

KÄHÖNEN Aapo / КЯХЁНЕН Ааппо
University of Helsinki / Университет Хельсинки
Finland, Helsinki / Финляндия, Хельсинки
aapo.kahonen@helsinki.fi

STATE-BUILDING AND FOREIGN POLICY: THE CASE OF EAST KARELIA AND THE ROLE OF FINLAND IN SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY IN 1921–22

ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЕ СТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО И ВНЕШНЯЯ ПОЛИТИКА:
СЛУЧАЙ ВОСТОЧНОЙ КАРЕЛИИ И РОЛЬ ФИНЛЯНДИИ В СОВЕТСКОЙ
ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКЕ В 1921–1922 гг.

Аннотация: Основания советской внешней политики и роль в ней Финляндии могут быть проанализированы в контексте государственного строительства, а также позиции элит и правящих классов в обеих странах. Несмотря на различия создававшихся политических систем, обе страны пережили жестокие гражданские войны, которые потребовали усилий по стабилизации новых режимов. Карелия как спорный пограничный регион в 1921–1922 гг. представляет собой хороший пример для плодотворного рассмотрения следующих вопросов: каково было значение идеологии — националистической либо большевистской — как для легитимации государства, так и для определения его внешнеполитической ориентации? Каким образом локальный, двусторонний конфликт был связан с более масштабными целями советской внешней политики в Европе? Результаты проведённого исследования показывают, во-первых, что в обеих странах идеология играла значительную роль в деле легитимации режима и в сфере внешней политики. Во-вторых, что советский внешнеполитический аппарат, несмотря на его революционное происхождение, имел достаточно точную информацию о финляндской внутренней политике и причинах Восточно-Карельского восстания. Однако главные внешнеполитические цели Советской России в отношении западных великих держав придавали локальному конфликту значение образцового примера, что предопределило характер советской ответной реакции.

Keywords / Ключевые слова: State-building, Soviet Russia, Finland, foreign policy, Karelia, 1921–22 / Государственное строительство, Советская Россия, Финляндия, внешняя политика, Карелия, 1921–1922 гг.

The starting points for both Soviet Russian and Finnish foreign policies were connected by revolution and stabilisation of the new, post-civil-war ruling elites,¹ as both countries were successor states of the Russian empire. Therefore, both ruling elites had in common clear ideological starting points, whether based on bolshevism or the anti-communist principles of a nation-state influenced by pan-Finnish nationalism, which clearly influenced their foreign political objectives. Regardless of this commonality,

¹ On the connections between revolution and state building from the standpoint of historical sociology, see, e. g. Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), XII–XIV, 472–483; Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 161–164.

a transition point can be noted in the foreign policies of both countries during the years 1920–22, with them moving away from ideologically motivated expansion towards so-called state interests and traditional methods of diplomacy. This did not mean the disappearance of ideology from foreign policy, but the transition did push it more often into the background or relegate it to the position of being a second option. After presenting the case of East Karelia, the relationship between state-building and foreign policy in Soviet Russia and in Finland will be analysed on a more general level in the concluding section.

Traditionally, the East Karelian revolt, which lasted from October 1921 to January 1922, has been studied in Finland more as a problem of bilateral relations between Soviet Russia and Finland, in the form of an indirect conflict.² In Russia, the East Karelian revolt has been briefly related to the general emphases of Soviet foreign policy.³ More recently, the focus has been on observing the significance of national separatism and nationalist expansion for Soviet Russia in a situation where the new state needed to stabilise both its political system and its international position. From this standpoint, it also becomes clear why the border policy or national expansionist aspirations of the Finnish foreign political leadership, especially foreign minister Rudolf Holsti, did not receive support from Western Europe and, eventually, from the Finnish domestic political arena either.

Soviet viewpoints on the East Karelian Revolt

The East Karelian revolt was one of the many rebellions against Soviet power, which flared up in 1921 as a result of pre-NEP war communism and hunger. The Soviet leadership was aware of the need for peaceful conditions in East Karelia, for safeguarding the Murmansk railroad and for easing food supply situation, as the commissar for foreign affairs, Georgii Chicherin, wrote first about it to the Soviet government and then again directly to Lenin in August 1921.⁴

Despite his warning, the outbreak of the revolt came as a surprise to many in power, not only to the Soviet administration but also to the Finnish government. When the revolt really broke out in force in late October 1921, the Soviet army presence in the area totalled only about one thousand men. This was reflected in the initial successes of the revolt, and by 16 November the rebels had taken Uhtua. Then the commissar of the foreign

² Keijo Korhonen, *Naapurit vastoin tahtoaan. Suomi neuvostodiplomatiassa Tartosta talvisotaan, vol. I, 1920–1933* (Helsinki: Tammi, 1966); Stacy Churchill, *Itä-Karjalan kohtalo 1917–1922. Itä-Karjalan itsehallintokysymys Suomen ja Neuvosto-Venäjän välissä vuoteissa 1917–1922* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1970).

³ Aleksander Rupasov, *Sovetsko-finliandskie otnoshenija: seredina 1920-x — natschalo 1930-x gg.* (Sankt Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2001), 15–16.

