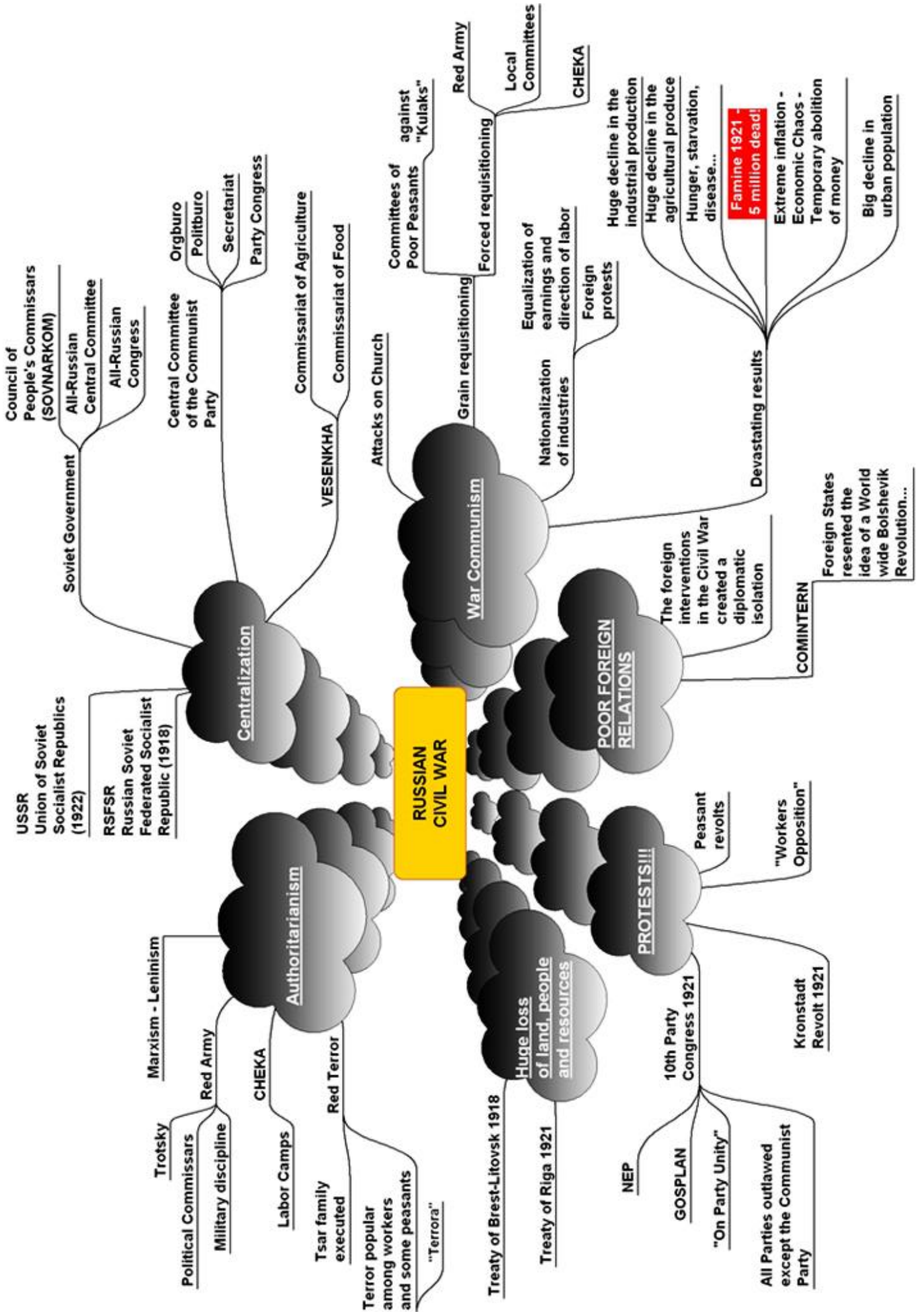


# RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR



# RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR

## WHO WERE THE WHITE FORCES?

- Those attached to other revolutionary groups, hostile to or rejected by the Bolsheviks...
- Former officers of the Imperial army, usually resentful of the "betrayal" at Brest-Litovsk
- Nationalist groups seeking independence for their particular minority

