

The Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918–1920: The Diplomacy of Chaos

By IAN C. D. MOFFAT. Basingstoke: Houndsmills, Palgrave Macmillan. 2015. £63.00. Hardback. ISBN: 9781137435712.

If there is one facet of the tumultuous events agitated by the Russian Revolution that Ian C. D. Moffat is keen to underscore it is the sheer pandemonium unleashed by that great insurrection. Like its French forebear's impact on the nineteenth century, the Russian Revolution leapt from its Eurasian cradle, shaping the twentieth century until its final decade. Moffat's study deals with this transformative quality, exploring the Revolution's disorientation of established international diplomacy and the beginnings of a new order in foreign affairs. He sheds light on a hitherto neglected and pivotal moment in recent history, intricately charting the Allied Powers of the First World War's designs on revolutionary Russia.

The book is organized in a sequence of chronologically ordered chapters, opening with a brief overview of the February Revolution and the months leading up to the Allied incursions into Russia. Moffat informs us that the Intervention can be divided into three distinctive episodes: the first being the Allies' efforts to preserve Russian commitment to the war against the German Empire; after the October Revolution, an attempt to forestall the Brest-Litovsk Treaty; and lastly, a resolution to support the White campaign in eviscerating Bolshevism. As a framework, this triadic approach lends itself favourably to Moffat's objective and enables the author to relay the unfurling events as they played out. Further clarity is provided by an effort to sub-divide the chapters, concentrating on specific theatres of the Allies' campaign: in Siberia, the Caucasus and North Russia.

Although delivered in a clear manner, Moffat's narrative becomes stultifying in parts. He relegates much of his analysis to the concluding chapter, with most of the book having a prosaic detachment from the high drama of its historical focus. Greater assessment of the events rather than a successive reeling off of their occurrence would significantly enhance the reader's experience. However, the plethora of information

contained within this book is a testament to Moffat's impressive abilities as a researcher. His fastidious retelling of this chaotic and dizzying period singles him out as a master of precision and elucidation.

As a Canadian naval veteran and self-described independent scholar, Moffat devotes much of his book to Canada's involvement in the Russian Civil War. Here he sheds fascinating insight into the erstwhile Dominion's efforts to prove itself as a competent, bona fide nation emerging from Britain's shadow. The timeframe of Moffat's investigation coincides with the British Dominions' growing sense of blood sacrifice and national mythmaking in the aftermath of the Great War. In fact, the book's essential aim is to highlight the discordant national interests of all the players involved. As an exercise in realpolitik, Moffat meticulously reveals the Allied Intervention to have been a fiasco from start to finish. From the United States and Japan's mutual suspicion of the other's intentions in Siberia, to France's myopic tenacity in ensuring repayment of its loans from Russia, the ordeal set the scene for future diplomacy and came to define the world we live in today.

Moffat also stresses the importance of historical personages during the affair, maintaining that their actions influenced the course of events. Crucially, by placing so much weight on this factor he undermines his simultaneous effort to emphasize the chaotic nature of the period. The volatility of the Russian Civil War and the failure of the Allies' objectives surely indicates the vulnerability of individuals to circumstances rather than their ability to control them absolutely. Nevertheless, Moffat presents the motivations of the likes of Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd George and Terauchi Masatake for the reader's consideration. As a result, he imbues a human dynamic to the complexity, which enables the reader to better understand what was driving each nation's ambitions. Of particular interest was his exploration of Wilson's bungling of US commitment to the intervention. The President was at once naively enthused by the

Russian Revolution's perceived synergy with the ideals of the American Republic but also tempered by that same republic's concern with its status as a budding superpower. Conversely, Moffat portrays Winston Churchill's vehement anti-Bolshevism as a vital aspect behind the intervention's longevity while also ensuring its disastrous retreat.

The Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918–1920: The Diplomacy of Chaos is an exhaustive and scholarly contribution to the field. Stylistically, its content is formed of a thorough empirical narrative with little accompanying evaluation. Still, Moffat has produced a work that adeptly condenses the myriad of frenetic elements which make this period of history at once so startling and unavoidable. Its publication is especially timely in light of recent developments in international diplomacy and is essential reading for anyone seeking knowledge on the history of relations between Russia and the West.

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