⁴ Juri Kilin, *Suurvallan rajamaa. Neuvosto-Karjala Neuvostovaltion politiikassa 1920–1941* (Rovaniemi: Pohjois-Suomen historiallinen yhdistys, 2001), 54.

affairs, Chicherin, sent a note on the events to the Finnish government, in which he presented the central arguments of the Soviet side that would be applied throughout the conflict. According to the information received by the Soviets, 'bandit groups,' which were at the time under the leadership of Finnish army officers, had caused disturbances in the Karelian Worker's Commune. On this basis, the Soviets claimed that Finland wanted to frame the events as a rebellion and a people's uprising deserving of foreign support, especially since the mixed Finnish-Soviet commission had Karelia on its agenda at the time. Soviet Russian reactions became harsher as the month progressed, and especially a note sent at the beginning of December offered a strict warning and raised the possibility of counter-actions against Finland. Finland's appeal to the League of Nations lent support to the Soviet argument that Finland wanted to interfere. It was defined both as a hostile act and as meddling in the internal affairs of Soviet Russia, as well as a violation of the Tartu Peace Treaty. Furthermore, the note accused the Finnish government of offering 'full-scale support' to the rebels and it denied that the revolt had been caused by food shortages or the repression of national and cultural rights. It argued that the Finnish border had been opened to support the movements of rebel groups.⁵

This public reaction of Soviet foreign policy officials needs to be related to the information offered by the Soviet Helsinki mission, which was based on a more diverse viewpoint. The Soviet representative in Helsinki, Aleksei Chernykh, distinguished between, on the one hand, the attitude of the Finnish government and, on the other, the attitude of Finnish right wing and activist circles towards the revolt. According to him, the government, unlike right-wing circles, aimed to avoid conflict with Soviet Russia, and he viewed the East Karelian events 'as a show which we [the Soviets] will quickly put a stop to.' He saw the Finnish government as balancing between the demands of 'the nationalistically-minded Finnish circles' and its own objectives of avoiding the growing tension in Finnish-Soviet relations. When evaluating the rebellion from the standpoint of domestic Finnish politics, Chernykh again emphasised that, 'It must be said that there are now very few elements in Finland willing to take the Karelian question to a direct confrontation with Russia [Rossii].' In addition to the social democrats, according to him almost all of the bourgeois parties desired a peaceful solution, while the 'Swedes,' the Swedish People's Party, was indifferent. This reflected the nationalistic and linguistic divisions within Finland, since 'the Swedes have never supported pan-Finnish tendencies,' the so-called kindred people policy. The addition of the 'kindred people,' namely the Karelians, into the Finnish population would have decreased the proportion of the Swedish-speaking minority among the total population of Finland.

⁵ Korhonen, *Naapurit vastoin tahtoaan*, 53–56; *Dokumenty vnesnei politiki SSSR, vol. 4* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo politzeskoi literatury, 1957), 558–559, Chicherin — Gyllenbögel 5.12.1921. On peasant revolts as 'banditism' in the bolshevik terminology, see Richard K. Debo, *Survival and Consolidation. The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 329.

The National Coalition Party of the conservative bourgeoisie was divided in its attitude towards the Karelian revolt. 'The far-right wing of the party' is militant, noted Chernykh, 'and its organ, *Iltalehti*, even presents calls to arms.' Instead, the more reasonable part of the party, represented by the newspaper *Uusi Suomi*, 'is not, at the end of the day, very resolutely demanding a decision on the matter.' For their part, the Agrarian League and the Progress Party supported the policy of the government, of which they were a part, 'with the exclusion of Minister of Defence Jalander.' Chernykh recognised the newspapers *Suunta* and *Inkeri*, the Civil Guards and the Committee of the White Karelians as being the main sources of East Karelian agitation.⁶

Chernykh characterised the fundamental divisions in Finnish foreign policy as follows. The government 'aims to find such a line, which, while simultaneously avoiding a direct confrontation with Soviet Russia, will maximally satisfy the objectives of the bourgeois-nationalist circles in Finland. The Finnish government has especially legalised so-called humanitarian aid to the rebels.' He viewed the collection of funds and ambulance services as 'violations of the most elementary forms of neutrality.' Chernykh noted the military enlistments and the sale of arms to East Karelia were taking place in Finland, though it was not easy to find proof of such activities since 'the work is done carefully and being led by individuals who are well recommended among the White Guard [Civil Guard] supporters.' Confirmation of the participation of Finnish officials in such actions was received through another organisation, Soviet Military Intelligence, at the beginning of January 1922. It found evidence that several officers in the Finnish 2nd division had been sent to East Karelia. In addition, on the initiative of the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the vacations of army officers higher in rank than captain had been cancelled for three months.⁷

In practice, the Finnish government operated actively on the diplomatic level, and the Soviets were worried about the question coming up in the mixed Finnish-Soviet commission, where agreements had already been reached on railways and fishing. The Finnish government had taken the East Karelia question to the League of Nations, where it had brought publicity to the issue and received moral support but no concrete resolution.

