goals and thus save the army from wavering and possible instances of betrayal of duty. The army should with all of its might struggle with the external enemy, and decisions about internal affairs should free it from the temptation to take part in the revolution, which can be more painlessly accomplished with a decision from the top.⁶⁸

All of the front commanders supported Alekseev's position. In the afternoon of March 2, Alekseev telegraphed Nicholas with the replies of the front commanders. The Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevich, commander of the Caucasian Front, wrote that victory in the war was necessary for both Russia and the future of the dynasty and thus required extraordinary measures. The other commanders replied in similar terms, stressing the importance of the war effort. The one dissonant note came from General V. V. Sakharov, the commander of the Romanian Front, who denounced the Duma in extremely bitter terms. Sakharov concluded, however, that there seemed to be no other choice but to submit to the Duma's demands if the war were to be continued. Alekseev concluded his telegram to Nicholas by noting, "the army's contact with matters of internal politics will signify the inevitable end of the war, shame for Russia, her collapse."⁶⁹

On March 2, Ruzskiy once again met with the emperor, this time on the question of the tsar's abdication. He found this discussion with the tsar much easier than the one on granting a responsible ministry the previous evening. Nicholas had already crossed the Rubicon the night before by agreeing to a constitutional monarchy with a strong parliament, thereby giving up on the ideal of autocracy that he had adhered to since his childhood. Moreover, the combined opinions of the military leadership, including his trusted chief of staff Alekseev and his uncle the Grand Duke Nikolay, certainly carried great weight. According to the diplomat de Basily, Alekseev was a "faithful soldier [who] had never failed in his loyalty to his sovereign and supreme commander," but Alekseev saw no other way out without risking internal

⁶⁸ "Fevral'skaya revolyutsiya," *KA*, No. 21, 67–70; de Basily, *Diplomat of Imperial Russia*, 120.

⁶⁹ "Fevral'skaya revolyutsiya," *KA*, No. 21, 67–75. See also: Denikin, *Ocherki*, I (1), pp. 56–57.

disorder and military defeat and collapse. Hasegawa sums up the stance of Alekseev, and the entire high command, in similar terms: “The best course of action seemed to Alekseev to take the posture of noninterference in internal politics, while putting pressure on the [t]sar to sacrifice himself for a peaceful settlement of the crisis.” Katkov offers a similar assessment, rejecting the view that the abdication of the tsar came about because of a “general’s revolution.” “Throughout the war,” Katkov concludes, “the generals adopted a strictly non-political attitude.”⁷⁰

The decision of the tsar to abdicate in favor of his brother, Grand Duke Mikhail, rather than his son Aleksey instantly threw the entire revolutionary settlement into an additional round of turmoil. Evidently, Alekseev and leading Duma liberals such as Rodzyanko, Aleksandr Guchkov (who became the first Minister of War in the Provisional Government), and Pavel Milyukov (who became Minister of Foreign Affairs) expected that the abdication in favor of a child would end the revolutionary upheaval in Petrograd while maintaining the Romanov dynasty. Katkov states, “even when the abdication had been decided upon the generals still believed that they were taking part in an action to save the monarchy and maintain the dynasty.” Grand Duke Mikhail’s accession to the throne was more problematic from both a political and legal point of view.⁷¹

Rodzyanko contacted Alekseev early on the morning of March 3 and asked that Alekseev delay the announcement of the abdication of Nicholas II. Rodzyanko explained his desire to hold up the news on the basis of his judgment that Grand Duke Mikhail was an unacceptable candidate as emperor who had no popular support. Rodzyanko said that the Duma Committee and the Provisional Government would rule until a Constituent Assembly could be called. Alekseev was extremely unhappy with this news. He considered both the uncertainty about the dynastic question and the calling of a Constituent Assembly during the middle of the war harmful from the point of view of the army. Alekseev noted that “all the thoughts and endeavors of command personnel of the field army” are directed toward keeping the army focused on the war and not allowing it to come into contact with “the unhealthy internal condition that part of Russia is experiencing.” He concluded by emphasizing, “I am a soldier, and all of my thoughts are directed west, towards the front and the enemy.”⁷²

This latest news from Petrograd apparently convinced Alekseev that he had been played for a fool by Rodzyanko during their negotiations over the

⁷⁰ Vil’chkovskiy, “Prebyvaniye Nikolaya II,” 160–163; “Iz dnevnika A.V. Romanova,” 206–207; de Basily, *Diplomat of Imperial Russia*, p. 120; Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, 501–507 (quote, p. 501); Katkov, *Russia 1917*, pp. 323, 326–344, 356, 427–430 (quote, p. 428).

⁷¹ De Basily, *Diplomat of Imperial Russia*, pp. 125–132; “Iz dnevnika A.V. Romanova,” 207; Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 546; Katkov, *Russia 1917*, p. 429.

⁷² “Fevral’skaya revolyutsiya,” *KA*, No. 22, 25–29.

last several days. Alekseev first had been led to believe that the granting of a constitutional monarchy by the tsar, and then Nicholas II's abdication, would end the revolution and allow the army to concentrate on the war. Now he was being told that the entire dynastic principle was in question. The afternoon of March 3 Alekseev telegraphed all of the front commanders. He summarized the current situation and then laid out a series of conclusions. He maintained that the Duma Committee was divided and that left-wing elements had gained influence over Rodzyanko. He noted that the Petrograd garrison had become "harmful and dangerous for everyone." The entire situation, Alekseev argued, was full of grave danger for the front armies and could undermine Russia's fighting capacity, leading to military defeat, the loss of territory, and the triumph of extreme leftist elements in Russia's remaining territory. Alekseev considered it necessary to insist to Rodzyanko that the tsar's abdication manifesto be realized, and that there be a conference at *Stavka* of all the front commanders "to establish unity in all cases and circumstances." He suggested that the conference should be March 8 or 9. Alekseev concluded, "the collective voice of the army's highest ranks and their conditions . . . should become known to all and influence the course of events."⁷³

This March 3 telegram of Alekseev often has been interpreted as a possible prelude to military intervention. Hasegawa states, "the proposal for a conference of commanders in chief clearly indicated his [Alekseev's] intention to revive the plan of military intervention against Petrograd." There are several problems with this interpretation. It is true that this is the strongest language Alekseev had used on the need for the military to influence a sovereign power question. He was clearly frustrated about first being forced into the arbiter role, only to end up with the least desirable outcome from his point of view. At the same time, it seems an overstatement to claim that a potential coup was in the offing. If Alekseev was interested in using force against the Provisional Government, he would have had to take bolder steps than calling for a conference a week later. Additionally, the very day (March 3) that Alekseev was allegedly contemplating military intervention he ordered General Ivanov to return to *Stavka*. The previous day (March 2) the movement of troops from the front to hook up with Ivanov was halted. This would indeed be a strange coup, then, because troops were being ordered to move away from Petrograd and the planning for it was to take place a week later. Allan Wildman's characterization of Alekseev's March 3 telegram seems more accurate: "This was the first glimmer of the impulse to suspend the traditional view of the Army as 'above politics' for the sake of reestablishing authority and discipline." Alekseev had no plan to intervene, but a "glimmer of [an] impulse."⁷⁴

⁷³ "Fevral'skaya revolyutsiya," *KA*, No. 22, 22–24.

⁷⁴ Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 552; Wildman, *End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, p. 213. Katkov, similarly, speaks of "the formation of a military *junta*" as a possible result

Regardless of Alekseev's intent, the suggestion of a conference at *Stavka* of the front commanders was rejected by the commanders themselves. Ruzskiy noted that the best way to maintain unity among the high command was for *Stavka* to be in direct contact with the government, and for *Stavka* to then issue government orders to the commanders of the fronts. Several of them stressed the need for the commanders to remain at the front in order to maintain discipline. Brusilov stressed the need to appeal to the troops with the message that they were to defend Mother Russia and that the army "cannot get involved in politics now." Only Sakharov gave an unqualified endorsement to Alekseev's proposal.⁷⁵

On the evening of March 3, Alekseev had a final series of conversations with Guchkov and Rodzyanko during which he learned of Grand Duke Mikhail's decision to abdicate. Alekseev reacted with despair to this news, which he thought would have a negative impact on the armed forces. He stated, "the current army in the field needs to be preserved and spared from all kinds of passions about internal questions. . . . The ferocious struggle [with the enemy] is still far from over, and the fatherland needs every fighter." Alekseev requested that the new government do its utmost for the defense effort and the maintenance of unity and discipline in the armed forces.⁷⁶

The two abdication manifestoes were distributed throughout the armed forces on March 4. There were only a few reported instances of senior commanders refusing to announce the abdications. Many of them left the task of explaining the abdications to their junior officers. Wildman notes that this reluctance may have been due to their fears that their authority as commanders had been undermined, but he explained their hesitation as a product of something else: "Perhaps more fundamental was their total unfamiliarity with 'politics': when suddenly thrust into the role of explaining a political act of the first magnitude (one, moreover, that went to the heart of their own loyalties), they were at a complete loss."⁷⁷

Summary

The outcome of the February Revolution hinged importantly on the political stance of the military leadership. The army became the arbiter of the sovereign power dispute that the revolution provoked. The army high command was far from eager to play this role, but it had no choice. Throughout

of Alekseev's proposed conference: Katkov, *Russia 1917*, p. 350. Hasegawa reconstructs the movement of Ivanov's units in considerable detail, and he shows that Ivanov's mission was not canceled because of unreliable troops, as some (particularly Soviet) scholars have argued, but due to a change in policy: Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, pp. 478–486.

⁷⁵ "Fevral'skaya revolyutsiya," *KA*, No. 22, 24–25, 32–33, 42–44.

⁷⁶ "Fevral'skaya revolyutsiya," *KA*, No. 22, 36–42.

⁷⁷ Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 217–219; Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 20–21.

the revolutionary crisis, leading Russian officers were guided by their concern that the war effort continue without disruption. The desire of the military leadership to stay “outside politics” and focused on external defense was consistent with their organizational culture. The domestic structure explanation also is essential for understanding why the military was thrust into the arbiter role, although it does not account for the extreme reluctance of the military to become more directly involved, let alone to try and seize power for itself. Cleavages within the officer corps (organizational structure) were not important: Despite allegedly serious internal splits, it remained unified throughout the crisis. The troops of the Petrograd garrison, on the other hand, were a fundamental contributor to the revolution, which represented the first, but by no means the last, appearance of the army rank and file on the political stage in 1917. The corporate interest approach may help explain why the army was willing to come to terms with the Duma leadership, which it thought could help advance the war effort. More important, though, was the fact that the military leadership wanted political stability so it could continue the war. It did not behave as a rational bureaucratic actor seeking to gain for itself a more powerful role as a result of the revolutionary chaos. The Russian army in February 1917 was not predisposed toward a virtual military dictatorship, similar to the arrangement in Germany under Hindenburg and Ludendorff.⁷⁸ In the next section we will see to what extent the organizational culture of the Russian officer corps had changed as a result of the disintegration of the armed forces in the aftermath of the February Revolution.

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE KORNILOV AFFAIR

The February Revolution, in the eyes of most segments of Russian society and the Russian political elite, was supposed to usher in a new era in the country’s political life, a bold departure from the old regime. There was little agreement, however, on the terms of the new order. The sharpest clash was between elite society and the bulk of the Russian population. If the February Revolution had abruptly ended the polarization between the government and the elites, the polarization between the upper and lower classes was as sharp as ever. The war effort was perhaps the most contentious issue dividing Russian society.

This polarization of Russian society was clearly reflected in the army. The officer corps believed in a continuation of the war until victory was achieved. The soldiers, on the other hand, were ready for peace. The February Revolution marked the beginning of the disintegration of the Russian armed forces, which severely strained relations within the army and between the military and the government.

⁷⁸ Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640–1945* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 299–341.

Efforts by the military leadership to fight disintegration within the country and the army eventually led to a confrontation between General Kornilov, appointed Supreme Commander in July, and the Provisional Government headed by Alexander Kerensky. In late August, Kornilov was denounced as a plotter by Kerensky and dismissed as commander. Kornilov at this point raised the flag of revolt and sent troops to march on Petrograd, but he had little backing and his putsch was quickly defeated. Whether Kornilov had been planning a military coup before Kerensky's denunciation of him is a hotly contested issue. I find little evidence that a military coup against the Provisional Government was being planned, although the idea did have some support in the officer corps. Military action against the Petrograd Soviet was intended, but in conjunction with Kerensky. Kornilov is undoubtedly guilty of insubordination, but only after Kerensky decided to dismiss him.

In this section I discuss the key political developments between the February Revolution and the Kornilov affair. I concentrate on the attitude of the high command toward developments in the armed forces and the thinking of leading officers about the role of the army in sovereign power issues. I then explain the behavior of the armed forces during the Kornilov affair.

Dual Power: The Provisional Government, the Soviets, and the War

After the smoke of the February Revolution had cleared, two authority structures emerged as contenders for influence in the formation of state policy. The Provisional Government was formed on the basis of the Duma, and bourgeois liberals dominated the first government. The revolution in Petrograd, however, had largely been accomplished by workers and soldiers, and the Petrograd Soviet represented their interests. The Soviet rejected the prospect of either (a) trying to establish a revolutionary government of its own or (b) entering into a coalition with the bourgeois liberals, and adopted a policy of conditional support for the Provisional Government.⁷⁹

The entire period of Provisional Government rule was marked by a series of crises, confrontations, and accommodations between the government and the Soviet. Perhaps the most vexing question of all was the war. The first Provisional Government was brought down in April by a disagreement with the Petrograd Soviet over Russia's war aims, accompanied by massive protests in support of the Soviet (the "April Crisis"). In May a "coalition government" based on the liberal Kadet party and moderate socialist elements from the Petrograd Soviet came into being.⁸⁰

The new coalition government and its War Minister, the socialist Kerensky, decided that a Russian military offensive was necessary to force

⁷⁹ Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution*, pp. 22–27, 129–166; Schapiro, 1917, pp. 55–119.

