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Рецензия / Book Review

**Быстрова Н.Е. «Русский вопрос» в 1917 – начале 1920 г.:  
Советская Россия и великие державы.  
М.: Институт российской истории РАН,  
Центр гуманитарных инициатив, 2016. 368 с.**

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**Bystrova, Nina E. ‘Russkii vopros’ v 1917 – nachale 1920 g.:  
Sovetskaya Rossiya i velikie derzhavy.  
Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN,  
Tsentr gumanitarnykh initsiativ, 2016. 368 p.**

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Long dismissed as the “forgotten war”, Russia’s involvement in the World War I is finally getting the attention it deserves. This renewed interest in the conflict, resulting from many commemorations and conferences, not to mention freer access to the archives, has also done much to make the Eastern Front an important part of the Great War’s broader narrative. The same is true of Russian diplomacy during the period. It is against that background that the international “Russia’s Great War and Revolution” project of has produced a two-volume collection devoted to Russia’s foreign affairs from 1914 to 1921. *‘Russkii vopros’ v 1917 – nachale 1920 g.: Sovetskaya Rossiya i velikie derzhavy* [The ‘Russian Question’ from 1917 to the beginning of 1920: Soviet Russia and the Great Powers], the new book by Dr. Nina Evgenevna Bystrova, a leading researcher

at the Institute of Russian History, is another most welcome addition to this literature.

Having combed the relevant Soviet collections, including the virtually inaccessible *Arkhiv vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation] the author provides a detailed account of how the young Bolshevik regime faced the challenges of a hostile world. *Paris 1919*, Margaret Macmillan's study of the Versailles Peace Conference, presented a good overview of how the victorious Western powers dealt – or to put it more accurately, failed to deal – with Lenin's government. But Macmillan did not work in any Russian archives and therefore does not tell us much about Bolshevik relations with the West right after the war. This omission makes Dr. Bystrova's book all the more important for understanding the complicated history of the period.

*'Russkii vopros' v 1917 – nachale 1920 g.: Sovetskaya Rossiya i velikie derzhavy* examines the complicated relations between Soviet Russia and the world's leading powers from the October Revolution to the time when a number of Western governments began officially to recognise the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Even now, a century later, many of the problems that emerged at that time remain relevant. Dr. Bystrova set herself a challenging task: "to analyse the extent to which the Soviet state achieved its foreign policy goals, its relations with such great powers as the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the United States of America and Germany, and to show the essence of their tactical differences in evaluating the Russian question" (p. 15). The monograph's approach is relatively objective, and its author has extensively relied on such sources as official documents of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, memoirs, materials from the Soviet and foreign press, some of which have been cited for the first time.

The book comprises an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a name index. The first chapter, "Relations between Soviet Russia and the Entente member states in late 1917 through mid-1918," covers the policy pursued by the Council of People's Commissars headed by Vladimir Lenin vis-à-vis the Entente's members and Germany during those years. This period was marked by Russia's leaving the war by signing of the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany. Despite the fact that there was no official diplomatic relationship, the Entente's members informally stayed in touch with representatives of the new Russian authorities. One of the topics of the 'unofficial' negotiations was intervention in Russia. The author writes, "The idea of intervening in Russia at the 'invitation' or with the 'consent' of the Soviet government was actively discussed in March and April of 1918 in Entente military and political circles"

(p. 98). The monograph goes on to detail efforts to legitimise the presence of foreign troops in Russia's north and, to a lesser extent, in Siberia and the Far East. Practically at the same time, the United Kingdom, France, the USA and Japan negotiated their joint intervention in the Far East and Siberia (pp. 66–67). By then Britain had already concluded a convention with France on their activity in Southern Russia. First signed in a short version on December 4 and in an extended version on December 23, 1917, the document declared that “the Caucasus, Armenia, Georgia and Kurdistan were the British zone and the French sphere consisted of Ukraine, Bessarabia and the Crimea” (p. 39).

Bystrova pays considerable attention to the Czechoslovak Legion's revolt since it “became a kind of an instrument in international politics” (p. 106). The Legion played a substantial role in the intervention and aggravated the Russian Civil War. The author concludes the chapter by stating that the Entente's members tried to keep the Eastern Front in the war (pp. 156–157). The Bolshevik leaders pursued the policy of balancing between Germany and the Entente powers (p. 157). Efforts by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs at the time “to decrease tension in its relations with Allies were in vain” (p. 157), while Germany pursued a two-faced policy in its dealings with the new regime (p. 157).