**or**

- Tsarists, nobilities
- Middle-class constitutional democrats
- Mensheviks
- Socialist Revolutionaries
- Foreign Powers
- Groups of nationalists, peasants etc... (Greens: Independent groups of nationalists, peasants or bandits who roamed Russia at this time. They fought anyone and raided villages and towns. The most famous was the Ukrainian nationalist, Nestor Makno, who shared his booty with local peasants)

## WHO WERE THE RED FORCES?

**RED ARMY:** The new Bolshevik regime did not trust the old army so they formed a new one in **January 1918:**

- It was open to all "class-conscious" workers of 18 years of age or more
- The bourgeoisie was banned
- 50 000 former Tsarist officers were retained to train the new force
- Each unit received a political commissar who was responsible for indoctrination and he should ensure that the army remained under Bolshevik control
- The supreme commander of the military forces was Leon Trotsky
- In August 1919 the Red Army had 300 000 soldiers – in January 1920 the Red Army had over 5 million men...

### **CHEKA**

+

- Workers
- Peasants

## WHAT WERE THE AIMS OF THE WHITE FORCES?

- The groups that made up the Whites had different aims: some wanted the Tsar back, some a military Dictator; others wanted constitutional government or revolutionary change. The only aim they had in common was to defeat the Bolsheviks; they agreed on little else...
- Senior Russian Army Officers hated the humiliating terms of Brest-Litovsk. They also wanted to regain control over the Army...
- Landowners wanted their land back
- Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks had been denied power...
- The Foreign Powers were critical against Russia leaving the war (for several different reasons)
- The Foreign powers were also afraid of the new doctrine - Communism
- National minorities wanted their independence...

## WHAT WERE THE AIMS OF THE RED FORCES?

*Ideology – Communism  
Stay in power*

## WHO WERE THE LEADERS OF THE WHITE FORCES?

- They lacked good leaders. Some of the commanders were cruel, treated their men with disrespect and set a bad example, drinking and taking drugs...

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- *The White Generals did not trust each other and would not co-ordinate their attacks. This allowed the Bolsheviks to pick off the White Armies one by one*
- *The Whites had problems inside their Armies, too. There was often fighting and squabbling, because the groups had different aims and beliefs. It was particularly hard for the revolutionaries to co-operate with supporters of the Tsar.*

### WHO WERE THE LEADERS OF THE RED FORCES?

*Lenin*

*Trotsky*

*Previous Tsarist officers...*

### HOW DID THE COMMUNISTS (RED) FINANCE THE CIVIL WAR?

**WAR COMMUNISM** (June/July 1918 - March 1921)

- *VESENKHA: "Supreme Economic Council" - formed in December 1917*
- *Civil War - the economy had to be adjusted to the war...*
- *Extensive nationalization (all the industries - "Decree of Nationalization")*
- *Equalization of earnings and direction of labor*
- *JUNE 1918: Different local rural administrations were formed, the "Committees of Poor Peasants" - who were going to control the rich peasants = "kulaks"*
- *Food was distributed by two centralized bodies: "Commissariat of Agriculture" and "Commissariat of Food"*
- *Large scale grain requisition (sometimes by military force and/or help from the Cheka)*
- **REACTION:** *the peasants stopped producing a surplus which led to hunger and starvation*
- *Peasant unrest all over the country (uprise...)*
- *Industrial sector was pushed far back during this period - devastating results*
- *Chaotic decline of industry, rationing, hunger, disease, decline of the urban population, gradual subordination of the unions to the government*
- *Temporary abolition of money (extreme inflation - economic chaos)*
- *Kronstadt uprising. The sailors together with some soldiers from the Red Army called for a new revolution with freedom of speech, of assembly and private trade*

So was the Bolshevik economical policy "War Communism" successful? Well, they won the Civil War...