⁸⁰ Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Search for Peace: February–October 1917* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), pp. 9–50.

the allies to take them and their program for an immediate peace seriously. The military leadership thought that an offensive was the only way to stop the disintegration of the armed forces. The “Kerensky offensive” was launched on June 18 and collapsed almost immediately. The problem of the war had not been solved. A separate peace was ruled out on the grounds that it could lead to German victory in the war, which would probably be fatal for the revolution. Yet the army was obviously in no state to fight, and its disintegration gathered speed after the failure of the Kerensky offensive.⁸¹

The war was by no means the only problem faced by the Provisional Government. Equally vexing issues were the state of the economy, the demand of the peasantry for land, the rise of national autonomy movements, and the need to call a Constituent Assembly to provide the government with greater legitimacy. All of these issues, however, were bound up with the war; and they were difficult, if not impossible, to solve until the war was over. Most relevant from the point of view of the army, it was difficult to solve the land question during the war. The redistribution of land could not take place without risking a complete collapse of the front, since many peasant-soldiers would return to their native villages to get their fair share. Most soldiers thought that the February Revolution signaled the end of the war and the distribution of land, and the inability of both the government and the Soviets to solve either problem contributed significantly to the drift of the army masses to the Bolsheviks, who promised to satisfy immediately the soldiers’ desire for peace and land.⁸²

The High Command and the Revolution

The adoption by the Petrograd Soviet of Order No. 1 caused the collapse of the old authority relations in the Russian military. Dual power quickly became a fact of life at the front as well as in the rear. The polarization in Russian society between the elites and the masses was reproduced in the army, with an often unbridgeable gulf separating officers from the troops. Soldiers’ committees sprang up at the front to represent rank-and-file interests, and they were already well-institutionalized by April. These committees were a clear symbol of dual power in the army.⁸³

The high command was dismayed to discover that the revolution had seriously undermined officer control over the troops. Equally distressing to

⁸¹ Wade, *Russian Search for Peace*, pp. 51–117; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, pp. 341–384; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 73–111.

⁸² Wade, *Russian Search for Peace*, pp. 142–143; Gill, *Peasants and Government*; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*.

⁸³ Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 202–290; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, pp. 53–181.

the high command was the fact that the Provisional Government was dependent on the Petrograd Soviet. The Soviet pursued an internally contradictory policy toward the army, striving both to maintain it as a fighting force to defend the revolution from the Central Powers and to undermine it as a possible base for counterrevolution. The officer corps found itself under attack from below and lacking real support on the part of either the Provisional Government or the Soviet.⁸⁴

Most troops and officers accepted the abdication of Nicholas II “calmly” (*spokoyno*). Many officers were apparently optimistic, seeing the fall of the autocracy as marking the end of the pernicious influence of the “German lobby” (the tsarina, Rasputin, and their “circle”) on state policy. General V. I. Selivachev enthused in his diary, “Is not this the beginning of the end for Germany??” Within a week, however, Selivachev had become extremely pessimistic and was predicting “a time of terror and civil war.”⁸⁵

The high command already had lost considerable faith in the Provisional Government during the negotiations over the abdication; and as the revolution spread to the front, their alarm was readily apparent. Between March 4 and March 7 Alekseev, who was appointed Supreme Commander by the Provisional Government, fired off a series of telegrams to Prime Minister G. E. Lvov and Defense Minister Guchkov. Alekseev noted that complaints were coming in from front commanders – particularly from the Northern and Western fronts (the ones closest to Petrograd and Moscow) – regarding the appearance of “delegates” from the capital in the army, claiming to speak for the workers or the Soviet. Alekseev stressed that all orders to military commanders should come through *Stavka* and only from the Provisional Government; the army did not recognize the Petrograd Soviet as a governing body authorized to make pronouncements on military matters. The arrest and even murder of officers by their own troops was seriously undermining officer morale and military discipline. The high command, only a few days after the abdication, began to warn of the possible collapse of the army and the threat to the country from Germany if the military disintegrated.⁸⁶

The military high command had no interest in having the army, including both officers and soldiers, involved in politics. This stance is clear from their reaction to a decision of the Provisional Government to allow military personnel to participate in politics. Order No. 114, issued on March 5, introduced several major changes in the army’s service regulations. The

⁸⁴ Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. I, pp. 374–375; Schapiro, 1917, p. 89.

⁸⁵ RGVA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1755, ll. 14–50; “Verkhovnoye komandovaniye v pervye dni revolyutsii,” KA, No. 5, 1924, 233–235; “Iz dnevnika gen. V. I. Selivacheva,” KA, No. 9, 1925, 108–114; Verkhovskiy, “Rossiya na golgofe,” 67–74.

⁸⁶ RGVA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1756, ll. 50, 83–87, 100–101; “Verkhovnoye komandovaniye,” KA, No. 5, 225–228; “Fevral’skaya revolyutsiya,” KA, No. 22, 50–52, 57–58.

change that elicited the biggest outcry from the officer corps was the one permitting military personnel to become members of organizations with political goals.⁸⁷

Alekseev protested that a fundamental change in the service regulations allowing military personnel to participate in political groups during wartime would be “disastrous” for the war effort and military discipline. He predicted an “inevitable split” in the army. Alekseev reminded the government that the army was currently at war and that “turning it into an arena of political struggle will inevitably entail catastrophic consequences.”⁸⁸

A detailed reply to Order No. 114 on behalf of *Stavka* was drafted by Quartermaster-General Lukhomskiy. Lukhomskiy declared that the permission for soldiers to get involved in politics is “completely intolerable” and a “violation of the one true principle – the non-interference of the army in politics.” “History teaches us,” Lukhomskiy continued, “that an army dragged into politics will always take part in coup d’états.” Lukhomskiy stressed that the army recognized the revolution and the new government, and that it should be left alone and not become occupied with political questions. If the army was dragged into politics, he warned, its “currently calm voice” would possibly become “threatening” and that it was hard to say what political position the army would take. Lukhomskiy perceptively predicted that the consequences of involving the army in politics would be dire, including military defeat by the Germans and a “lengthy civil war” in Russia.⁸⁹

Other officers, from front commanders on down, also protested Order No. 114 and its potentially pernicious effects on the military. General Brusilov protested:

Allowing soldiers to participate in political organizations is undoubtedly harmful, because it undermines the basic foundations of military service and introduces into military units a political element, when an army should be outside it. The interference of the army in politics is a destructive influence on its necessary discipline and inevitably distracts the military from its direct goal, and this will always be a threat to the firmness of state power and will weaken the stability of the state organism. The army is isolated from political influences and overtures in all states, even those with the most liberal political systems.⁹⁰

An avalanche of complaints poured into *Stavka* about the proposed changes. Corps Commander Mishchenko considered the changes concerning political activity in Order 114 “completely incompatible with the military

⁸⁷ For the text of Order No. 114, see L. S. Gaponenko et al., eds., *Velikaya oktyabr'skaya sotsialisticheskaya revolyutsiya* [hereafter VOSR]: *Revolutsionnoye dvizheniye v Rossii posle sverzheniya samoderzhaviya. Dokumenty i materialy* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1957), p. 424.

⁸⁸ RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1758, l. 95; RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1760, l. 23.

⁸⁹ RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1758, ll. 131–137.

⁹⁰ RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1760, ll. 32–35.

spirit.” General M. F. Kvetsinskiy, the Chief of Staff of the Western Front, noted that officers had been raised under the old system and were thereby politically “inert,” but other groups were already active among the troops and working successfully to bring them over to their side. Kvetsinskiy predicted that if prohibitions were not reinstated, officers also would start to become involved in politics. A Major-General and a Colonel telegraphed the War Ministry from the Far East to protest Order No. 114, arguing that all officers should be “outside politics” and that those who could not adhere to such a stance should retire. Similar views were expressed by other officers.⁹¹

The innovations of the Provisional Government encapsulated in Order No. 114 sharply contradicted the organizational culture of the Russian officer corps. Nevertheless, the Provisional Government let the order stand and went one step further, setting up a commission to work out a “Declaration of Soldiers’ Rights.” Military personnel of all ranks were given the right to join any political organization and to express their political views when off duty either in print or orally. Alekseev objected strongly to Guchkov about the provisions in the draft declaration. Alekseev wondered if there was any distinction between free speech and treason, noting sarcastically that under the new declaration apparently one could work for, say, the restoration of the monarchy or “solicit donations for the German navy.”⁹²

On May 1, Guchkov resigned from the Provisional Government. The Declaration of Soldiers’ Rights was issued by the new War Minister, Kerensky, on May 8. Kerensky had been the only socialist to join the first Provisional Government and was a lawyer with no military or foreign policy experience. Alekseev had no faith whatsoever in Kerensky, deriding him as a “nincompoop, buffoon and charlatan” in his diaries. Most historians have been equally unkind to Kerensky, accusing him of engaging in “banal theatrics” and being “hysterical” and noting that he “was doubtless a poseur and a windbag.” Kerensky engineered the dismissal of Alekseev as Supreme Commander, presumably because of Alekseev’s support for the allied war aims and his opposition to the Declaration of Soldiers’ Rights. Kerensky had Brusilov, the commander of the Southwestern Front, appointed in Alekseev’s place.⁹³

The collapse of the June Kerensky offensive was both a consequence of the disintegration of the army and a further catalyst to its breakdown. The despair of the high command plummeted to new depths. Their mood was

⁹¹ For the officers cited here, plus additional ones not cited, see RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1760, ll. 41–49, 60; RGVIA, f. 366, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 170–173, 308–311. See also Denikin, *Ocherki*, I (1), p. 63; I (2), p. 24.

⁹² RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1760, ll. 79–81.

⁹³ George Katkov, *The Kornilov Affair: Kerensky and the Break-up of the Russian Army* (London: Longman, 1980), pp. 11, 19–21; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, p. 27; Schapiro, 1917, p. 55; Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution*, p. 131.

expressed well by General P. S. Baluyev, commander of the Eleventh Army on the Southwestern Front. Baluyev telegraphed Kerensky and Brusilov on July 12, claiming that he was “horrified (*v uzhasse*) at the shame and ruin that threatens Russia and the revolution.” Many units, he reported, have become “undisciplined armed crowds.” Baluyev considered it necessary to restore the commanders’ full powers that had existed before the revolution, to reintroduce the death penalty, and to halt all meetings and political discussions in the army until the war was over. Supreme Commander Brusilov telegraphed Kerensky on July 13 with a list of similar demands, including: granting commanders full disciplinary powers; forbidding political meetings; reducing the role of committees to advisory status, dealing only with questions of the soldiers’ daily life; and “categorically forbidding soldiers’ participation in any political societies or organizations during the war.”⁹⁴

Kerensky, in response to the failure of the June offensive and the clamor from the officer corps for stricter discipline, called a conference at *Stavka* on July 16 that included all of the Front commanders plus several other prominent generals. The military leadership called for discipline to be restored, the raising of the authority of the commander, the abolition or curtailment of committees and commissars in the army, the cancellation of the Declaration of Soldiers’ Rights, and the abolition of politics from the army. On July 12 the government had approved the restoration of the death penalty at the front for military personnel guilty of certain crimes, and it was proposed that it be extended to the rear. The conference had little effect, since, as Leonard Schapiro notes, the military leadership was “demanding the impossible – that the clock be turned back, and that the effects of the revolution on the army be wiped out.”⁹⁵

The most important change to come out of the July 16 *Stavka* conference was the appointment of a new Supreme Commander. General Lavr Kornilov had been Commander of the Petrograd garrison during the April Crisis, but resigned after his intention to use force in support of the government against demonstrators was countermanded by the Petrograd Soviet. He was made Commander of the Eighth Army on the Southwestern Front. Kornilov made a name for himself by applying summary execution to deserters and with a toughly worded telegram (which was leaked to the press) calling for harsh measures on the part of the government to restore discipline in the army.

⁹⁴ RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1786, ll. 192–197; RGVIA, f. 366, op. 1, d. 81, ll. 50–53. For Alekseev’s reports from March, April, and May on the state of the army, see L. S. Gaponenko, ed., *Revolutsionnoye dvizheniye v russkoy armii 27 fevralya–24 oktyabrya 1917 goda: sbornik dokumentov* (Moskva: “Nauka,” 1968), pp. 35–38, 61–63, 111. Officers’ letters during the summer of 1917 also reflected their despair about their loss of authority and the disintegration of the army: RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1786, ll. 5–23.

⁹⁵ Schapiro, 1917, p. 103. For a complete transcript, see “Protokol Soveshchaniya Ministra-Predsedatelya A.F. Kerenskogo s generalitetom v STAVKE 16 iyulya 1917 goda,” *Russkiy arkhiv*, No. 3, 1993, 139–184.

Kornilov had not attended the July 16 conference, but a telegram he sent to the meeting was more conciliatory toward committees and commissars than the views expressed by the rest of the high command. Kerensky apparently found Kornilov more acceptable than the other top generals, despite Kornilov's reputation as a stern disciplinarian.⁹⁶

Kornilov, the Provisional Government, and the Question of Dictatorship

Kornilov's appointment as Supreme Commander came at a time when the mood in the country had shifted somewhat toward the right. The collapse of the June offensive had demonstrated the desperate position of the army. The violence of the "July Days," in which radical workers, soldiers, and sailors, with definite Bolshevik participation if not leadership, tried to force the Petrograd Soviet to push aside the Provisional Government and take power for itself, was also seen by some elements of society as proof that firm state power was needed. During the July Days the Provisional Government announced that they had information demonstrating that Lenin and other Bolsheviks were working for Germany. The military leadership, having witnessed the effects of Bolshevik propaganda on the troops, supported a crack-down on the Bolsheviks and strong state power.⁹⁷

One of Kornilov's conditions for accepting the post of Supreme Commander was that the government apply stern measures like the death penalty for military crimes in the rear as well as the front. Throughout the month of August, Kornilov was involved in negotiations with Kerensky and the Deputy War Minister, B. V. Savinkov, to get government agreement to his program, which included not only the death penalty but also raising the power and authority of commanders and curtailing the responsibilities of soldiers' committees and government commissars. Government pursuit of such policies would put it on a collision course with the Petrograd Soviet.⁹⁸

Kornilov was the most visible symbol of the desire among some sectors of society for a "strong hand." He thus garnered the support of a wide range of groups who had been agitating throughout the summer for a strong

⁹⁶ Jorgen Larsen Munck, *The Kornilov Revolt: A Critical Examination of Sources and Research* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1987), pp. 49–69; Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 30–31, 39–46; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 156–157.

⁹⁷ Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968); Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, pp. 419–438; Semion Lyandres, *The Bolsheviks' "German Gold" Revisited*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies, No. 1106 (Pittsburgh: Center for Russian and East European Studies, February 1995); Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976), pp. 14–20; Schapiro, 1917, pp. 83–84, 94–95.