Chernykh concentrated the substance of his report into the two last paragraphs, where he took a stand on the causes of the revolt as well as on the potential effects of its continuation:

⁶ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 159, o. 2, d. 41, Chernykh — Chicherin 30.11.1921.

⁷ Kilin, *Suurvallan rajamaa*, 57.

“Speaking seriously about the rebellion, which is taking place in Karelia, it is very, very difficult to condemn it from here. Even though it is clear that the rebellion receives leadership and material support from Finland, it is obvious that there are local reasons [for it], one of which — the food tax.” A Cheka internal security report, made after the military action, confirmed the need to prioritise internal causes, even though Cheka’s Foreign Intelligence (VTchK-INO) claimed that the pan-Finnish ideology of annexing Karelia to Finland had had great significance.

However, the last paragraph of the report focused on the consequences: ‘If termination [of the rebellion] is delayed, then the Finnish government without doubt will move towards an aggressive policy.’⁸ In order to avoid this, the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) formulated its stance rather strongly for the politburo on 2 December 1921, in which it excluded the more nuanced and diverse analyses on Finnish policy and the internal causes for rebellion in East Karelia suggested by Chernykh. The international Soviet reaction, and the prevention of possible interference to events defined as internal affairs, were seen as a priority. The NKID collegium thought that Soviet Russia should put an immediate stop to any attempts to mobilise the League of Nations against it. Hence, it was necessary to announce that Finland ‘had taken a dangerous path, which could lead to serious consequences, which is why we [NKID] would consider it necessary to support this declaration with military demonstrations at the Finnish border.’ The question was, then, of making an example of Finland so as to prevent international interference in the future.

The NKID collegium evaluated the international situation as being favourable to them for the following reasons: ‘nothing will make England and France take part at the moment [in the East Karelian conflict]; in Poland, there is an exceptionally resolute tendency towards better relations with us; Romania has a cabinet crisis.’ Regarding the Western great powers, Soviet Russian foreign policy makers had clear reasons for their view, and even though the League of Nations supported the Eastern European border states in questions of sovereignty, it was not an immediate threat. In the end, the NKID collegium focused more on the revolt itself and on strengthening the political system in Soviet Russia. As diplomatic pressure, the NKID collegium proposed suspending the meeting of the mixed Finnish-Soviet commission, believing the Finns would suffer more from such a move. The Soviet Union should take advantage of the favourable international situation, the NKID collegium argued, so that the army and Cheka could suppress the revolt as quickly as possible. In connection with this, the NKID collegium observed: ‘In the end, we are prepared to consider in a positive spirit the extending of amnesty to those in Kronstadt [who rebelled against the Bolsheviks

⁸ RGASPI, f. 159, o. 2, d. 41, Chernykh — Chicherin 30.11.1921. On Cheka’s evaluation see Kilin, *Suurvallan rajamaa*, 54–55.

in 1921] who distinguish themselves [in suppressing the rebellion] in Karelia.’ Provided that the Cheka would not oppose such a move, ‘in a political sense an amnesty for the Kronstadt [rebels] at this moment would remarkably weaken the forces of those fighting against us in Karelia.’

The NKID collegium proposed sending the note to Finland before the League of Nations gave its official ruling on the Karelian question. The politburo decided on this suggestion the following day. By then, the memorandum had reached the top level of decision makers in Soviet Russia, evident because a handwritten note had been added: ‘To Com. Trotsky. Provide your opinion in two words. To my mind, Chicherin is right. 3/XII Lenin.’⁹

The Soviet conviction regarding the non-interference of the Western powers was based on the clearly progressing overtures for a European-wide rebuilding effort and peace conference, especially with Great Britain.¹⁰ Already at the beginning of September, the politburo had been studying Chicherin’s report on (Soviet) Russia’s debts to the Western powers. Chicherin and Leonid Krasin had been entrusted with ‘formulating the preconditions that should be orally communicated in discussions with Lloyd George [the British prime minister].’ Close to the middle of September, the reciprocity of compensations was defined as a starting point for the possible payment of all debts, excluding war debts, questions of nationalisation versus the damages caused by intervention, and a new loan from the Western markets. On the political side, the *de jure* recognition of the Soviet government and a peace treaty were expected. From the viewpoint of the legitimacy of the political system, a central demand was ‘to abstain from supporting our enemies and the counter revolution, not to interfere in the internal affairs of the Soviet republic [Soviet state] and not allow anything that violates the sovereignty of the Soviet government or questions the indivisibility of our territory...’ Regarding the debt negotiations, the Soviet government tentatively noted that they should not be discussed with Great Britain alone, but also with France, however separately if possible.¹¹

Trotsky’s presentation on Finnish relations was taken as a starting point on 3 December 1921, however it was modified so that his proposal to break off diplomatic relations was postponed. Already on the same day, Chicherin mentioned that there had been a misunderstanding in the politburo, and that the question only had to do with suspending the work of the mixed Finnish-Soviet commission. ‘The calling home of our

⁹ RGASPI, f. 159, o. 2, d. 41, Chicherin — Politburo 2.12.1921.

¹⁰ Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 81–89.