War Communism is reckoned to have begun at mid-1918 with the "**Decree of Nationalization**", making all large-scale enterprises liable to nationalization without compensation. In the following three years there was wholesale nationalization, grain requisitioning, extreme inflation and the virtual disappearance of a money economy, a chaotic decline of industry, rationing, hunger, and disease, a decline of urban population, a gradual subordination of the unions to the government, and a Civil War which demanded the dispatch of all available human and material assets to the fronts.

Morris writes about War Communism: "Strict centralized control of all forms of economic production and distribution, the virtual outlawing of all private trade, and the near destruction of the money economy by the printing of vast quantities of banknotes."

To be able to feed the towns during the civil war a **large-scale requisitioning of grain** on the countryside was necessary. In **June** different local administrations - the "**Committees of Poor Peasants**" were formed. They were going to fulfill the needs of the urban population and the army. To make sure that the food supply was enough a **decree of 1919 ordered the peasants to hand over to the State any grain surplus to what was needed for subsistence**. In response the peasants simply reduced their production so there was no surplus. By 1921 only about half as much stock was kept and half as much land cultivated as there had been in 1913. Little food arrived in the cities, and the only prospect of a livelihood lay in the countryside. City workers in their thousands simply left and went into the country, to join the thousands of soldiers returning from the wars. The Government continued the confiscation of supplies, sometimes by military (CHEKA) force.

In March 1921, shortly before the Tenth Bolshevik Party Congress opened in Petrograd, the sailors of the Kronstadt naval base outside Petrograd, joined by some of the Red Army, refused to obey their officers and called for a new revolution that gave genuine freedoms - of speech, of assembly, of private trade. Trotsky

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decided firm action was needed - it took ten days before the rebels gave up. This outburst, together with the peasants active refusal to take part in the grain requisitioning, convinced Lenin of the need for change.

### **HOW DID THE WHITE SIDE FINANCE THE CIVIL WAR?**

### **FOREIGN INTERVENTION: WHICH COUNTRIES INTERVENED IN THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR?**

- Japan
- Britain
- France
- USA
- Italy
- Finland
- Lithuania
- Poland
- Romania

### **FOREIGN INTERVENTION: WHY DID THESE FOREIGN POWERS INTERVENE IN THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR?**

- Resentment at Russian withdrawal from war
- To recover war supplies
- Fear of Bolshevism
- Anger at writing off Russian debts by the Bolsheviks
- Japan wanted to try to gain some territory in the east...

- *LENIN: "The allies wanted to suppress communism"*

- *The allies wanted Russia to restart the war in the east, or at least prevent Germany (Central Powers) from making free use of Russian, Polish, Ukrainian raw materials (and the allied stored supplies in Russia)*

#### **AFTER WWI:**

- *France wanted to have some of the invested money back. Between 1887 and 1917 France invested 16 billion francs in companies/enterprises now nationalized (without any compensation) by the new government*

- *Great Britain and the US had lesser investments to defend*

- *Japan saw an opportunity of territorial gains in Asia (and they were therefore checked by US troops that was more concerned with hindering Japanese annexations than combating Bolshevism further west...)*

#### **AFTER MID-1919**

- *When the Third Communist International (COMINTERN) declared that the main aim was to "overthrow capitalism, establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in an International Soviet republic" the Russian Civil War became predominantly ideological.*

### **WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE FOREIGN INTERVENTION AND WHY...?**

#### **FAILURE:**

- Lack of co-ordination
- Interventionists were not keen for a fight
- Very limited objectives
- Not any concerted effort to bring down the Bolsheviks

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## The international intervention was strictly limited:

- The US sent only about 6000 men to Siberia (mostly to check the Japanese troops)
- Many of the men that were sent over were affected by war-weariness - they were not motivated
- The undemocratic regime of some of the White generals made it hard (or impossible) for some of the foreign troops to cooperate (esp. with Admiral Kolchak on the Eastern front... the US troops refused to cooperate, and the French troops did it with very big difficulties)
- More important for the White armies were the substantial sums of money and the large quantities of military supplies. Unfortunately, some of that was checked by corruption and inefficiency which meant that little of the aid actually reached the front
- The intervention seemed to have the opposite effect of what it meant to have. The Bolsheviks were skilled in their propaganda when they portrayed their war effort as a defense of Russia against foreign imperialism...
- The only big exception to the limited success of the international efforts was the **Czechoslovak Legion**. It had been formed in 1917 by Czechs and Slovaks resident in Russia together with POW. Their aim was not anti-Bolshevik, it was to fight for independence in their own country against the weak Austrian-Hungarian Empire. On their way to the Western front they clashed into local Soviet officials who tried to disarm them (in Cheliabinsk). This incident led to this well-organized and well-equipped unit to cooperate with the White forces. It was successful, especially in the beginning of the Civil War, and their success encouraged the White forces. Representatives of the Socialist Revolutionaries combined with the Czech Legion formed one centre of White Administration at the Eastern front (Omsk).

## WHAT WERE THE MAIN REASONS FOR THE BOLSHEVIK SUCCESS IN THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR?

- In the south and east the white armies fought on fronts that were too wide
- poor communications between the white armies
- white side far away from industrial centers
- intervening allies and the white generals did not agree with each other
- the white armies showed very little understanding for the peasantry and the national minorities
- the white leaders had no clear policies
- the white generals did not develop any international understanding for their cause
- the methods of operations as well as the aims of the white armies were defective
- there were sympathies with the Bolsheviks among the intervening troops
- the red army benefited from "brilliant" leadership
- the red army also had coherent policy and propaganda

The Bolsheviks had some **advantages** - the railroad within their area made it possible for the troops to move quickly from one front to another, the area included industrial centers who could easily change the production to arms and equipment, they had a skillful Commissar of War - Trotsky - who brought in 50 000 former officers of the Tsarist army, and the Red Army was quite homogeneous - the army was united in the aims, the ideology **and by compulsion...**

## The reasons for the final victory of the Reds in the Civil War are not difficult to determine:

- The various White armies fought as separate detachments. They were never more than an uncoordinated group of forces; whose morale was seldom high.
- They were unwilling to sacrifice their individual interests in order to form a united anti-Bolshevik front. This allowed the Reds to pick off the White armies separately.
- In the rare cases in which the Whites did consider combining, they were too widely scattered geographically to be able to mount a sustained attack on the Reds.
- The Whites were a collection of dispossessed socialists, liberals and moderates, whose political differences often led them into bitter disputes among themselves.
- Save for their hatred of Bolshevism, the Whites lacked a common purpose.
- They became too reliant on supplies from abroad, which seldom arrived in sufficient quantity, in the right places, at the right time.