⁹⁸ Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 41–64; Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, pp. 100–109; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 69–92. For the text of the Kornilov program submitted to the Provisional Government on August 10, see *Krasnaya letopis'*, No. 1(10), 1924, 207–217.

government, a restriction on the authority of the Soviets, and a prosecution of the war effort to victory over the Germans. Although it is clear that these groups supported Kornilov's program, there is less convincing evidence on whether they supported a military dictatorship and the extent of Kornilov's contacts with these groups.⁹⁹

Several military organizations have been accused of conspiring with these organizations and Kornilov to establish a military dictatorship. These include the Union of Officers, the Military League, the Union of Cossack Troops, the Union of St. George Cavaliers, and the Union of Military Duty. The most important of these groups was the Union of Officers, which had been formed in May. Kerensky and the Deputy War Minister Savinkov saw the Union of Officers as "a nest of reaction." Kerensky's brother-in-law, Colonel V. L. Baranovskiy, who was a key assistant to Kerensky in the War Ministry, disagreed with this assessment, but his voice was evidently a minority one. Savinkov asked the chief commissar at *Stavka*, Captain M. M. Filonenko, to monitor the activities of the Main Committee of the Union.¹⁰⁰

That there were praetorian sentiments among some members of the Russian officer corps, and that these sentiments increased between March and August, is clear. Denikin reports growing dismay among officers about the weakness of the state and the potential collapse of Russia. Officer support for a coup, however, apparently was not widespread, and little concrete evidence of plotting has appeared. Top commanders who apparently talked about the need for a military dictatorship included General P. N. Vrangeli, General A. M. Krymov, and Admiral A. V. Kolchak. Military censors noted in June an officer's letter that said that "some officers say that only a military dictatorship can save us." By August the desire for a strong hand was widespread among officers, but this view must be dissociated from support for a military coup. Wildman accepts the claims that the Union of Officers was plotting against the government, but rejects the idea that its views represented the majority of officers.¹⁰¹

A second minority subculture was that of the so-called democratic officers, who supported the revolution and endeavored to work closely with the

⁹⁹ William G. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution: The Constitutional Democratic Party, 1917-1921* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 205-224; James D. White, "The Kornilov Affair - A Study in Counter-Revolution," *Soviet Studies*, 20 (1968), pp. 187-205; Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 136-144; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 126-134.

¹⁰⁰ RGVIA, f. 366, op. 2, d. 38, l. 7; RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1786, ll. 176-179; RGVIA, f. 366, op. 1, d. 67, ll. 19-30; RGVIA, f. 366, op. 2, d. 38, l. 16. For background, besides the sources in the previous note, see Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 11-19; Allan Wildman, "Officers of the General Staff and the Kornilov Movement," in Frankel, Frankel, and Knei-Paz, *Revolution in Russia*, pp. 92-94.

¹⁰¹ Denikin, *Ocherki*, I(1), pp. 88-89, 123; II, pp. 25, 28-30; Vrangeli, *Vospominaniya*, pp. 32-34; Wildman, "Officers of the General Staff," pp. 84, 93-94; RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1773, ll. 203-217.

soldiers' committees. A good example of this type of officer was Colonel Verkhovskiy, the Commander of the Moscow Military District from June until August and War Minister after the Kornilov affair. Verkhovskiy believed that officers needed to work with "the most conscious" soldiers to convince them of the need to restore military discipline for the good of the war effort, and he opposed any return to the more strict and physical type of discipline favored by other Russian officers.¹⁰²

It seems that the majority of officers, and particularly the high command, occupied a position somewhere between the "praetorian" and "democratic" subcultures. These officers were apolitical patriots who were distressed by the disintegration of the army and believed that politics should be removed from the army and that the military should concentrate on the war effort.

Prince G. N. Trubetskoy, Director of the Diplomatic Chancellery at *Stavka* from March until the Kornilov affair, remarked that Russian generals had an "exclusively military world view, discussing all current events from that point of view." Despite their opposition to involvement in politics, Trubetskoy contends, they were somewhat forced into it by the collapse of the army. As for Kornilov, Trubetskoy stated: "[H]e is first of all a soldier and he little understands complex political questions. In this sense he clearly reflects the properties of the entire command staff of the army." Most subsequent historians have shared this assessment. Alexander Rabinowitch states, "Kornilov remained very much an officer of the old school; national political issues interested him only insofar as they affected the primary task of restoring the army."¹⁰³

General I. P. Romanovskiy, the Quartermaster-General at *Stavka* at the time of the Kornilov affair, summarizes the outlook of the military leadership well. Politics, Romanovskiy asserts, was "completely foreign" to him. The disintegration of the army in 1917 was a cause of much suffering, and Romanovskiy says he came to the conclusion that strong power was necessary to save the army and Russia: "[W]hat kind of power it was essentially was all the same to me, as long as it was strong." These views reflected an organizational culture based on opposition to military involvement in sovereign power issues combined with the sentiment that the potential collapse of the army and the state should not be permitted.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Verkhovskiy, *Rossiya na golgofe*, pp. 84, 87; Wildman, "Officers of the General Staff," pp. 87–90.

¹⁰³ Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii (GARF), f. 1780, op. 1, d. 11, l. 1; Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, p. 97. See also General E. I. Martynov, *Kornilov (popytka voyennogo perevorota)* (Leningrad: Voyennaya tipografiya uprav. delami NKVM i RVS SSSR, 1927), pp. 20, 47; General N. N. Golovin, *Rossiyskaya kontr-revolutsiya v 1917–1918 gg.*, Part I, Book 2 (Tallinn: "Illyustrirovannaya Rossiya," 1937), pp. 9–12; Verkhovskiy, *Rossiya na golgofe*, pp. 89–90, 106. See also "Iz dnevnika gen. V. I. Selivacheva."

¹⁰⁴ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, l. 87.

By August 1917, then, there was a widespread feeling in the officer corps and among significant elements of the nonsocialist political elite that a firm hand was needed to conduct the war and prevent government collapse. General Kornilov was the most prominent symbol of this sentiment. Some of those who longed for a strong hand believed that a military coup would be required for it to come about, and they looked to Kornilov as the potential “man on horseback.” For a plot to succeed, however, it needed a leader, and it is far from clear that Kornilov saw himself as a putschist. To better answer this question, we need to look in more detail at the Kornilov affair.

The Kornilov Affair

Kornilov took over as Supreme Commander in late July 1917. He urged the Provisional Government to adopt his program of tough military measures to restore the fighting capacity of the army. His disillusionment grew after two trips to Petrograd on August 3 and 10 produced no results. Most shocking, perhaps, to Kornilov was the discovery that a possible traitor was a member of the Provisional Government; both Kerensky and Savinkov told him not to go into too much detail during his operational report because they suspected a minister of passing information to the Germans (the suspected member, probably unfairly, was Agriculture Minister V. M. Chernov, the leader of the Socialist Revolutionary [SR] Party). The fall of Riga to the Germans on August 20 was another major demoralizing event.¹⁰⁵

After his August 3 trip to Petrograd, Kornilov ordered the movement of the Third Cavalry Corps to an area about 250 miles from Petrograd. This troop movement could be justified by the threat to Riga and potentially Petrograd from the Germans, but the deployment also had a political purpose. Kornilov’s Chief of Staff, General Lukhonskiy, suspected as much and asked Kornilov his reasons. Kornilov answered that according to available reports the Bolsheviks were planning an action in Petrograd for the end of August (the six-month anniversary of the February Revolution), intimating that these troops might be used to suppress demonstrations. Kornilov went on to state that it was necessary to introduce firm measures to save the army and Russia. He added that he was not a counterrevolutionary, but that the Provisional Government, although it contained strong people, also had members who were fatal for Russia. Thus, Kornilov said, it might be necessary to put pressure on the government. Kornilov said that he counted on broad support and that a reconstituted government would have to include

¹⁰⁵ There are two detailed studies in English of the Kornilov affair: Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*. I have been able to draw on the materials of the Investigative Commission established to study the Kornilov affair, which are stored at GARF in Moscow and were unavailable to Katkov and Munck. See also Martynov, *Kornilov*; White, “The Kornilov Affair”; Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, pp. 94–150; Wildman, “Officers of the General Staff”; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 184–223.

people like Kerensky and Savinkov. Lukhonskiy states that he had no doubt that Kerensky and Kornilov would come to an agreement. Kornilov was certainly, though, entertaining the idea of pressuring the government, although he had no concrete plan to do so.¹⁰⁶

Savinkov and Filonenko, respectively the Deputy Defense Minister and the government commissar at *Stavka*, played a key role in the Kornilov affair. Savinkov, Filonenko, and Kerensky were all members of the SR Party, and Savinkov basically ran the War Ministry as Kerensky's deputy from the end of July. Filonenko had served as commissar under Kornilov in the Eighth Army, and he replaced Savinkov as government commissar at *Stavka* when Savinkov moved to Petrograd at the end of July. Savinkov and Filonenko worked closely with Kornilov in drafting his program for military reform, and played a key role in negotiating between Kerensky and Kornilov over the contents of the reform program.¹⁰⁷

Kerensky was wavering about whether to adopt Kornilov's program. He certainly understood that by siding with Kornilov he would be breaking his ties with the Soviet, his original base of support after the February Revolution. In mid-August, Kerensky evidently decided to press ahead with the Kornilov program, and he tasked Savinkov to go to *Stavka* to come to a final agreement with Kornilov. Kerensky told Savinkov on August 17 that he had accepted Kornilov's demand that the death penalty be extended to the rear and that the Petrograd Military District, with the exception of Petrograd itself, be placed under the authority of the Supreme Commander. The plan to create a separate Petrograd Army had been proposed as early as April and had been put in motion by Kornilov in early August. Kerensky also instructed Savinkov to agree with Kornilov on the dispatch of the 3rd Cavalry Corps to Petrograd at the end of August to repress the projected Bolshevik demonstration and any disturbances provoked by the announcement by the Provisional Government of the adoption of Kornilov's program and the placement of Petrograd under martial law.¹⁰⁸

Savinkov discussed these plans with Kornilov at *Stavka* on August 23–24. Kornilov complained to Savinkov about Kerensky's indecisiveness, but

¹⁰⁶ See Lukomskiy's deposition to the Investigative Commission, which is probably the best single source on military command thinking during the Kornilov affair, even more informative than Kornilov's own deposition: GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 50–54. See also General Loukowsky, *Memoirs of the Russian Revolution* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1922), pp. 95–101. For Kornilov's deposition, see "General L. G. Kornilov pered chrezvychaynoy komissiiy vremennogo pravitel'stva," *Kentavr*, Nos. 5–6, 1995, 105–120, 101–113.

¹⁰⁷ Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 47, 57, 66–67, *passim*; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 64–67; Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, pp. 99–108; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 191–192, note 13; Martynov, *Kornilov*, pp. 24–25, 43, *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 65–67; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 31, l. 35; Martynov, *Kornilov*, p. 79; RGVA, f. 366, op. 1, d. 127, ll. 26–27; GARF, f. 1780, d. 1, op. 14, ll. 50–53, 82–83; "General L. G. Kornilov," *Kentavr*, No. 6, 105–106.

Savinkov convinced Kornilov of Kerensky's indispensability and told him that Kerensky had agreed to introduce the death penalty in the rear. Savinkov also negotiated, on Kerensky's order, the demarcation between the area of the Petrograd Military District under Kornilov's command and the area under the control of the Petrograd Military Governor. This agreement was immediately communicated to the War Ministry in Petrograd, and Kerensky issued a telegram to Kornilov confirming the subordination of the Petrograd Military District to the Supreme Commander. Finally, Savinkov requested, under Kerensky's authority, the dispatch of the 3rd Cavalry Corps to Petrograd. Kornilov informed Savinkov before Savinkov's departure that he believed the government was moving in the right direction and he asked Savinkov to tell Kerensky that he would support Kerensky for the good of the fatherland. All those at *Stavka* thought that Kornilov's program had finally been accepted and that firm power was soon to be introduced in the country that would halt the collapse of the army.¹⁰⁹

At this point the Kornilov affair becomes rather strange, if not downright surreal. On August 22 V. N. L'vov, who had been the Procurator of the Holy Synod in the first two provisional governments, went to see Kerensky in Petrograd. L'vov had apparently decided, either on his own volition or because of political conversations in Moscow, that Kerensky needed to be persuaded to change the make-up of the government. L'vov told Kerensky that a powerful group of people stood behind his demand to change the government, and Kerensky evidently empowered L'vov to negotiate on his behalf with this "powerful group."¹¹⁰

L'vov returned to Moscow, where he told several people that he had been sent by Kerensky to negotiate with Kornilov, and then went on to *Stavka* on August 24. L'vov met with Kornilov on August 25. L'vov told Kornilov that he had come on Kerensky's behalf to discuss the composition of the new government. L'vov laid out three options: (1) a new government formed by Kerensky, (2) a directorate that would include Kornilov, and (3) a dictatorship. Kornilov replied that he favored the third option, that he would not reject the role of dictator if offered to him, and that regardless he

¹⁰⁹ "General L. G. Kornilov," *Kentavr*, No. 5, 115–117; GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 37, 56; GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 54–56, 82–84; GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 11, l. 3; D. A. Chigayev, ed., *VOSR: Revolyutsionnoye dviizheniye v Rossii v avguste 1917 g: Razgrom kornilovskogo myatezha. Dokumenty i materialy* [hereafter *VOSR: Razgrom*] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959), pp. 421–425, 451; RGVIA, f. 366, op. 1, d. 67, ll. 45–51; Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 67–72; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 100–105.