¹¹ RGASPI, f. 17, o. 3, d. 196, Politburo protocol, Chicherin on the debt question, 2.9.1921, and f. 17, o. 3, d. 201, Politburo protocol, on debts, 13.9.1921.

representative from Finland was not proposed [by the NKID] and, of course that step would go too far,' he said. Two days later, the politburo accepted Chicherin's view. The interest of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs was to avoid breaking off diplomatic relations, in no small part to ensure the transit of goods through Finnish ports and via Finnish railroads, especially for receiving newspaper-quality paper, of which there was an acute shortage.¹² In addition, the second motive might well have been that harsher reactions by the Soviet Union might steer Finland in the wrong direction.¹³ However, in late December the Soviet representative in Helsinki, Chernykh, announced in a tense discussion with Foreign Minister Holsti that the Soviets were concentrating troops on the border since Finland was not honouring the peace treaty. Finland had already noted the increased number of Soviet troops along the border and, according to the Americans, the government in Finland was panicking. The government was considering mobilising Finnish troops and had begun making overtures with the other states on Soviet Russia's western border from the Arctic Sea to the Black Sea.

Otherwise, the politburo used Trotsky's presentation as a basis for countermeasures, which it initiated against Finland on the basis of the East Karelian situation beginning on 3 January 1922. The starting point was, on the one hand, to wage a propaganda and diplomatic campaign against Finland, and on the other to intensify the role of the All Russian Extraordinary Commission, Cheka, in communications. Already by the end of December, Soviet Russia had had sufficient preconditions for ending the revolt: the Soviet army had concentrated 13 000 men in East Karelia, which was more than enough. During the first week of January, the Finnish government announced the closing of the border, which the Soviets had been demanding since autumn.¹⁴

Dismantling the Karelian crisis and its aftershocks: the last blossoming of a border-state alliance

The tension in bilateral relations between Soviet Russia and Finland, raised by the East Karelian crisis, began to ease off by mid-January. Soviet Russia took advantage of the progress it had made in relations with Western Europe, which had begun already in the autumn. At the beginning of January, as progress was being made in suppressing the revolt and with diplomatic pressure against Finland still mounting, the politburo heatedly discussed participation of a Soviet delegation in the economic conference

¹² Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVP RF), f. 04, p. 251, d. 53423, Ganetski — Chernykh 14.1.1922 and Ganetski — Chernykh 9.2.1922. Even in February, the Foreign Trade Commissariat (NKVT) was of the opinion that unless paper could be received through, or imported from, Finland, 'We will have to close all our newspapers.'

¹³ RGASPI, f.17, o. 3, d. 240, Politburo protocol, on Karelia,, 3.12.1921, f. 159, o. 2, d. 41, Chicherin — Molotov 3.12.1921 and f. 17, o. 3, d. 241, Politburo protocol, on Karelia, 5.12.1921.

¹⁴ Korhonen, 59, 61; RGASPI, f. 17, o. 3, d. 248, Politburo protocol, on the Karelian front, 3.1.1922.

to be held in Genova and prepared work groups to respond to the different questions that would be raised during negotiations.¹⁵

The Soviet understanding of the positive attitude on the part of Great Britain grew stronger in early January as well. The London government was known to have demanded, 'on the basis of general sources,' that Finland end the conflict with the Soviet government. The British representative in Helsinki had announced to the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs that, 'at the moment, when the Entente High Council meets, in order to solve the Russian question peacefully, no member of the League of Nations should threaten European peace.' The declaration of the English government made a strong impression in the Finnish government. In other respects as well, the list of Finland's supporters was growing thin: the French-backed alliance of Central European countries, 'the Little Entente,' underlined its neutrality, as the Baltic countries were not part of the alliance. Even the Polish government, 'which had good relations with Finland,' seemed interested in safeguarding its neutrality.¹⁶ This image of Finland overstepping its national interests was further strengthened when the British representative in Moscow contacted Maxim Litvinov, Vice Commissar for Foreign Affairs, in mid-January enquiring into how he could encourage reconciliation and help end the fighting in East Karelia. Litvinov took the opportunity to convey a message. In addition to condemning the 'bandit attacks,' it was crucial to note 'that the slightest support from the League of Nations would increase the Finnish government's aggression and inevitably lead to armed conflict [between Soviet Russia and Finland].' 'I received the impression that the government of Great Britain will act in a restraining fashion in Helsinki,' he concluded.¹⁷

With respect to Poland, Soviet Russia was more optimistic about its foreign policy options than there were grounds for, but in terms of the main question regarding East Karelian crisis the government had a strong case. On 6 January, the High Council of Entente had reached a decision to call for a financial and economic conference in which all European countries, including the countries defeated in the First World War and Soviet Russia, would be asked to participate. The other option for Soviet foreign policy, forming a special relationship with Germany, had begun to progress rather swiftly after mid-January, when Karl Radek was sent to Berlin. During the first half of February, he met with the commander of the Reichswehr, Hans von Seeckt, and a little later

¹⁵ RGASPI, f. 17, o. 3, d. 249, on the delegation to the European conference, 5.1.1922, f. 17, o. 3, d. 250, on the invitation to Lenin to attend the European conference, 10.1.1922, and f. 17, o. 3, d. 251, on the Genova delegation, 12.1.1922.