The second chapter, “Soviet Russia on the diplomatic front in the years of intervention, the latter half of 1918 through early 1919,” looks at the intervention in the Russian regions, the support provided by the Western countries to anti-Bolshevik forces, and the White movement's foreign policy. It also analyses the supplementary treaties of 27 August 1918 signed between the RSFSR and Germany.

The chapter sees the intervention as a decisive factor in the relations between the RSFSR and the Entente during this period. The author believes that the Allies had no clear-cut ambition to overthrow the Bolsheviks. As she writes, “The intervention meant to intimidate the Bolsheviks and make them conduct negotiations according to the Entente's conditions rather than an instrument of changing the regime” (p. 222). The intervention in the north of Russia is given as an example of the Entente's uneasy relations both among its members and with the local authorities and population as well as the anti-Bolshevist armies.

Bystrova notes that “all the financing, supplying and training of the troops was in allied hands” (p. 171). This is convincingly illustrated by the memoirs of V.V. Marushevskii, commander of the Russian troops of the Northern Army (pp. 171–172). Her research also demonstrates that the Entente's intervention in the Civil War is basically the story of British support of the Whites (p. 225).

The author concludes the chapter by pointing out that in autumn 1919 foreign support to White forces began to decrease. After the latter's military defeats, the Entente's members began to rely on other methods to deal with Russia, such as an economic and diplomatic blockade and a *cordon sanitaire*, in the hope that the Soviet regime's politics would grow more moderate over time (p. 237).

The third chapter, "Russia and the Treaty of Versailles," considers the Paris Peace Conference, as well as the Versailles-Washington system that resulted. Bystrova's analysis of the Versailles Treaty is of considerable interest. She naturally focuses on the clauses that affected Russia, which are mostly related to cancelling the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and its appendices (pp. 242–255). The author believes that, despite that treaty's dissolution and provisions for reparations, Versailles provided no compensation to Russia (p. 255).

"Soviet Russia and the Entente powers in 1919 through early 1920," the fourth chapter, touches on Allied relations with Soviet Russia and the White movement as well as British and US mediation to ease hostilities between the Civil War's adversaries (p. 261). The author details plans for conferences of representatives of the opposing Russian armies on Turkey's Princes' Islands and the mission to Russia by William Bullitt, the head of the US delegation's political information division at Versailles. Efforts at setting up talks on the Turkish Islands failed because of White opposition. However, the author explains that "the 'Russian question' remained in the foreground of the peace conference's discussions. G. Clemenceau advocated putting up a barrier around Russia. W. Churchill, who substituted for Lloyd George in Paris, supported military involvement into Russian affairs" (p. 282).

The fourth chapter goes on to look at the establishment of the Third Communist International, which she sees as the Soviet government's attempt to prevent the "creation of the new world order" established by the Paris Peace Conference without Russia's participation (p. 278). She ends with the dawn of a new stage in Soviet Russia's relationship with the leading Western powers, which is characterized by a more pragmatic approach by both sides. As a result, "in late 1919 the Entente member states decided to stop the intervention that had failed to destroy Bolshevism, in January 1920 the economic blockade was actually lifted from Soviet Russia, and trade and economic relations started to emerge" (p. 356).

In her conclusion, the author summarises how relations between Soviet Russia and the West evolved from 1917 through early 1920. She ends by venturing that "Soviet Russia managed to recover its position after the geopolitical collapse of 1918. To succeed, it had to proceed along a difficult path and overcome many

obstacles, beginning with the blockade to half blockade, half peace, to a few instances de jure recognition in 1920 through 1922, and recognition [by more governments] in 1924 through 1925” (p. 362).

Bystrova’s monograph is an important and well-timed contribution Soviet diplomatic history. One of the best works on the young Bolshevik regime’s dealings with the West, it provides a comprehensive account on the period when the Soviet state was being established during World War I, the Civil War, and the Allied intervention. We very much hope that her book will be translated into English to make it more accessible to historians outside of Russia.



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