¹¹⁰ V. N. L'vov should not be confused with the Prime Minister of the First Provisional Government, G. E. L'vov. All contemporary observers and later historians have regarded L'vov as unreliable if not delusional. L'vov gave no fewer than four different versions of his story to the Investigative Commission between August 27 and October 5. See GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 5–18, 97; N. Ukraintsev, "The Kornilov Affair: Observations by a Member of the Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry," *Soviet Studies*, 25 (1973), 294–295; Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 74–82; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 30–32.

considered the participation of Kerensky and Savinkov in the government desirable. Kornilov also told L'vov to relay to Kerensky and Savinkov his desire that they come to *Stavka*, since he could not guarantee their safety in Petrograd and the composition of the new government could be agreed in Mogilev.¹¹¹

Lukhomskiy maintains that one of the major sources of the subsequent disagreement was over the term dictatorship, which he maintains implied for Kornilov a collective, and not a personal, dictatorship. Lukhomskiy's account is backed by other sources, and on August 25 and 26 there were several discussions about the composition of a future government. Lukhomskiy and Kornilov testified that on the 26th the opinion at headquarters had centered around the notion of a Council of National Defense (*Sovet Narodnoy oborony*) with Kornilov as its head and Kerensky as its deputy. The fact that no firm decision had been made by Kornilov about the most desirable composition of a future government is clear from the fact that on the 26th he telegraphed several leading political figures, asking that they come to *Stavka* to discuss the composition of a new government.¹¹²

While L'vov was in Mogilev, Savinkov had returned to Petrograd to report his agreements with Kornilov to Kerensky. Despite the fact that Kerensky had agreed to accept Kornilov's proposals at the time he sent Savinkov to *Stavka* (August 17), he now hesitated to adopt them. Savinkov tried several times on August 25 and 26 to persuade Kerensky to sign the new laws and bring them before the cabinet. Kerensky eventually agreed to submit them to the government on the night of the twenty-sixth.¹¹³

L'vov, meanwhile, returned to Petrograd on August 26 to report to Kerensky the results of his discussion with Kornilov. Until this meeting, Kerensky had no idea who L'vov allegedly was representing. L'vov now said that he had come on behalf of Kornilov, although L'vov had told everyone else that Kerensky had sent *him* to Kornilov, and not the other way around. L'vov told Kerensky that Kornilov had presented him with the ultimatum that Kerensky and the entire government resign and that all military and civil power be transferred to Kornilov, and L'vov also stated Kornilov's desire for Kerensky and Savinkov to go to Mogilev. Katkov correctly notes that "the word 'ultimatum' is the pivot on which the whole Kornilov affair revolves." Kornilov believed that he had merely told L'vov his preferences about the shape of a future government, reiterated his belief that the measures worked out with Savinkov be immediately introduced, and asked that

¹¹¹ Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 106–109; Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 77–81. The relevant primary sources are cited in the following note.

¹¹² "General L. G. Kornilov," *Kentaur*, No. 6, 101–104; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 5–18, 26, 67–69; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 56–57; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 11, l. 3–5; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, l. 37; VOSR: *Razgrom*, 450.

¹¹³ Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 83–84; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, p. 111.

Kerensky and Savinkov come to *Stavka* to discuss the composition of the future government and for their own safety.¹¹⁴

Kerensky decided to double-check L'vov's report of Kornilov's "demands" by conducting a conversation with Kornilov over the Hughes apparatus that night (August 26). Kerensky asked Kornilov to confirm the message he had sent with L'vov, without stating the message's content. Kornilov verified that he had asked L'vov to transmit a message and that he requested that Kerensky and Savinkov come to *Stavka*. Neither Kerensky nor Kornilov, however, said anything specific about the content of Kornilov's message to Kerensky. Kornilov's very phrasing, however, suggests he had not sent an ultimatum; Kornilov referred only to "the outline that I had sketched for Vladimir Nikolayevich [L'vov] with the request that he report it to you [i.e., Kerensky]." Kornilov's failure to state explicitly the nature of his message to Kerensky was, as Lukhomskiy stated, "a very serious mistake." Kerensky's failure to ask is equally culpable.¹¹⁵

Kerensky had L'vov arrested and telegraphed Kornilov, ordering him to give up his post to the Chief of Staff, Lukhomskiy. Kerensky then reported to the cabinet that Kornilov had sent L'vov with an ultimatum that he be given dictatorial power. Kerensky received from the cabinet extraordinary powers to deal with the crisis. Kerensky refused Savinkov's request that he be allowed to clear up the misunderstanding with Kornilov, arguing that it was not a misunderstanding but a "crime." Kerensky had his own reasons for not wanting to come to an agreement with Kornilov, both because he feared him as a rival for power and because going along with Kornilov's program would mean breaking with his socialist allies in the Soviet.¹¹⁶

At *Stavka* the Hughes apparatus discussion between Kornilov and Kerensky was taken as clear evidence that Kerensky would take the steps agreed with Savinkov. Kornilov telegraphed Savinkov the previously agreed telegram on the movement of the Third Cavalry Corps to Petrograd and the introduction of martial law beginning on August 29. The arrival of the telegram dismissing Kornilov, Trubetskoy reports, was like an "exploding bomb." Kornilov and others close to him at *Stavka* concluded that either (a) Kornilov was the victim of some provocation (some blamed L'vov, others Kerensky, others Savinkov and Filonenko) or (b) leftist elements in the government and the Soviet had pressured Kerensky to break with Kornilov.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 86–88; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 108–109; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, l. 57; VOSR: *Razgrom*, p. 441–442.

¹¹⁵ VOSR: *Razgrom*, p. 443; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, l. 57.

¹¹⁶ Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 91–95, 157; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 110–114; Martynov, *Kornilov*, p. 100.

¹¹⁷ "General L. G. Kornilov," *Kentavr*, No. 6, 104; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 98–99; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 57–59, 84; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 4–5.

Lukhonskiy refused the post of Supreme Commander and said that it was too late to go back on the agreement between Kerensky and Kornilov. Lukhonskiy maintained that only the program proposed by Kornilov could save the army from collapse and save Russia from a humiliating defeat. Both Filonenko at *Stavka* and Savinkov in Petrograd believed that a huge misunderstanding had taken place, and Savinkov had a long conversation with Kornilov over the Hughes apparatus on the afternoon of August 27 to try to ameliorate the situation. By this point, however, neither Kerensky nor Kornilov was interested in backing down. Kerensky issued a public telegram on the twenty-seventh accusing Kornilov of “attempting to encroach on supreme power in the state” and ordering Kornilov to give up the post of Supreme Commander to General V. N. Klembovskiy, the commander of the Northern Front. Kornilov responded with an inflammatory appeal to the population accusing the Provisional Government of being under the influence of “the Bolshevik majority of the Soviets [the Bolsheviks did not in fact have a majority in the Soviet at this time – B. T.] acting in complete agreement with the plans of German General Staff” and proclaimed, “Russian people, your great motherland is dying!”¹¹⁸

The fact that the Kerensky–Kornilov dispute was now out in the open made it impossible for it to be resolved in a way satisfactory to both sides. Klembovskiy, like Lukhonskiy, also refused to take over the position of Supreme Commander. Kornilov sent word to General Krymov to continue his advance on Petrograd, on foot if the railroads were disrupted, but then lost communication with him. As Kornilov told the Investigative Commission, he had made no alternative arrangements to stay in touch with Krymov because the operation was being carried out in agreement with the government and he did not foresee that the very same government would order communications between the two of them cut off.¹¹⁹

The chaos in the high command was mirrored by chaos in the ruling circles in Petrograd. The former Supreme Commander, Alekseev, was brought in to help resolve the crisis. He appealed to Kerensky to compromise with Kornilov, but Kerensky said that was impossible. On August 29, telegrams continued to arrive at the War Ministry from the front commanders asking to whom they were subordinate. Alekseev decided that the situation was too dangerous and could be exploited by the Germans, so he agreed to become Chief of Staff under Kerensky as Supreme Commander and to work with Kornilov to defuse the crisis.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ VOSR: *Razgrom*, pp. 445–452; ; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 28; Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 92–93, 97–99; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 7–8, 112–113.

¹¹⁹ VOSR: *Razgrom*, pp. 453, 455–456; “General L. G. Kornilov,” *Kentavr*, No. 6, 107.

¹²⁰ VOSR: *Razgrom*, pp. 466–467; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 2–3; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 113–114; Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 100–103.

Alekseev and Kornilov “spoke” on the Hughes apparatus several times on August 30. It was agreed that Alekseev would come to *Stavka* as soon as possible and that until he arrived the Provisional Government would issue a statement that all of Kornilov’s orders relevant to operational matters should be obeyed. As Kornilov sarcastically remarked in a letter to Krymov dispatched on August 30, “thus came about an episode unique in world history: a supreme commander, accused of treason and betrayal of the motherland and handed over to justice for it, received an order to continue to command the armies.” Alekseev arrived at Mogilev on the afternoon of September 1. That evening Alekseev arrested Kornilov, Lukhomskiy, and Romanovskiy. Alekseev was forced to take this step to avoid further confrontation.¹²¹

Krymov’s expedition, in the meantime, had petered out on the outskirts of Petrograd. Initially on August 27 both Kerensky and Kornilov believed that Kornilov was likely to succeed. Some accounts attribute Krymov’s failure to the countermobilization of the Soviets, soldiers’ committees, and other mass organizations. Other analysts emphasize the confusion faced by Krymov, his officers, and his troops upon learning that there was no Bolshevik uprising in Petrograd and that Kerensky had accused Kornilov of mutiny. Both accounts undoubtedly contain an element of truth and are not mutually inconsistent. Regardless, as George Katkov points out, “not a single shot was fired on either side.”¹²²

Explaining the High Command’s Behavior during the Kornilov Affair

The fact that Kornilov refused to submit to the Provisional Government on August 27 means that the Kornilov affair must be coded as a case of military intervention. There is no doubt that after August 27 Kornilov was insubordinate and took steps to change the executive leadership of the state. Kornilov’s insubordination, however, is not proof of a previous plot to overthrow the government.

¹²¹ Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 105–114; VOSR: *Razgrom*, pp. 466–469; Martynov, *Kornilov*, pp. 191–193; “General L. G. Kornilov,” *Kentavr*, No. 6, 108.

¹²² Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 100–101, 105–106, 197 (quote, p. 197); Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, pp. 127–150; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 114–118; Martynov, *Kornilov*, pp. 129–151; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 184–202; Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, pp. 461–462. Incidentally, it appears that there was in fact no planned Bolshevik demonstration in Petrograd and that the information was based on an unreliable counterintelligence report. Regardless, there can be no doubt that Kornilov believed the report, and he also expected opposition from the Bolsheviks and the Petrograd Soviet when the law on applying the death penalty in the rear was announced. It was not simply a “cock-and-bull story,” as Allan Wildman asserts. See “General L. G. Kornilov,” *Kentavr*, No. 5, 120, note 22; Loukomsky, *Memoirs of the Russian Revolution*, p. 105; Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, p. 117; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, p. 195.

As should be clear from the previous section, the evidence for a Kornilov conspiracy is weak. The Investigative Commission established by the Kerensky Government to examine the affair found no evidence for a previous conspiracy. The only witness who claimed to have direct evidence for the existence of a plot was L'vov, and his testimony on this issue was contradicted by three other witnesses – and L'vov himself on two occasions. Kerensky insisted that there was a plot, and indeed spent a considerable portion of the rest of his life trying to prove its existence. He was unable to produce any evidence for the Commission, however, and his claim that he had information from counterintelligence was directly contradicted by N. D. Mironov, a counterintelligence officer who was sent by Savinkov in August to *Stavka* to check on potential plotters in the Officers' Union. Mironov was unable to uncover any evidence for a plot and was completely surprised by the Kornilov "uprising." The Commission also found no evidence for a plot among the high command or the Officers' Union, basing their conclusion on extensive interviews with all of the relevant parties and searches of their premises. No documents supporting the existence of a plot were uncovered. Similarly, none of the officers of the Third Cavalry Corps believed that they were acting against the Provisional Government. Everyone at *Stavka*, the Commission concluded, believed that Kornilov and Kerensky were working together.¹²³

Some scholars point to the dispatch of a group of officers to Petrograd to assist Krymov's Third Cavalry Corps in putting down the anticipated Bolshevik demonstration as evidence of the existence of a plot.¹²⁴ The problem is that, at the time the officers were sent (August 25–26), Kornilov had every reason to think he was acting in accordance with the Provisional Government. The officers were told that they were to be at the disposal of Krymov and assist him in putting down a Bolshevik uprising. No action against the Provisional Government was discussed.¹²⁵

Other information pointing to the existence of a Kornilov plot appeared in the years following the revolution in various émigré memoirs and newspapers. Many of these accounts were published years or decades after the event and contradict each other on key points. It does seem true, nevertheless, that various individuals and organizations, including some officers, took concrete steps to assist Kornilov at the end of August. Clear links between these individuals and groups and Kornilov, however, have not been well established. No plans were made to maintain contacts between these groups and *Stavka*.

¹²³ GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 5–41, 48–57, 97–102. See also Ukraintsev, "The Kornilov Affair," a 1956 article by a member of the Commission. The two major Western studies of the Kornilov affair both conclude that Kornilov did not conspire to overthrow the Provisional Government: Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*.

¹²⁴ Martynov, *Kornilov*, pp. 90–91; Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, p. 117.

¹²⁵ GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 21; GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 146, 173–175; GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, l. 63; GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 42–48, 101–102; Denikin, *Ocherki*, I(2), pp. 210–211; II, pp. 40, 53–54; VOSSR: *Razgrom*, pp. 420, 452–453.

Most important, the goal of these various plots seemed to be directed toward suppressing the Bolsheviks and the Petrograd Soviet, and not the Provisional Government itself.¹²⁶

The best evidence for any praetorian leanings on Kornilov's part is found in Lukhonskiy's testimony. Several times in August, Kornilov had considered pressuring the government to adopt his reform plans and expel the members that he believed were traitors, such as Chernov. The relevant counterfactual is whether Kornilov would have tried to overthrow the government if it had decided not to adopt his proposed measures. Denikin suggests that such an outcome was very possible.¹²⁷ My reading of the available evidence is that Kornilov had no actual plan to move against the government in late August if his reforms were rejected, but that some of his associates were urging him on and that Kornilov may have undertaken such an effort later if he became convinced that the external military threat to the army and the country was severe enough. Another possibility is that Kornilov would have moved against the Petrograd Soviet without the authorization of the Provisional Government, hoping to win its assent after the fact. Kornilov and many other top officers had come to the conclusion that the disintegration in the army was inextricably linked to (a) political and economic developments in the rear and (b) the failure of the government to cope with the crisis.

Kornilov justified his own behavior as motivated by national interest reasons, in particular the disintegration of the army and the possible loss of the war. His appeals to the people on August 27 and 28 argued that the Provisional Government's actions "are killing the army and shaking the country from within" and undermining "the very independent existence of the state." In his testimony to the Investigative Commission, Kornilov also stressed his goals of forcing "traitors to the Motherland" from the cabinet and pressuring the government to create "strong and firm power" in the country.¹²⁸

General Lukhonskiy, Kornilov's chief of staff, admitted openly that by supporting Kornilov on August 27 his stance was, in a formal sense, criminal. Lukhonskiy argued that to understand his decision of August 27 one needed to understand the situation in the army and the country. If the measures proposed by Kornilov were not adopted rapidly, Lukhonskiy believed, then in the next 2–3 months the army would collapse, leading to the "death of Russia." The commanders of the various fronts were also placed in a difficult position. All of them had endorsed the measures proposed by Kornilov for

¹²⁶ For varying treatments of this material, see White, "The Kornilov Affair"; Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 136–144; Munck, *Kornilov Revolt*, pp. 37–38, 126–134; Denikin, *Ocherki*, Vol. II, pp. 25–34, 40, 43, 54; N. G. Dumova, "Maloizvestnye materialy po istorii Kornilovshchiny," *Voprosy istorii*, No. 11, 1968, 69–93.