¹⁶ RGASPI, f. 159, o. 2, d. 41, Raevskii — Chicherin 6.1.1922.

¹⁷ AVP RF, f. 04, o. 41, p. 251, d. 53423, Litvinov — Chernykh 16.1.1922

with the Foreign Minister, Walter Rathenau, with whom he had the possibility to discuss both military as well as financial co-operation.¹⁸

The relatively limited and peripheral crisis, at least from the viewpoint of the great powers, nevertheless increased activity in the other peripheral states, Estonia and Poland. The Estonian foreign political leadership, especially Foreign Minister Ants Piip, suggested in late December that Finland would soon have to give up its policy of 'splendid isolation.' The East Karelian crisis had finally made the Finns interested in alliances. Estonia proposed forming a mutual defensive alliance with Finland on 10 January 1922, but by then the Polish leadership was also trying to form political alliances with other countries. The Polish policy had changed from the previous summer, and it had returned to seeking guarantees of political security. An alliance with Finland would protect its northern flank in the same way as an alliance with Romania was already in place to protect its southern flank; additionally, Poland had already formed an alliance with France to protect itself from a German threat.

The participation of smaller border states did not interest the Polish security and foreign political leadership, unlike the Finnish leadership. In the final analysis, however, the Finnish political leadership was ready to choose an alliance with the militarily stronger Poland, and a preliminary treaty was prepared on the basis of the Polish-Romanian alliance at the beginning of February. The alliance failed not because of different opinions on the role of the Baltic countries, but because of the French stance on the matter. According to France, an alliance between Poland and Finland would tie Poland too tightly to its eastern border in a potential conflict with Soviet Russia, when the French primarily needed Poland as an ally against Germany. This negative view of Poland's main ally ended Polish-Finnish negotiations in mid-March.¹⁹ This type of process, even as a failure, was not in the interests of Soviet foreign policy, neither in its relations with Finland nor in a larger border-state context. Soviet Russia's security and foreign political leadership did, however, give signs of softening its stance, for example in Trotsky's speeches, in March–April of 1922.²⁰

The last act in this quickly evolving alliance-building activity took place at the border-state conference held in Warsaw on 13 March 1922. Even though the conference mainly dealt with loose political cooperation between the countries, especially following right on the heels of the Genova conference, in the end a political protocol was formed that included a security guarantee. According to it, with respect to an unprovoked attack

¹⁸ See Edward Hallett Carr. *A History of Soviet Russia. The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923, vol. 3* (1953) (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 357, 369–371, for more on the relations between Soviet Russia and Germany.

¹⁹ Marko Lehti, *A Baltic League as a Construct of the New Europe. Envisioning a Baltic Region and Small State Sovereignty in the Aftermath of the First World War* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 378–383.

²⁰ Korhonen, *Naapurit vastoin tahtoon*, 66–67.

‘a benign [Fr. *bienveillante*] attitude should be taken, and what kind of support can be offered should immediately be considered.’ Thus, the protocol was not a military treaty in the sense that the failed Finnish-Polish alliance would have been. Rather, it can be interpreted as an attempt by Finland, Estonia and Latvia to ensure some kind of binding cooperation in a situation where the earlier, publicly supported alliance plans had failed; Poland, for its part, was mostly interested in receiving political support at the Genova conference.

At the conference on economic cooperation and political relations, which began in Genova, Italy, on 10 April 1922, the Western powers and Soviet Russia failed to reach an agreement. Instead, Soviet Russia and Germany agreed on economic and political matters, as well as on secret military cooperation in nearby Rapallo on 16 April 1922. This made clear the fact that any alliance with Poland, though primarily against Soviet Russia, would also be an alliance against Germany. No bourgeois majority could then be found in Finland supporting an alliance with Poland, since the social democrats already opposed alliances with the border states in opposition to Soviet Russia. This domestic political combination ensured the failure of Holsti’s alliance policy in the Finnish parliament on 13 May 1922.²¹

The foundations of the Soviet Russian and Finnish foreign policies from the standpoint of state building

The elites governing Soviet Russia and its foreign political decision-making were quite new. First comprised of party officials and heads of the army during the civil war, the ruling cadre also came to include communist factory managers in the 1920s. The new ruling class had fully emerged in the Soviet Union by the 1930s. Socially, a central difference between the earlier imperial elite and the new Soviet elite was transition from an exclusive to an inclusive elite. This meant remarkable growth in the composition of the elite when both social and ethnic background became more diverse. Even though the level of education decreased, its significance remained high, and this enabled the rise of educated ethnic minorities, e. g. Armenians, Jews, Latvians and Georgians, to the ranks of top decision-makers, also regarding foreign policy.²²

The creation of the Soviet elite and Soviet state took place simultaneously as a reaction to the post-civil-war supply and economic crisis in the years 1920–21.

²¹ For more on the Genova conference and treaty of Rapallo, see Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, vol. 3, 371–376; on the Warsaw protocol, based on Latvian source in French, see Lehti, *A Baltic League as a Construct of the New Europe*, 381–395.

²² Aappo Kähönen, “Continuities and Differences between Soviet and Russian Foreign Policies from the Elite Perspective, 1860–1928”, *Peterburgskii istoričeskii žurnal* 1 (2017): 141–156. Online version: *Cyberleninka*, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/continuities-and-differences-between-soviet-and-russian-foreign-policies-from-the-elite-perspective-1860-1928> (accessed January 15, 2019).

The most remarkable examples of the crisis were peasant rebellions, especially in Tambov, and the Kronstadt military rebellion in February-March of 1921. The stabilisation of the new regime required not only ending the confiscation of grain and food rationing, both of which were a part of war communism, but also the economic compromises in the form of the NEP in order to quickly strengthen political control of the country. This meant excluding not only other socialist parties, but all spontaneous working-class activity from the soviets. The Kronstadt sailors were revolting against such a policy when they began to support the strikes that broke out in Moscow and St. Petersburg in February. In practice, the soviets were converted into components of state administration by increasing the number of appointed officials (*nomenklatura*), while at the same time the standard of living of urban workers was increased in exchange. This resulted in unprecedentedly strong state machinery and control of the work force. The connections between the state administration and the party, and their eventual unification, together with the avant-garde character of the Bolshevik Party, made this development logical, and the party-state was for the most part fully functioning by 1923.²³ The new constitution for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was accepted in July 1923, mostly on the basis of the previous constitution for Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. Even though the objective was to avoid the impression of having created a unified state, the exclusion of the word ‘federative’ from the constitution reflected just such a shift in the centre of gravity.²⁴

From an ideological standpoint, this change can be characterised by the concepts of hegemony and passive revolution employed by Antonio Gramsci. Usually the hegemony of the ruling class, when for example building a nation state, is achieved in part by genuinely including the ideologies of other social groups in it, in a process reminiscent of alliance building rather than exclusion or neutralisation. In cases when neutralisation plays a strong role in the creation of hegemony, then a passive revolution takes place. The consolidation of the different states of the Italian peninsula to form the single state of the Kingdom of Italy instead of a republic in the 1860s is an example of such a passive revolution. In Gramscian terms, the new ruling class in Russia ended social change and created hegemony via a passive revolution when neutralising other social groups, the working class included, and monopolising political power. This interpretation can be based on Gramsci’s comments on Trotsky’s America-inspired views in 1921 on the primacy of industry and the degree to which coercive industrial methods can

²³ V. P. Naumov and A. A. Kosakovskii, “Vvedenie”, in V. P. Naumov and A. A. Kosakovskii (eds), *Kronshtad 1921* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodyi fond ‘Demokratia’, 1997), 7–8; Simon Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24. Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite* (London: Routledge, 2008), 7–23, 233–241.

²⁴ Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia. The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1923, vol. 1* (1950) (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 403–404, 410–413.

increase discipline in matters of production. This kind of combination could lead to a new form of Bonapartism. About a decade later, Trotsky's ideas were put into practice by Stalin.²⁵

The Finnish parliamentary system could be seen, from an outside perspective, as being just as unstable and perhaps temporary in nature as many in the West saw Soviet Russia. Even though there emerged in Finland a liberal state in place of an earlier estate state, one with civil liberties, its own law enforcement machinery, democratic municipal administration and land reforms, its permanence was not self-evident. A social compromise made this change possible: even the winners of the Finnish civil war recognised that the defeated group, i. e. the communists, could not be permanently excluded from political decision making.²⁶ However, the compromise was never entirely supported by the victorious bourgeois, anti-communist coalition. Even if this right-wing, extreme nationalist group of activists represented a minority on the bourgeois side, it still had considerable influence, and not only because of its background as part of the military and economic elite.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony can also be applied in the Finnish context, especially when observing, like Miika Siironen does, differences within the bourgeois, anti-communist coalition. The 'unpolitical' unanimity among the winners had central importance for political decision making in the post-civil-war Finnish state. The significant concepts in defining the unanimity were 'whiteness' and 'the heritage of the war of liberation,' became part of the hegemonic interpretation through which Finnish independence and Russia/Soviet Union relations were constructed. However, there were different points of emphases within the coalition on the enemy image and the policy of national integration.²⁷ It is possible to claim that the building of the Finnish nation state ultimately ended in 'genuine hegemony' when the activities of the reformist left became legally possible in the 1920s, making the integration process easier beginning in the mid-1930s. The activist group aimed for its part to extend its stricter nationalistic values first among the bourgeois coalition and then among the rest of society. Had their plan succeeded, it would have meant, in addition to an authoritarian state and a more aggressive

²⁵ Kähkönen, 'Continuities', 152–154. See also Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "State, Transition and Passive Revolution" (1979), in Chantal Muffe (ed.), *Gramsci and the Marxist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 208–209, 227–228.

²⁶ Pertti Haapala, *Kun yhteiskunta hajosi. Suomi 1914–1920* (Helsinki: Painatuskeskus, 1995), 250–254. A *compromise* as the basis for post-civil-war Finnish society would seem better founded than the notion of 'everybody's victory' used by Haapala (Pertti Haapala, "Yhteiskunnallinen kompromissi", in Pertti Haapala & Tuomas Hoppu (eds), *Sisällissodan pikekujättiläinen* (Porvoo: WSOY, 2009), 404, in a subtitle), as in the sense that with a compromise everybody gives up on something, whereas the experience of victory was hardly shared in the same sense between the different parties after the civil war.