¹²⁷ Denikin, *Ocherki*, I(1), p. 69; I(2), pp. 197–198; II, pp. 29–30, 36, 39.

¹²⁸ VOSR: *Razgrom*, p. 446; Martynov, *Kornilov*, pp. 116–117, 122; "General L. G. Kornilov," *Kentavr*, No. 6, 105; RGVIA, f. 366, op. 2, d. 99, ll. 27–32.

restoring discipline and the fighting capacity of the army. Generals Baluyev (Western Front), Shcherbachev (Rumanian Front), and Klembovskiy (Northern Front) telegraphed to *Stavka* and Petrograd their support for Kornilov and his program, but without taking a stand against the Provisional Government. The commander of the Caucasian Front, General Przheval'skiy, telegraphed his support of the Provisional Government and stated that "any split in the army and its participation in a civil war will be fatal for the fatherland." General Denikin of the Southwestern Front, on the other hand, took a stance of open defiance to the government, arguing that the dismissal of Kornilov would lead to the collapse of the army and the death of the country, and that "I will not go with it [the government] along that path."¹²⁹

In the end only Denikin refused to submit to the Provisional Government. He undertook no military efforts to support Kornilov, however, and was arrested by a commissar and a crowd of troops. Once the "paper war" between Kornilov and Kerensky broke into public view on August 28, Baluyev and Shcherbachev sided openly with the Provisional Government. Klembovskiy was in a trickier spot, because he had refused the Supreme Command when so instructed by Kerensky. Klembovskiy adopted a stance of neutrality and made no effort to support either side. Klembovskiy explained his behavior to the Investigative Commission in the following manner:

In general I adhered to the policy that the military should not interfere in politics, and should exclusively devote its efforts to operational questions. If I had started to interfere in politics and written various appeals then it could have been harmful to military operations. To divert the army from its most important tasks at such a serious moment was impossible.¹³⁰

Kornilov received the most support at *Stavka*, whose officers knew of Kornilov's prior agreement with the government and believed that L'ov had acted as Kerensky's emissary. These officers evidently felt a certain obligation of military honor to stay by the Supreme Commander's side in light of what they perceived as his shabby treatment by the government. Even the Officers' Union, often portrayed as a nest of reactionary officers, was not four-square behind Kornilov. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Govorov, head of the Officers' Union in the 10th Army on the Western Front, appealed to all members of the Union to remain subordinate to the Provisional Government and remain focused on their "only task, to raise the fighting capacity of the army for saving the Motherland from foreign invasion." He reminded Officers' Union members that the first

¹²⁹ GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 57–68, 71–74; Loukomsy, *Memoirs of the Russian Revolution*, p. 112; VOSR: *Razgrom*, pp. 447–448; Martynov, *Kornilov*, pp. 102, 114–116.

¹³⁰ GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 31, l. 1; GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 83, l. 20; GARE, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 83, ll. 14–17; RGVIA, f. 366, op. 2, d. 99, ll. 172–179; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, II, pp. 193–202; Wildman, "Officers of the General Staff," pp. 95–96.

clause of their regulations stated that the Union was a purely professional organization with no political platform.¹³¹

Summary

The Kornilov affair was a case of military intervention in politics, but it hardly conforms to any reasonable definition of a military coup. This in no way resembled a well-planned military conspiracy. Kornilov's intervention came only after his agreement with the Provisional Government broke down because of a bizarre series of circumstances. To the extent there was intervention by Kornilov, it was stimulated by his belief that the government's policies were leading to the disintegration of the armed forces and inevitable military defeat. Domestic structure in that sense represented not just an opportunity, but a motive in itself. When the state is disintegrating, it is impossible for the armed forces to remain completely aloof from sovereign power issues.

The other aspect of opportunity, organizational structure, was less important. The commissar at *Stavka* was part of the negotiations between Kornilov and Kerensky, and the counterintelligence officer there found no evidence of a plot. Internal divisions within the army, particularly between officers and troops, played a role in the outcome of the affair after Kerensky denounced Kornilov, but equally important was the fact that when Krymov started his mission it was in agreement with the government, and neither he nor his troops were prepared for the sudden turn in events. There is little evidence that the rest of the officer corps was deterred from supporting Kornilov by the prospect of failure, because initially both the government and *Stavka* thought that Kornilov was likely to succeed.

A corporate interest account is consistent with those historians who contend that there was a military conspiracy behind Kornilov, because the encroachments on officer autonomy in 1917 represent a clear grounds for military intervention from this perspective. I found the evidence for a Kornilov plot weak, and thus I see the corporate interest explanation as not compelling.

Kornilov clearly violated organizational norms against military intervention when he revolted on August 27. The repeated protests by Kornilov and his defenders, such as Denikin, that Kornilov had no personal ambitions and no political goals, and that he only sought the preservation of Russia, were an attempt to justify the violation of an existing norm of civilian supremacy. In Kornilov's defense, the circumstances under which he revolted on August 27 were extreme. But culture was clearly overridden in this case by other concerns related to domestic structure.

¹³¹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 14, l. 61; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 24, l. 11.

The failure of the rest of the officer corps to act in support of Kornilov can be explained by their organizational culture. Given the chaos and disintegration around them, the relative *inactivity* of the officer corps is best explained by norms that inhibited military intervention. Their apolitical stance is shown even more clearly in the next section, in which the October Revolution and the Bolshevik rise to power are discussed.

THE OFFICER CORPS AND THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

The Bolshevik party took power in Petrograd on the night of October 25–26. Was this a revolution or a coup d'état? Most observers at the time apparently saw it as a reckless coup, and they predicted that the Bolsheviks would be unable to hold power. In the end, it took a bloody civil war for the Bolsheviks to consolidate their rule. On the other hand, there are strong grounds for calling the October events a revolution, given the considerable popular support the Bolsheviks had in late 1917 in the major cities of the country. Allan Wildman's description of the "so-called 'October Revolution' of 1917" strikes me as the most apt; he notes that October "was concurrently a *social upheaval* and a *contest for power*."¹³²

The officer corps and the high command, like the rest of Russian society, had to define their stance toward the Bolshevik assumption of power in Petrograd. To many officers the Bolsheviks were little more than German agents trying to undermine the Russian state from within. Lenin had called for the abolition of the army, and the Bolsheviks had made their hostility toward the officer corps clear. Given the Bolsheviks' positions on the war and the army, one might have expected a more forceful and consistent reaction on the part of the military leadership to the October events. Although the high command at *Stavka* did try to send troops to Petrograd in support of the Provisional Government, these efforts were somewhat half-hearted, and the commander of the vital Northern Front acted to impede the dispatch of troops to Petrograd. Even more remarkably, perhaps, *Stavka* capitulated to the Bolsheviks without resistance a month later. This passive stance can be explained partially by the calculation that there was no opportunity for action given the uncontrollability of the troops, but also by officer corps' beliefs that domestic political activity was inappropriate and that their primary mission was to remain at the front and defend the state. In October and November 1917, officers were not prepared to launch a civil war to defeat the Bolsheviks; this action would come later, and it only really gathered steam once the war was over.

¹³² Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, II, p. 262 (emphasis in original). On this debate, see Pipes, *Russian Revolution*; Pipes, "1917 and the Revisionists"; Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution*, pp. 167–209; Suny, "Toward a Social History" Ronald Grigor Suny, "Revision and Retreat in the Historiography of 1917: Social History and its Critics," *Russian Review*, 53 (1994), 165–182.

In this section I examine the October Revolution (if I can be permitted this loaded term), the Bolshevik take-over at *Stavka*, and the response of the armed forces. I first discuss the relevant political and military developments, and then I provide an explanation for officer corps' behavior.

The Bolshevik Victory and the Military

The Kornilov affair further undermined the tottering Provisional Government and was a fillip for the Bolshevik party. Conservative elements in society felt betrayed by Kerensky, and the masses lost faith in him and turned even more to the Soviets to represent their interests. The Bolsheviks gained most of all, as they were most responsive to mass demands for immediate peace and land.¹³³

The effects of the Kornilov affair in the armed forces were devastating. The split between the officer corps and the troops became more pronounced than ever. More arrests of officers by their troops took place, and on the Northern Front one commander reported that "there is complete distrust towards the high command staff and there are voices among the soldiers that the entire command staff should be raised on bayonets." Similar reports came in from other fronts. Verkhovskiy, who had been promoted to General and War Minister due to his perceived service to the revolution during the Kornilov affair, noted in his diary that "the masses look at their officers like a convict looks at his chain." A sharp growth in support among the soldiers for the Bolsheviks was noted by multiple observers, particularly on the Northern and Western Fronts.¹³⁴

The "social upheaval" in the country, as Wildman notes, was accompanied by a "contest for power." Dual power had given way to a general feeling of powerlessness, particularly on the part of the Provisional Government. The Socialist Revolutionary S. Mstislavskiy later remarked that "power was in essence lying on the ground. In order to pick it up . . . it was enough to bend over." Lenin not only grasped this fact but was determined to act on it. In September the Bolsheviks secured a majority in the Petrograd Soviet, and on September 25 a Bolshevik-dominated Presidium was elected with Trotsky as chair. At about the same time the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet decided, under Bolshevik prompting, to call a nationwide (Second)

¹³³ Schapiro, *1917*, pp. 118–119; Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, pp. 165–167; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 223–226; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, pp. 435–446, 546, 557; Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 121–124.

¹³⁴ The two direct quotes in this paragraph are from: RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1800, ll. 379–380; Verkhovskiy, *Rossiia na golgofe*, p. 127. Additional support for these conclusions include: RGVIA, f. 366, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 104–110; RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1800, ll. 386–400, 430–435; Verkhovskiy, *Rossiia na golgofe*, pp. 111–112, 114, 123, 125–127; "Iz dnevnika gen. V. G. Boldyreva," *KA*, No. 23, 1927, 263; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 224–290; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, pp. 435–557.

Congress of Soviets in Petrograd for late October. Lenin worked throughout October to persuade the rest of the Bolshevik leadership to seize power prior to the Second Congress of Soviets in order to present the Congress with a *fait accompli*.¹³⁵

The seizure of power in the capital required an armed force to carry out the operation. On October 9 the Petrograd Soviet formed a Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) to defend the capital against “counterrevolution.” The specific catalyst for the formation of the MRC was the announcement, in the second week of October, that the Provisional Government intended to move troops from the Petrograd garrison to the front. The Commander of the Northern Front, General V. A. Cheremisov, opposed this step, convinced that more unreliable troops were the last thing he needed. The government went ahead anyway, and the fear that they might be sent to the front inclined most of the Petrograd garrison to either remain neutral or side with the Bolsheviks during the seizure of power. Kerensky seemed unaware that he had very few reliable troops to resist a Bolshevik attempt to seize power, the prospect of which by the second half of October was an open secret.¹³⁶

The Bolshevik take-over really began on October 21–23, when the MRC made a largely successful bid to wrest political control over the Petrograd garrison from the Provisional Government. On October 23 the MRC gained control over the Peter and Paul Fortress, overlooking the Winter Palace, and the neighboring Kronwerk Arsenal. By October 24, Bolshevik efforts to grab key government buildings were well underway, and the government finally woke up to the fact that it had few reliable troops in the capital. The main force on the government side consisted of military school cadets and the Women’s Battalion; even Cossack units in the capital refused to support the Provisional Government. Much of the military activity on the Soviet side, meanwhile, was carried out by Baltic Fleet sailors and Red Guards, sometimes acting independently of the MRC.¹³⁷

The final act in the struggle for Petrograd, as during the February Revolution, was played out at the front. Efforts to order troops from the front began in earnest on October 25. Kerensky ordered Cheremisov, the Northern Front commander, to dispatch two Cossack divisions and several other units to Petrograd; Cheremisov immediately carried out this order. Kerensky himself fled Petrograd the morning of the 25th in search of reliable troops from the

¹³⁵ Mstiskavskiy is quoted in Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, p. 577. On Bolshevik party politics in September and October, see Schapiro, 1917, pp. 121–128; Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, pp. 168–208.

¹³⁶ Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, 224–248; Schapiro, 1917, pp. 128–132; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 290–294; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, pp. 559–578.

¹³⁷ Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, pp. 241–272; Rex A. Wade, “The Red Guards: Spontaneity and the October Revolution,” in Frankel, Frankel, and Knei-Paz, *Revolution in Russia*, pp. 65–69.

front. By the evening of October 25 more than an entire corps had been dispatched toward Petrograd.¹³⁸

Cheremisov was in touch with officers at the General Staff in Petrograd, located across Palace Square from the Winter Palace, several times on the 25th. He was told that even the most disciplined units were abandoning their posts, that “the government is deprived of the remnants of power,” and that the Cossacks were disobeying orders and refusing to leave the barracks. Chaos reigned at the General Staff, the situation was regarded as hopeless, and a conversation between Cheremisov and the staff broke off when it was reported that the building was being seized by the MRC and that the staff was stopping work and leaving immediately. Cheremisov also undoubtedly knew that the Bolsheviks had made considerable inroads among the troops of his front in September and October; Bolsheviks represented a plurality of Northern Front delegates to the Second Congress of Soviets, and with their allies the Left SRs were a majority.¹³⁹

At 10:00 P.M. on October 25, Cheremisov ordered that all forces dispatched from the Northern Front toward Petrograd should come to a halt. Cheremisov had been skeptical about the use of front troops in Petrograd from the beginning. On October 23 he received an order to have troops ready to send to Petrograd if necessary; Cheremisov handed the order to his commissar, W. S. Voytinskiy, stating, “This is political and has nothing to do with me. . . . You can try to execute it if you think it can be done.” The news from Petrograd obviously reinforced his prior belief that the front army should not be used in what he called the “political scrape” in Petrograd. When a demoralized Kerensky arrived at Pskov on the evening of the 25th, Cheremisov apparently persuaded Kerensky that further resistance was futile, and Cheremisov later insisted that the order to halt the troops moving on Petrograd came from Kerensky. Kerensky even suggested at one point that he would name Cheremisov as Supreme Commander in his stead.¹⁴⁰

Kerensky reversed himself the morning of October 26 and decided to continue his bid to march on Petrograd with troops from the front. Kerensky was persuaded to continue by front commissar Voytinskiy, Quartermaster

¹³⁸ Many of the key telegrams and documents on the high command and the October Revolution have been published. See, in particular, G. N. Golikov, ed., *VOSR: Oktyabr'skoye voozuzbennoye vosstaniye v Petrograde. Dokumenty i materialy* [hereafter *VOSR: Vosstaniye*] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1957), especially, pp. 277–278, 399–426, 593–663; “Oktyabr' na fronte,” *KA*, Nos. 23–24, 1927, 149–194, 71–107; “Stavka 25–26 Oktyabrya 1917 g.,” *Arkhiv russkoy revolyutsii* [hereafter *ARR*], Vol. 7, 1922, 279–320. On these specific orders, see *VOSR: Vosstaniye*, pp. 399, 593–594; “Stavka 25–26 Oktyabrya,” 286–291.