²⁷ Miika Siironen, *Vapaussodan perintö. Valkoisuus paikallisyhteisössä — sisältö, ylläpitäjät ja rapautuminen Iisalmessa 1918–1933* ([Oulu]: [Miika Siironen], 2011), 193–196.

expansionist foreign policy, the emergence of a new hegemony based on passive revolution.²⁸

When the representatives of Soviet Russia evaluated the objectives of Finnish foreign policy, for example during the peace negotiations in Tartu in 1920 or regarding East Karelia, they repeatedly characterised them by calling attention to the variations within the bourgeois coalition. Partly this viewpoint was based on the Marxist foundations of Bolshevik ideology, but mainly on practical observations. On the one hand, it was possible to pursue a relatively moderate policy with respect to the centre-liberal governments and aim for agreement on practical questions. On the other hand, the value of such agreements could be questioned if the right-wing, pan-Finnish pressure group would have caused the government to change its policy line, or worse, if it would have taken power.

Together with the stabilisation of the political system, the other theme that strongly reflected on the relations between Soviet Russia and Finland had to do with underlining one's own legitimacy and undermining that of the other. In principle, and at times also in practice, this led to expansionist objectives in foreign policy. This fundamental understanding of policy emerged out of the recent revolutionary fervour and shaped the relations of Soviet Russia with other countries, regardless of whether they were great powers or smaller countries. In the relations between Soviet Russia and Finland as well, this conflict of interest was demonstrated by the supranational role of the Comintern when it supported local communist parties, like the Finnish Communist Party (SKP), which questioned the very existence of the Finnish nation state. Similarly, there were corresponding elements in Finnish foreign policy, not only the official Greater Finland objectives of 1918–20, but also in its cooperation with other border states in order to further its own and the nationalist expansion of other states into Russia, for example through the Estonian-organised Border State Club. Soviet Russian legitimacy was questioned on separatist and expansionist bases by such organisations as the East Karelian government in exile, various refugee organisations, the Academic Karelia Society (AKS), founded immediately after 'loosing Karelia,' and the White Russian émigré organisations.²⁹ Both countries tried to keep a formal distance between their respective governments and these kinds of organisations after the signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty, but both financial ties and membership of the government-level politicians in such organisations,

²⁸ Aappo Kähkönen, "Vallankumouksen ja nationalismin leikkauskohdissa 1905–1932. Suomi hauraana valtiona", in Juhani Koponen & Sakari Saaritsa (eds), *Kiinniotajat* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2019), forthcoming.

²⁹ On the objectives of the Border State Club and the Academic Karelia Society and the activities of the White Russian organisations in Finland, see Toivo Nygård, *Suur-Suomi vai lähibeimolaisten auttaminen. Aatteellinen heimotyö itsenäisessä Suomessa*. (Helsinki: Otava, 1978), 120–127; Risto Alapuro, *Akateeminen Karjalaseura. Ylioppilasliike ja kansa 1920- ja 1930-luvulla* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1973), 91–95; Aleksi Mainio, *Näkymätön sota: Suomi vastavallankumouksellisen terrorismin ja vakoilun tukialueena, 1918–1939*. (Helsinki: Unigrafia, 2015), 23–26.

or their participation in events involving the organisations, diminished the credibility of such claims.

After making and abiding by international agreements became an important tool in Soviet foreign policy, even temporary, reciprocal 'ideological armistices' became significant. Both the demands of Imperial Germany in the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918 as well as Great Britain and Weimar Germany regarding trade negotiations in 1920–21 that the Bolsheviks cease their propaganda efforts in German and British territories and spheres of influence are examples of this new direction. Similarly, Soviet Russia also demanded as part of trade negotiations that Weimar Germany prohibit the activities of White Russian governments in exile and anti-Soviet organisations in its territory.³⁰ At the most general level, when preparing to negotiate with the Western great powers on imperial debts and new loans in 1921–22, the Soviet government required as part of its political preconditions undisputed recognition of its legitimacy and territorial integrity.

The East Karelian revolt was the second turning point, after the Tartu Peace Treaty, in the relations between Soviet Russia and Finland. The revolt became an example of the shift in Soviet Russia's foreign policy precisely because of issues of state legitimacy and preparations for the Geneva conference. Not only did the prospect of reaching a potential understanding with Soviet Russia make the Western great powers less interested in interfering in a local conflict, but also Soviet Russia had already defined its policy objectives. When both non-interference in internal affairs and territorial integrity became a central part of these objectives, it became clear that the East Karelian revolt had international significance: Soviet foreign policy could not make such local concessions to Finland because it would have weakened Soviet Russia's position in the international negotiations.