¹³⁹ *VOSR: Vosstaniye*, pp. 403, 407–408; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, p. 286.

¹⁴⁰ Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 294–298 (quote, p. 294); Katkov, *Kornilov Affair*, pp. 128–129; *VOSR: Vosstaniye*, pp. 411–413, 603–609.

General of the Northern Front Baranovskiy (Kerensky's brother-in-law), and General P. N. Krasnov, the commander of the Third Cavalry Corps. All of them thought that Cheremisov was being overly pessimistic and thereby dooming the Provisional Government's real chances for success. Kerensky and Krasnov set off to rejoin Krasnov's units, which had been halted in transit the night before on Cheremisov's order. Krasnov really only commanded a division, and not a corps, since the other two divisions in the corps were scattered across the Northern Front and unable to join up with him, and even the First Don Cossack Division under his command was far from full strength.¹⁴¹

Kerensky continued to order additional units from *Stavka* and the Northern Front as he and Krasnov moved on Petrograd. General N. N. Dukhonin, the Chief of Staff at Mogilev, believed that plenty of troops were en route and that Krasnov and Kerensky would have a more than adequate force. Most of these units suffered from resistance of the troops and delays imposed by the railroad workers en route. Cheremisov believed that sending more troops from the Northern Front was dangerous because it would cause the army to split into competing factions. He persuaded Dukhonin on October 27 to halt the movement of troops from the 12th Army under his command. Cheremisov noted that two of his three front army committees were pro-Bolshevik, and various units had discussed going to Petrograd to assist the revolution. Cheremisov believed that all troop movements in support of either side should stop, since otherwise the situation "could lead to a civil war at the front and to the collapse of the front." Thus when Krasnov went into battle against pro-Bolshevik forces (mainly sailors and Red Guards) on October 30 on the outskirts of Petrograd he was heavily outgunned. Krasnov in fact had only about 1,000 troops compared to the 10–20 thousand armed men (I hesitate to call them troops) on the Bolshevik side. Krasnov's Cossacks opted to negotiate, and a cease-fire was worked out. Kerensky fled the scene before he could be handed over to the Bolshevik side, and the whole affair was over.¹⁴²

Soviet Power and the Capitulation of Stavka

The Bolsheviks had now temporarily secured power in Petrograd. Their seizure of power had received the backing of the Second Congress of Soviets, which opened in Petrograd on October 25. Many Bolsheviks and all Mensheviks and SRs, as well as most army units, believed that the Congress's call for a Soviet-based government implied the formation of a broad-based

¹⁴¹ VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, pp. 603–609; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 295–298.

¹⁴² Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 298–307; "Oktyabr na fronte," *KA*, No. 23, 155–156, 166–167, 171–173, 176–182; VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, pp. 610–613, 638–640.

socialist government. The most important policy decisions of the Second Congress were the decrees on land and peace, which called for an immediate peace and the transfer of private lands to peasant committees without compensation for the landlords.¹⁴³

The Bolsheviks also successfully seized power in Moscow by November 2. The Moscow Soviet, which had a Bolshevik majority, formed a Military Revolutionary Committee on October 25. Resistance, including from the military, was much more fierce than in Petrograd, and more than 1,000 people died in a week of fighting. It seems that much of the military opposition came from students at military academies and that many officers did not participate on either side. The Western Front, which was the closest to Moscow, was experiencing difficulties similar to those of the Northern Front, and the Chief of Staff of the front, General R. F. Val'ter, feared the consequences among the troops of trying to send reinforcements to either Petrograd or Moscow.¹⁴⁴

Despite Bolshevik victories in the two most important cities, many Russian elites, including the military leadership, remained convinced that the Bolsheviks' days were numbered. Dukhonin, now the acting Supreme Commander, continued to command the troops at his own discretion while he waited for the political situation to become more clear. He ordered all troops to remain at the front and continue to fulfill their "duty to the motherland" while political negotiations on the formation of a new government were conducted.¹⁴⁵

A key card in the Bolshevik deck was their effort to secure an immediate peace and thus further undermine the high command. On November 7, Lenin directed Dukhonin to begin negotiations immediately with the enemy on a cease-fire, to be followed by peace talks. The next day Lenin, Stalin, and N. V. Krylenko, on behalf of Sovnarkom, contacted Dukhonin and asked him what steps he was taking to implement the government's instructions. Dukhonin replied that only a government supported by the country and the army would have enough weight with the enemy to be able to achieve meaningful results.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Schapiro, 1917, pp. 133–134; Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, pp. 291–298, 301–304, 306; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, pp. 616–617, 643–645.

¹⁴⁴ Schapiro, 1917, pp. 154–155; John L. H. Keep, "The Spread of Bolshevism to the Interior: 1917–1918," in Shukman, *Blackwell Encyclopedia*, p. 201; A. G. Kavtaradze, *Voyennye spetsialisty na sluzhbe Respubliki Sovetov 1917–1920 gg.* (Mosvka: "Nauka," 1988), pp. 33–34; "Oktyabr na fronte," *KA*, No. 23, 173–176; A. Shlyapnikov, "Oktyabr'skiy perevorot i stavka," *KA*, No. 8, 1925, 166–167.

¹⁴⁵ Schapiro, 1917, pp. 139–142; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 297, 302–303; David R. Jones, "The Officers and the October Revolution," *Soviet Studies*, 28 (1976), 212–216; VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, p. 805.

¹⁴⁶ The story of the Bolshevik peace campaign of November 1917 is told in detail by Wildman: Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 379–405. Most of the relevant

The Bolsheviks responded to Dukhonin's refusal by dismissing him as Supreme Commander and appointing in his place Krylenko, a Bolshevik activist with limited military experience and no command experience who held the rank of ensign (*praporshchik*). Dukhonin replied that he could only give up power to a government that had the support of the majority of the people. "I am completely unconcerned with the political face of that authority," Dukhonin stated, "since at the current moment merely an authority as such is necessary." Dukhonin continued to concern himself with operational matters and trying to maintain some semblance of authority at the front.¹⁴⁷

Krylenko, in the meantime, was doing his best to make Dukhonin's position untenable. Krylenko set out for the Northern Front on November 11, announcing that he was going to the front to secure peace. He summoned Cheremisov to meet him. Cheremisov refused, asking Krylenko to come to him so he could tell Krylenko why his peace efforts were "impracticable." Krylenko did not go to see Cheremisov but pushed on to the Fifth Army on the Northern Front, where the commander, General V. G. Boldyrev, also refused to meet with Krylenko. The morning of November 12, Krylenko addressed a meeting of the Fifth Army Committee at which he declared his intention to secure peace, over the "corpses" of the "counterrevolutionary command staff" if necessary.¹⁴⁸

The Bolsheviks had considerable support in the Fifth Army and on November 13 Boldyrev was arrested. Cheremisov asked Dukhonin to be relieved of his command. Dukhonin urged him to remain "for the good of the motherland," but by November 15 Cheremisov's Chief of Staff, General S. G. Lukirskiy, was acting front commander. General V. V. Antipov, who had been a corps commander, assumed the command of the Fifth Army. Lukirskiy contacted Antipov on November 15 to find out if Antipov was a "Krylenko protégé." Antipov stated that he had told Krylenko that he considered politics in the army to be "completely intolerable" and that he had never involved himself in politics and would not do so. Lukirskiy seemed satisfied and thereby "appointed" Antipov as Commander of the Fifth Army. The next day, however, Antipov asked to be removed "for health reasons."¹⁴⁹

The situation on the Western Front was similarly chaotic and difficult for the command staff. On December 12 the Minsk MRC asked General Baluyev

documents on *Stavka* and the Bolshevik campaign are published as "Nakanune peremiriya," *KA*, No. 23, 1927, 195–249. On the specific points here, see "Nakanune peremiriya," 197–201; L. S. Gaponenko, ed., *Oktyabr'skaya revolyutskiya i armiya: 25 oktyabrya 1917 g.–mart 1918 g. Sbornik dokumentov* [hereafter *ORA*] (Moskva; "Nauka," 1973), pp. 83–85.

¹⁴⁷ *ORA*, pp. 85–86; "Nakanune peremiriya," 206; Shukman, *Blackwell Encyclopedia*, pp. 335–336.

¹⁴⁸ "Nakanune peremiriya," 208, 223–227; *ORA*, pp. 110–111.

¹⁴⁹ "Nakanune peremiriya," 223–227; *ORA*, pp. 110–111; *RGVIA*, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1802, ll. 77–87, 157.

to enter into armistice negotiations with the Germans. Baluyev replied that he did not take orders from the MRC and would not enter into negotiations; he also said that if the MRC resorted to force, he would resign. Despite Dukhonin's protests and suggestion that the Western Front military leadership resist the MRC with force, virtually the entire top command staff of the front resigned. The Chief of Staff of the front, General Val'ter, told *Stavka* that it would be impossible to resist the MRC, "on whose side are all the troops of the front." Much of the Western Front staff decided to stay in place, however, arguing that the situation was temporary and that they could not leave administrative control either to "completely inexperienced people" or to "the winds of fate." They agreed to stay in their posts on the condition that they be removed from politics and that they play no role in the peace negotiations, a position that *Stavka* endorsed.¹⁵⁰

Dukhonin continued to believe that the Bolshevik position was weak and that *Stavka* could hold out. The peace negotiations would fail, Dukhonin argued, because neither the Germans nor the allies took the Bolsheviks seriously. Dukhonin also made arrangements to resist with force any attempt by Krylenko to move on *Stavka*. He appealed to all political parties to solve the question of state authority and asked the troops to not be fooled by promises of peace, warning them of Russia's possible enslavement to imperial Germany.¹⁵¹

Dukhonin's position, however, was becoming more tenuous by the day. Already he had lost control over the Northern and Western Fronts. The Bolsheviks were weaker on the Southwestern and Rumanian Fronts, but their peace proposals resonated with the troops there also. The political situation on these latter two fronts was even more chaotic because on November 6 the Ukrainian Rada (Council) had declared the founding of the Ukrainian People's Republic and on November 7 the Cossack Ataman General Kaledin proclaimed a Don Republic and invited the Bolsheviks' opponents to come to the region to organize resistance. The Germans, moreover, had proved quite happy to enter into negotiations on a cease-fire directly with Russian units at the local level, since a separate peace on the Eastern Front would free up resources for the war in the west.¹⁵²

By November 18, Dukhonin and *Stavka* had apparently decided that further resistance was pointless. The All-Army Committee based at *Stavka*, which had remained loyal to Dukhonin while many of the front committees were becoming pro-Bolshevik, stated its desire to avoid bloodshed and

¹⁵⁰ "Nakanune peremiriya," 215–218; ORA, 116–120; RGVA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1812, ll. 246–253.

¹⁵¹ "Nakanune peremiriya," 218–220, 223, 226, 229–231; RGVA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1802, ll. 31–37.

¹⁵² Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 350–397; Frenkin, *Russkaya armiya*, 618–644; Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union*, pp. 53–73, 114–126; Suny, *Revenge of the Past*, pp. 43–51; Shukman, *Blackwell Encyclopedia*, pp. 205–207, 220–223.

come to an agreement with the Sovnarkom. On the night of November 18 the Mogilev Soviet established a MRC and recognized Krylenko as commander-in-chief. Dukhonin tried to persuade the commander of the Rumanian Front, General Shcherbachev, to take over his position, because he wanted to transfer his command without Bolshevik participation, which would imply “obedience.” Shcherbachev begged off, and he even suggested that the new commander-in-chief be elected by the front and army committees! Dukhonin and the rest of the military leadership also considered moving headquarters to Kiev, but negotiations with the Ukrainian Rada went nowhere and the high command could not decide among themselves.¹⁵³

Krylenko arrived at *Stavka* on November 20, by which point Dukhonin had decided to submit peacefully. Although there were still some units willing to fight, Dukhonin allowed himself to be arrested without incident. One of his last decisions was to order the release of Kornilov and the other officers implicated in the Kornilov affair, who made their way to the Don region to begin organizing what would become the White Volunteer Army. A mob of soldiers, driven perhaps by the release of Kornilov or simple blood lust, attacked Krylenko’s railroad car where Dukhonin was being held, dragged him out, and viciously beat and murdered the last commander-in-chief of the Russian Empire.¹⁵⁴

Explaining Officer Behavior after the October Revolution

The coding of the October Revolution case is a tricky question. The officer corps’s behavior clearly was not a case of military intervention. It is hard to code it as a case of military arbitration, since the military leadership did not really choose anyone as their preferred contender for supreme executive power. The Chief of Staff, Dukhonin, remained loyal to the recognized Supreme Commander, Kerensky, until after Kerensky ran away for good. But the military leadership did not hold to a consistent line, since Cheremisov clearly worked against sending troops to support the Provisional Government. For this reason I have coded this case as *both* military arbitration and military noninvolvement. The military high command was unwilling to recognize the Bolshevik government as legitimate for several weeks, but eventually there were no other viable contenders and the Bolsheviks won by default.

Dukhonin’s stance when the October Revolution broke out is perhaps the easiest to understand. He took orders from the Supreme Commander, Kerensky, and carried them out as best he could until the defeat of Kerensky

¹⁵³ “Nakanune peremiriya,” 236–238; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 399–400; Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, p. 52.

¹⁵⁴ Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, pp. 400–401; Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, pp. 52–53.

and Krasnov's forces. The Provisional Government, Dukhonin remarked in a telegram to the population on October 27, was the "authorized organ of democracy" until the Constituent Assembly convened, and he noted that the front army was prepared to defend the government with force.¹⁵⁵

The activity of Cheremisov, the Northern Front commander, is more difficult to explain. General Krasnov and Cheremisov's front commissar, Voytinskiy, suggest that Cheremisov was a Bolshevik sympathizer and actively working to undermine Kerensky's position. This is clearly not true, since when Krylenko arrived at the Northern Front on November 12 Cheremisov refused to see him. In fact on several occasions Cheremisov made quite disparaging remarks about the Bolsheviks, and he went into emigration after the revolution.¹⁵⁶

Cheremisov justified his opposition to sending troops to Petrograd on three grounds: the need to maintain the front, his opposition to interference in politics, and the futility of the effort. Cheremisov told Dukhonin: "[A]n overwhelming number of front troops and the entire fleet [Baltic] stand for noninterference in the Petrograd political scrape and demand that the army fulfill only its direct task, i.e. the defense of the front. . . ." "The political struggle should not concern us," Cheremisov remarked, and noted that he had restrained units from going to Petrograd to support the Bolsheviks, telling them that "I personally consider the active interference of the army in politics intolerable and therefore I consider it inexpedient in general to send troops to the support of one or the other of the warring parties." Only by taking such a position, Cheremisov said, "have I succeeded so far in preserving the front from collapse. I am pursuing an exclusively operational task, i.e. first of all and only strive to prevent the front from collapsing."¹⁵⁷

Dukhonin's response demonstrates clearly the dilemma faced by the military command. Dukhonin noted the need to maintain the front, but also to follow orders from the existing government. Dukhonin said, "Undoubtedly, the principal task is to firmly maintain the front. . . . On the other hand, I have to be concerned about the attempt of a separate group of the population to seize legitimate power in their hands and impose their will, which could in the most decisive manner affect the defense of the motherland and her vital interests." Dukhonin, however, eventually relented to Cheremisov's protests

¹⁵⁵ VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, p. 609.

¹⁵⁶ P. N. Krasnov, "Na vnutrennem fronte," ARR, Vol. 1, 1922, 143; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, p. 294, note 64; VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, p. 611; "Oktaybr na fronte," KA, No. 23, 184; "Nakanune peremiriya," 224.

¹⁵⁷ VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, pp. 611–612. The order in which communications between *Stavka* and the Northern Front took place is confusing based on the published documents. Based on my archival research, the documents should be read in the following order: VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, pp. 614–615; "Oktaybr na fronte," KA, No. 23, 163–166; VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, pp. 610–613. See RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1807, ll. 259–274. See also Cheremisov's comments in "Oktaybr na fronte," KA, No. 23, 176–182.

that sending troops from the Northern Front “inevitably will lead to civil war and the collapse of the front,” and he agreed that no units would be sent except for the Third Cavalry Corps (Krasnov’s forces).¹⁵⁸

Cheremisov’s stance is perfectly understandable, but he did skirt the boundaries of insubordination. For example, around midnight on October 25 he contacted the commander of the Western Front, Baluyev, and told him that “the Provisional Government in its previous form essentially does not exist” and noted that his front committee had decided to stand neither with the government nor the Bolsheviks. Cheremisov suggested that he and Baluyev “unite their activity and views.” Baluyev replied, “It’s a pity that your forces are participating in politics; we have sworn an oath to the Provisional Government.” Baluyev also noted that military policy was determined by *Stavka*, and not by commanders deciding to unite their views. Cheremisov replied that the Provisional Government no longer existed and that under the circumstances “we do not have the right to evade politics and not take into consideration the political mood of the masses; we are obligated to consider this mood, so that the front does not open up for the enemy.” Baluyev’s position was that “as a soldier, at the current time I recognize only one policy for us – to save the Motherland from the Germans, and on that point I am in solidarity with you.” Baluyev concluded, “It is decisively all the same to me who is in the Provisional Government as long as it exists and it eliminates the ruin that is reigning in Russia.”¹⁵⁹

Cheremisov did not, it appears, ever ignore or disobey a direct order, but he did his best to maneuver Kerensky, Dukhonin, and Baluyev around to his point of view that it would be catastrophic for the army to send troops from the front to deal with the “political squabble” in Petrograd. Dukhonin, Krasnov, Baluyev, Voytinskiy, and Baranovskiy all became suspicious of Cheremisov’s actions and considered his behavior inappropriate if not downright treasonous. Cheremisov was hardly at the mercy of the front committees and MRCs, though, as is sometimes suggested. Cheremisov told the chair of the MRC in Reval that he had taken from the beginning a stance of the army’s noninterference in Petrograd politics, but that Kerensky had nonetheless decided to send troops. Cheremisov noted that because the army must be “an organized army, and not a disorganized crowd,” the orders of the Supreme Commander (Kerensky) and *Stavka* had to be “unquestionably carried out.”¹⁶⁰

It turned out that Cheremisov was right about the difficulty that the military would have in moving troops from his front to Petrograd, and several

¹⁵⁸ VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, pp. 612–613.

¹⁵⁹ VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, pp. 415–417.

¹⁶⁰ VOSR: *Vosstaniye*, pp. 603–609, 611–613; “*Stavka* 25–26 Oktyabrya 1917 g.,” 300, 302–303; “Oktyabr na fronte,” *KA*, No. 23, 182–186; “Oktyabr na fronte,” *KA*, No. 24, 98–105.

of his subordinates, including his Chief of Staff and his army commanders, agreed with him on this point. The Provisional Government's claim to legitimacy was quite weak, both because of the manner in which it took power and because of the nature of "dual power" and the popularity of the Soviets. Cheremisov also felt, along with most other observers, that the Bolsheviks would not last. Despite all of these caveats, Cheremisov's very determination to not interfere in Petrograd politics was a form of political arbitration, because he did not unflinchingly implement government orders.¹⁶¹

The behavior of top generals such as Dukhonin, Baluyev, and Krasnov, on the other hand, should be coded as military noninvolvement in a sovereign power dispute because they carried out orders of the existing government up to the point when that government *de facto* ceased to exist. These officers did so even though there was no love lost between the officer corps and Kerensky, who was blamed for bringing the army to ruin and despised for his duplicitous dealings with Kornilov. Krasnov later reflected on why he had supported Kerensky during the October Revolution, summarizing his thoughts the night of October 25–26 when he went to meet Kerensky: "Yes, I am going. Because it is not to Kerensky I go, but to the Motherland, to great Russia, which I cannot disavow. And if Russia is with Kerensky, then I too will go with him. I will hate and curse him, but I will go and serve and die for Russia."¹⁶²

The difference between the behavior of Cheremisov and the other top generals, although coded differently, should not be exaggerated. All of the high command cared little about which government ruled in Petrograd, as long as they could end the anarchy in the country and army and continue the war effort. The difference in the behavior of different officers was based more on tactical considerations, in conditions of chaos and poor information, than on strategic differences about the proper role of the army.

Once Krasnov's expedition had failed, it became clear to the top military command that there was no sense in offering further resistance. Dukhonin and the front commanders believed that their single task was to attend to operational matters, maintaining order in the army until a legitimate government came into being. The Provisional Government's acting War Minister and the General Staff Chief in Petrograd, Generals A. A. Manikovskiy and V. V. Marushevskiy, agreed to serve the Soviet regime on the condition that they focus entirely on "the daily needs of the army." Marushevskiy noted, "we categorically are removing ourselves from involvement in internal

¹⁶¹ "Oktyabr na fronte," *KA*, No. 23, 163, 168, 176–182, 192–194; "Oktyabr na fronte," *KA*, No. 24, 71–79; *VOSR: Vosstaniye*, 601; "Iz dnevnika gen. V. G. Boldyreva," 263.

¹⁶² Krasnov, "Na vnutrennem fronte," 149, 163. See also Jones, "Officers and the October Revolution," 210–212.

politics.” Manikovskiy and Marushevskiy, however, were arrested by the Bolsheviks on November 19.¹⁶³

Dukhonin complained bitterly to General Shcherbachev, “the situation is, of course, extremely difficult, complicated by the complete bankruptcy in state relations of the political parties, who cannot in any way come to an agreement, leaving the army, primarily the command staff, to disentangle the mess they’ve created.” Despite these bitter feelings, Dukhonin and the rest of *Stavka* capitulated without a fight to Krylenko. The General-Quartermaster at *Stavka*, General M. K. Diterikhs, argued on November 18 that the fact that the allies had communicated their views on a separate peace to Sovnarkom was an “oblique recognition by the allies of Petrograd [i.e., Bolshevik] authority.” Thus, *Stavka* should cancel its plans to evacuate to the South because, “being a strictly military organ, *Stavka* cannot concern itself with the political struggle for power.” Diterikhs persuaded Dukhonin to “save the dignity of a non-political *Stavka*” and submit to arrest when Krylenko arrived. Most of the officers from the various departments at *Stavka* continued to work under Krylenko.¹⁶⁴

Indeed, the willingness of some officers to submit to Bolshevik authority, despite the extreme hostility of the Bolsheviks to the officer corps, was evident even in these early days of Soviet power. On November 19 the new commander of the 12th Army, General V. F. Novitskiy, urged Dukhonin to come to an agreement with the Sovnarkom. Noting that his army committee was pro-Sovnarkom, Novitskiy argued that the only way to “weaken the anarchy that exists in the army” is to come to “an agreement with the new authority.” Even if the command staff disperses, he concluded, “surely Russia and the army will remain and they need in these great and difficult historical minutes courageous, firm, and experienced leadership, which can save them from complete disintegration.”¹⁶⁵

The new temporary commander of the Southwestern Front after the fall of *Stavka*, General N. N. Stogov, complained about the large number of political questions with which he was being forced to deal. The Southwestern Front was particularly chaotic, with the Ukrainian Rada, the Cossacks, and various pro-Sovnarkom Military Revolutionary Committees trying to assert their authority and move troops about in their own political interests. “In relation to politics I stand on the point of view I have stated more than once,” Stogov stressed, “the noninterference in the conflict of political tendencies. . . . Despite that from all sides the appearance of demands about giving this or

¹⁶³ “Oktyabr na fronte,” *KA*, No. 24, 75–79; Shlyapnikov, “Oktyabr’skiy perevorot i stavka,” 166–167; M. N. Pokrovskiy and Ya. A. Yakovlev, eds., *Razlozheniye armii v 1917 godu* (Moskva–Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1925), pp. 167–168; “Nakanune peremiriya,” 197–201; RGVA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1812, ll. 23–24; Kavtaradze, *Voyenmye spetsialisty*, pp. 60–62.

¹⁶⁴ “Nakanune peremiriya,” 228–231, 239–240; Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Vol. II, p. 400; Kavtaradze, *Voyenmye spetsialisty*, p. 58.

¹⁶⁵ *ORA*, pp. 144–145.

that order with a political tinge has not stopped.” Stogov added that given these conditions he would have a hard time taking moral responsibility for further developments, despite his “desire to carry out his soldierly duty to the motherland to the end.”¹⁶⁶

The historian David Jones discerns three main types of officer corps behavior in the aftermath of the October Revolution, and his conclusions are perfectly consistent with the evidence discussed in this section, and throughout the entire chapter, about the existence of a dominant organizational culture and two subcultures in the Russian officer corps during the revolution. One subculture that Jones highlights is the group of officers such as Kornilov, Denikin, and Alekseev, who after the October Revolution went south to try to organize an anti-Bolshevik resistance. Jones maintains that this group was a small one consisting of “the most embittered” officers. A second small group was made up of officers such as Novitskiy, who decided that the Bolsheviks represented the best chance to restore strong power in the state. Jones concludes:

A third group (at first by far the most numerous) tried, like Boldyrev, to remain politically neutral in conditions of growing internal strife. . . . These officers usually attempted to hold the front while a front remained, and then sought to retire temporarily from military life as a means of preserving their neutrality amidst the conflicting claims, appeals and demands of both Whites and Reds.¹⁶⁷

Summary

The opportunity structure for military intervention in October was mixed. State weakness remained a severe problem and presented a real opportunity to seize power, which the Bolsheviks exploited. On the other hand, organizational barriers to army activity were strong due to support for the Bolsheviks among the troops of the Petrograd garrison and the Northern and Western Fronts. It was not counterbalancing, penetration, or officer-corps cleavages that prevented intervention, though, as organizational structure accounts would predict.

In terms of motives, it is hard to imagine a more decisive threat to the military’s corporate interests than the Bolshevik take-over. The Bolshevik party had called for Russia’s defeat in the war, was suspected of working for Germany, and favored the abolition of the armed forces. The military high

¹⁶⁶ RGVA, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1803, ll. 92–101, 142–143, 187–191.

¹⁶⁷ Jones, “Officers and the October Revolution,” 223. See also John Erickson, “The Origins of the Red Army,” in Richard Pipes, ed., *Revolutionary Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 230. A. G. Kavtaradze demonstrates convincingly that the standard Soviet view that the “overwhelming majority” of the officer corps was actively anti-Soviet power in October 1917 is false. At a maximum, Kavtaradze writes, less than three percent of the officer corps was openly against the October Revolution. The majority took a wait-and-see attitude: Kavtaradze, *Voyennye spetsialisty*, pp. 37–38.

command's passive behavior during the October Revolution thus gives additional weight to the organizational culture interpretation. Process tracing of this case has demonstrated that officers were guided in their behavior by their beliefs about the army's proper role in politics, specifically the norm that the military was "outside politics" and should not interfere in party political disputes. This factor combined with organizational structure barriers to intervention to immobilize the officer corps in October.