It would seem probable that on these grounds, the Soviet government expressly chose a strict policy when reacting to Finnish support for the East Karelian revolt. Despite the support the revolt received from Finland, the Soviet government had already been informed of the influence of the supply crises on local opinion, and the mission in Finland thought the risk of conflict between the two states was low providing that the revolt was not prolonged. The chosen policy in part led to counter-productive results. Visible Soviet troop concentrations prompted the Finnish government to finally close the border, but the build-up also scared the conservative bourgeoisie, earlier opponents of a border-state alliance, to now pursue this type of an alliance. The opening of talks for a military alliance with Estonia and/or Poland in early 1922 only made this easier. This kind of development was damaging from the Soviet viewpoint, and hence,

³⁰ Debo, *Survival and Consolidation*, 413.

the Soviet government understood that its relations with Finland would require new initiatives during the next months and years.

List of secondary sources

Наумов, В. П., Косаковский, А. А. Введение / В. П. Наумов, А. А. Косаковский // Кронштадт 1921 : документы о событиях в Кронштадте весной 1921 года / сост. В. П. Наумов и А. А. Косаковский. — Москва : Международный фонд «Демократия», 1997. — С. 7–16. — (Россия. XX век. Документы).

Рупасов, А. И. Советско-финляндские отношения : середина 1920-х — начало 1930-х гг. / А. И. Рупасов. — Санкт-Петербург : Европейский Дом, 2001. — 312 с.

Alapuro, R. Akateeminen Karjala-seura : ylioppilasliike ja kansa 1920- ja 1930-luvulla / R. Alapuro. — Helsinki : WSOY, 1973. — IX, 270 s.

Buci-Glucksmann, C. State, transition and passive revolution / C. Buci-Glucksmann // Gramsci and the Marxist Theory / ed. by C. Muffe. — New York : Routledge, 2014. — P. 207–233.

Carr, E. H. A History of Soviet Russia : the Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923 / E. H. Carr. — London : Penguin Books, 1966. — Vol. 1. — 430 p.; Vol. 3. — IX, 614 p.

Churchill, S. Itä-Karjalan kohtalo 1917–1922 : Itä-Karjalan itsehallintokysymys Suomen ja Neuvosto-Venäjän välissä suhteissa 1917–1922 / S. Churchill. — Helsinki : WSOY, 1970. — 218 s.

Debo, R. K. Survival and Consolidation : the Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia / R. K. Debo. — Montreal ; Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. — XIII, 502 p.

Haapala, P. Kun yhteiskunta hajosi : Suomi 1914–1920. — Helsinki : Painatuskeskus, 1995. — 313 s.

Haapala, P. Yhteiskunnallinen kompromissi / P. Haapala // Sisällissodan pikkujättiläinen / toim. P. Haapala ja T. Hoppu. — Porvoo : WSOY, 2009. — S. 395–404.

Jacobson, J. When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics / J. Jacobson. — Berkeley : University of California Press, 1994. — XI, 388 p.

Kilin, J. Suurvallan rajamaa : Neuvosto-Karjala Neuvostovaltion politiikassa 1920–1941 / J. Kilin. — Rovaniemi : Pohjois-Suomen historiallinen yhdistys, 2001. — 291 s.

Korhonen, K. Naapurit vastoin tahtaan : Suomi neuvostodiplomatiassa Tartosta talvisotaan / K. Korhonen — Helsinki : Tammi, 1966. — Osa 1. 1920–1933. — 159 s.

Kähönen, A. Continuities and Differences between Soviet and Russian Foreign Policies from the Elite Perspective, 1860–1928 / A. Kähönen // Петербургский

исторический журнал. — 2017. — № 1. — С. 141–156. — URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/continuities-and-differences-between-soviet-and-russian-foreign-policies-from-the-elite-perspective-1860-1928>. — (15.01.2019).

Kähönen, A. Vallankumouksen ja nationalismin leikkauskohdissa 1905–1932 : Suomi hauraana valtiona / A. Kähönen // Kiinniottajat / toim. J. Koponen ja S. Saaritsa. — Helsinki : Gaudeamus, 2019. — (в печати).

Lehti, M. A Baltic League as a Construct of the New Europe : Envisioning a Baltic Region and Small State Sovereignty in the Aftermath of the First World War / M. Lehti — Frankfurt am Main : Peter Lang, 1999. — 550 p.

Mainio, A. Näkymätön sota : Suomi vastavallankumouksellisen terrorismin ja vakoilun tukialueena, 1918–1939 / A. Mainio. — Helsinki : Unigrafia, 2015. — 338 s.

Moore, B. Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy / B. Moore. — Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1991. — XVI, 559 p.

Nygård, T. Suur-Suomi vai lähiheimolaisten auttaminen : aatteellinen heimotyö itsenäisessä Suomessa / T. Nygård. — Helsinki : Otava, 1978. — 342 s.

Pirani, S. The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24 : Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite / S. Pirani. — London : Routledge, 2008. — XIV, 289 p.

Siironen, M. Vapaussodan perintö : valkoisuus paikallisyhteisössä — sisältö, ylläpitäjät ja rapautuminen Iisalmessa 1918–1933 / M. Siironen. — [Oulu] : [Miika Siironen], 2011. — 275 s.

Skocpol, T. States and Social Revolutions : a Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China / T. Skocpol. — Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1979. — 407 p.