THE CIVIL WAR

Theories of military coups are not designed to explain such a complex political phenomenon as revolution, and thus at times they have not adequately captured the multiple and mixed opportunities and motivations of officers. This observation applies even more to the ability of these theories to explain military behavior in a civil war. The Russian Civil War lasted three years and cost millions of lives. Military officers were of course key actors on both sides of the lines. In this section I briefly discuss the motivations of officers who fought for the Reds and the Whites.¹⁶⁸

The new Bolshevik regime achieved an armistice with the Germans on December 2, and peace talks opened at Brest-Litovsk on December 9. The Soviet government was initially unwilling to agree to the harsh terms demanded by the Central Powers, and it tried to adopt the policy proposed by Trotsky of "Neither War nor Peace." In the meantime, the new government was busy consolidating Soviet rule at home. By February 1918 most of the old Russian Empire was under Soviet control. The Ukrainian Rada fell in January, and in February the Don Cossack resistance collapsed and the Volunteer Army under the leadership of Generals Alekseev, Kornilov, and Denikin was forced to abandon Rostov and head out onto the steppe.¹⁶⁹

The Volunteer Army was the first and ultimately most important source of resistance to Soviet rule. General Alekseev, the former Supreme Commander who was in retirement after his dismissal, had begun work to create an organization of conservative officers even before the October Revolution, and after the Bolsheviks seized power he endeavored to congregate anti-Bolshevik officers in the Don Cossack region in the south of Russia. Peter Kenez notes, "Alekseev was the first to recognize that in order to fight the Bolsheviks it was necessary to form a new army rather than try to save units of the old one." Very few officers answered Alekseev's call in November 1917, and even many officers in the region (in the Don and Kuban) did

¹⁶⁸ Good general introductions are Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg, and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹⁶⁹ Mawdsley, *Russian Civil War*, pp. 3–29; Schapiro, 1917, pp. 151–169.

not join the Volunteer Army. The entire army was only 4,000 men strong by February 1918 (the size of the Russian officer corps in November 1917 was 250,000).¹⁷⁰

The Volunteer Army was composed of the most bitter officers from the old army. They were ardent patriots and nationalists who believed that the Bolsheviks were leading Russia to ruin. The leaders of the Volunteer Army were committed to continuing the war against Germany. They believed that the Bolsheviks were German agents; thus to continue the war against the enemy, one had to fight both the Bolsheviks and the Germans. Kenez, the major Western historian of the Volunteer army, remarks, “to ask the generals to give up fighting the foreign enemy was to ask them to be something other than they were.”¹⁷¹

While Alekseev, Kornilov, and Denikin were trying without much success to raise a force capable of opposing the Bolsheviks, the new Soviet government continued its efforts to undermine the old army. Evan Mawdsley observes, “by mid-November no one controlled the army.” The Front commanders did their best to hold the army together, but many soldiers and officers drifted away. The Sovnarkom decision in mid-December to introduce elections for commanders further accelerated the collapse, and on January 29 Krylenko announced the demobilization of the entire army. When Trotsky on February 10 (new style; the Russian calendar was synchronized with the Western one on February 1) at Brest-Litovsk declared the end of the war, even though no formal peace treaty had been signed, the Soviet government had no real army to defend the country. Germany attacked on February 18 and took Minsk on February 21 and Kiev on March 2. The Soviet government at that point accepted extremely harsh terms from the Central Powers and signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3.¹⁷²

The most important consequence of the German onslaught on Russia in late February, the so-called Eleven Days War, was the impetus it provided to the Soviet regime to establish a regular army. Utopian plans for a workers’ and peasants’ militia had to be scrapped. The Soviet government appealed to old officers to come to the defense of the motherland, and thousands of officers answered this call; A. G. Kavtaradze, the leading specialist on this question, puts the number at more than 8,000. Mawdsley stresses, “A central fact about the Red Army, one often forgotten, is that it was originally intended for use not against counterrevolutionaries but against the Germans and the Austrians.”¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, pp. 57–71; Mawdsley, *Russian Civil War*, pp. 20–21; Kavtaradze, *Voyemnye spetsialisty*, p. 28.

¹⁷¹ Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, p. 71; Mawdsley, *Russian Civil War*, pp. 20–21, 165; Kenez, “Ideology of the White Movement,” pp. 74–75.

¹⁷² Mawdsley, *Russian Civil War*, pp. 31–37.

¹⁷³ Kavtaradze, *Voyemnye spetsialisty*, pp. 70, 166; Mawdsley, *Russian Civil War*, p. 59.

Many of these old army officers that came to the defense of the Soviet regime, labeled “military specialists” by the Bolsheviks, were quite explicit about their patriotic motives and the fact that they had not decided to join the Red Army out of love for Bolshevism. These officers stated their opposition to any involvement in civil war, but they were prepared to work for the defense of the country from external attack, which they saw as their duty to the motherland. One early recruit to the Red Army in February 1918 was General D. P. Parskiy, who told General M. D. Bonch-Bruyevich, head of the Soviet Supreme Military Council, “I am far from this socialism that your Bolsheviks preach. But I am ready to work honorably not only with them, but with anyone, even the Devil and his disciples, if only to save Russia from German slavery.”¹⁷⁴

Thus, many of the officers fighting for both the Reds and the Whites saw themselves as defending the fatherland against external invaders. This was a particularly important motivation for the “military specialists,” but even the Volunteer Army officers, who were quite clearly focused on fighting inside Russia, saw the war against the Bolsheviks as a continuation of and inextricably linked to the war against Germany. Many who supported the Whites apparently saw Brest-Litovsk as further proof that the Bolsheviks were German spies. For the “military specialists,” as Mawdsley points out, the enlistment in the Soviet army in February 1918 to fight against Germany served “as a bridge – a one-way bridge – to the service of the Soviet regime and to battles on the ‘internal’ front.” Once they had enlisted in the Red Army for patriotic reasons, it was easier to redirect them internally once the German threat had passed. The Soviet regime probably would not have survived without the assistance of the “military specialists,” who filled an overwhelming majority of the top command and staff positions in the Red Army during the Civil War.¹⁷⁵

It is important to stress that, although thousands of officers joined the Soviet and Volunteer armies in late 1917–early 1918, hundreds of thousands of officers remained neutral. The vast majority of the old officer corps had no stomach for civil war. As David Jones puts it, these officers believed that “their duty was to defend the ‘Fatherland,’ not decide who best represented it.” The former Supreme Commander, General Brusilov, was asked by younger officers in early 1918 what they should do. According to Jones, “he [Brusilov] repeatedly reminded them that governments could come and go, but Russia would remain; an officer should therefore remain aloof from the civil strife, and wait until he could again honorably serve the nation against

¹⁷⁴ Kavtaradze, *Voyennye spetsialisty*, pp. 65, 69–70; Mawdsley, *Russian Civil War*, pp. 60–61 (including the Parskiy quote); Erickson, “Origins of the Red Army,” pp. 243, 253.

¹⁷⁵ V. M. Voynov, “Ofitserskiy korpus belykh armiy na vostoche strany (1918–1920 gg.),” *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, No. 6, 1994, 53; Mawdsley, *Russian Civil War*, p. 61; Kavtaradze, *Voyennye spetsialisty*, pp. 198–226.

its external foes.” Brusilov himself, like many other officers, eventually joined the Soviet army only after the Polish invasion of April 1920.¹⁷⁶

As the Civil War continued, it became more difficult for officers, as for the rest of the Russian population, to remain completely outside the conflict. Both the Reds and the Whites introduced conscription in the second half of 1918. Many of the officers drawn into the civil war ended up on one side or the other because of nonpolitical motives, such as where they and their families lived or with whom they had personal or professional ties. Even many of those who ended up in the Red Army from the very first days of the October Revolution did so not because of commitment to the Bolshevik cause but out of a sense of patriotism, duty, and what Jones calls “professional inertia.” Kavtaradze stresses that many officers that ended up serving the Whites did so because they lived in regions under White control and the pressure of material circumstances; a similar observation could be made about those fighting on the Soviet side.¹⁷⁷

A striking and strange aspect of the Russian Civil War is that most of the officers fighting and dying on both sides seemed to care little about the political and ideological issues that were allegedly central to the conflict. This is seen most clearly on the Soviet side. Bonch-Bruyevich noted in the summer of 1918 that many of the officers living in the area controlled by the Bolsheviks were reluctant to join the Red Army because they saw it as a narrow class- and party-based force more for fighting counterrevolution than for defense of the state against external enemies. Those who did volunteer, who represented less than ten percent of the officers living in the Soviet zone, did so out of patriotism and the habit of military service, and perhaps economic necessity. Material circumstances and coercion certainly played a role for those old army officers that were enlisted in the Red Army once conscription of officers started in the second half of 1918. Kavtaradze, quoting an unnamed “military specialist,” says that most of them upheld the “basic principle of no involvement in politics and service exclusively in military affairs.” As the Bolshevik regime endured, many old tsarist officers came to accept it as the legitimate Russian government. One reason for the Bolshevik victory, Mawdsley emphasizes, was that “the Bolsheviks were able and willing to make use of much of the apolitical debris of the Tsarist state, including the army officer-corps.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ David R. Jones, “The Officers and the Soviets, 1917–1920: A Study in Motives,” in David R. Jones, ed., *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual*, Vol. I (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1977), pp. 177–178, 181; Kavtaradze, *Voyenmye spetsialisty*, p. 169; Voynov, “Ofiterskiy korpus belykh armiy,” 62; Brusilov, *Soldier’s Notebook*, pp. 326–327; Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, p. 71; Kenez, “Ideology of the White Movement,” p. 66.

¹⁷⁷ Jones, “Officers and the Soviets,” pp. 178–180; Kavtaradze, *Voyenmye spetsialisty*, p. 49; Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, p. 278.

¹⁷⁸ Kavtaradze, *Voyenmye spetsialisty*, pp. 95–97, 211, 220–221; Jones, “Officers and the Soviets”; Mawdsley, *Russian Civil War*, p. 285.

It is less true of the Whites that they did not care about politics. The White political leadership, unlike on the Soviet side, was dominated by officers; the territory under White control was essentially under the rule of military dictatorship. The White leadership, though, seemed to have no clear ideology other than a conservative, patriotic nationalism. For the White leadership, the Bolsheviks were not compatriots but an evil and alien force that had taken over their country; for many White officers this feeling expressed itself as a paranoid and vociferous anti-Semitism. The White military leadership continued to express the old maxim of the Imperial army, that the military is “outside politics.” Denikin, the leader of the Volunteer Army for most of its existence, argued that the White officers had little interest in political or class warfare. They were, he argued, fighting for the very existence of Russia. The Whites put forward no clear political program, arguing that they did not want to predetermine the future state system, which was a question to be addressed by the Russian people. General N. N. Yudenich, the commander of the White Northwestern Army, adopted the slogan, “Against the Bolsheviks, without Politics.” The leader of the Russian Army in the East, Admiral A. V. Kolchak, adopted a similar attitude toward politics.¹⁷⁹

Kenez notes the absurdity of trying to be “above politics” during a civil war. But there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the White officers on this point. They were not, as Kenez makes clear, the reactionary monarchists of Soviet demonology, although there were clearly both monarchists and reactionaries on the White side. Most leading White officers were patriots and nationalists, fighting for the idea of “Russia” more than any other idea. Kenez concludes that the primary reason for the White failure was not military but political: “The leaders of the Volunteer Army were such poor politicians that they did not understand the nature of the war they were fighting. They misunderstood politics to such an extent that they believed it could simply be avoided. Such ostrich-like behavior invited disaster.”¹⁸⁰

Summary

The Russian Civil War clearly represents a case of military intervention in politics, the largest in Russian history. Which side represented the legitimate government of Russia is a political and ideological question that will not be resolved here.

¹⁷⁹ Denikin, *Yudenich. Vrangeli: Revolyutsiya i grazhdanskaya voyna v opisaniyakh belogvardeytssev* (Moskva: Otechestvo, 1991), pp. 15, 18, n. 1; Denikin, *Ocherki*, I(2), pp. 10, 111; II, p. 14; Mawdsley, *Russian Civil War*, pp. 95–99, 107–110, 135–136, 165, 197, 280; Kenez, “Ideology of the White Movement”; Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, pp. 204, 210–211, 280; Voynov, “Ofitserskiy korpus belykh armiy.”

¹⁸⁰ Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, p. 280; Kenez, “Ideology of the White Movement.”

The four civil–military relations theories being tested are not well equipped to explain behavior during a civil war, but several of them contain important insights. The domestic structure approach highlights how various social groups, including the military, got drawn into sovereign power issues during a period of state collapse. Lack of military cohesion clearly was not a barrier to military involvement in sovereign power issues. Consistent with the empirical literature, but in opposition to the logic of the organizational structure perspective, army disunity was more a contributor to intervention than a barrier to it.

In terms of motives, the corporate interest approach fares poorly as an explanation for military involvement in the civil war, since much bigger issues were at stake than narrow military ones. The organizational culture perspective also encounters problems. Many officers violated previous apolitical group norms, while simultaneously defending their actions in terms of this culture. Most officers maintained that they were supposed to protect the country from external enemies and remain aloof from domestic politics. These officers did their best to sit out the Civil War. For most officers of the Imperial Russian Army, the Civil War was not an opportunity to grab power but a national tragedy that, like the rest of the population, they were unable to avoid.

CONCLUSION

The armed forces were a key player during the Russian Revolution and Civil War. The officer corps encountered a contradictory mix of structural opportunities and barriers, of motives to intervene and norms against intervention. Weighing the evidence is complicated by the fact that some of the theories are wrong for the right reasons, while others are right for the wrong reasons.

Domestic structure is an essential part of the explanation. The extreme weakness of the Russian state created a situation in which the army could not avoid participation in domestic politics. In February and October the military was almost quite literally dragged into politics against its will. The Kornilov affair and the Civil War were both in part efforts by a small group of officers to take action to prevent army and state collapse, although the Kornilov affair would not have happened without a bizarre series of events that is impossible to describe as a planned coup attempt. Military *involvement* in sovereign power issues, if not intervention, was clearly a product of low state political capacity.

Organizational structure was only a partial guide to military behavior, and when correct it was right for the wrong reasons. Counterbalancing was never an issue, and penetration by police spies and political commissars had little effect on officer behavior. The internal divisions in the officer corps that mattered were more ideational than structural. The one way in which lack

of cohesion mattered in the army was the split between troops and officers, a factor overlooked in the literature.

From the time of the February Revolution there were strong corporate interest motives for military intervention. And sections of the military did intervene during both the Kornilov affair and the Civil War. But it would be incorrect to describe either of these efforts as motivated by threats to the army's resources, position, or autonomy. Officers were pulled into high politics against their will because of state collapse. Threats to the military's autonomy and even existence were not defended by vigorous efforts to intervene in politics. This is seen most clearly in the case of the October Revolution and its aftermath, when the military put up little resistance to the seizure of power by a revolutionary party completely hostile to military interests. When the corporate interest approach does correctly predict intervention, it is right for the wrong reasons.

Organizational culture, on the other hand, was often wrong for the right reasons. Prior to 1917 the dominant culture stressed the importance of civilian supremacy and the impermissibility of military involvement in sovereign power issues. This norm was violated by leading officers on several occasions. But organizational culture still provides a very good account for many of the decisions made by officers. Throughout the revolution, officers were motivated by their previously held beliefs about their proper role in politics, particularly a commitment to external defense and of remaining "outside politics." Even when officers violated this norm of civilian supremacy, particularly during the Civil War, it continued to shape their thinking and behavior. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the revolution and Civil War is how long it took to push the officer corps to intervene, despite the collapse of the state, the prospect of military defeat, and the serious threats to their interests that the revolution entailed. In many countries it takes much less to bring about a military coup.

In general, the combination of external war, revolution, and civil war makes this case a difficult one for civil-military relations theory. Officers groped their way ahead in unfamiliar territory under contradictory and severe pressures. Ultimately, they were no match for Lenin and the Bolsheviks.