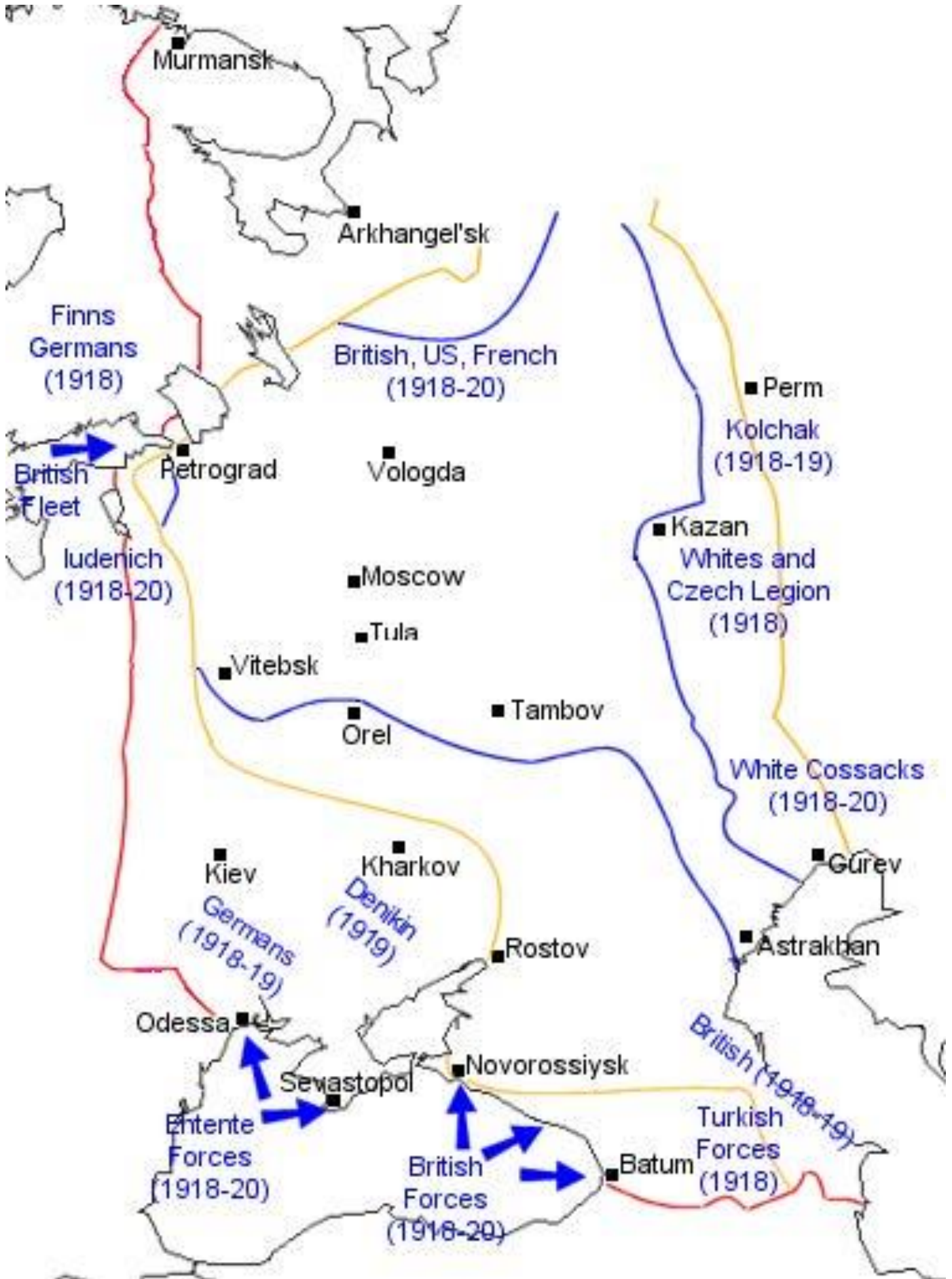
## **RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR**

- Although the Reds imposed a reign of terror, the Whites' own record in ill-treating local populations was equally notorious.
- The Whites lacked leaders of the quality of Trotsky.

### **The Reds, in contrast, had a number of overwhelming advantages:**

- They remained in control of a concentrated central area of western Russia, which they were able to defend by maintaining their inner communication and supply.
- The two major cities, Petrograd and Moscow, the administrative centers of Russia, remained in their hands throughout the war.
- The Reds kept control of the railway network.
- The Reds' strongest hold was over the industrial centers of Russia. This was a key advantage since it gave them access to munitions and resources unavailable to the Whites.
- The dependence of the Whites on supplies from abroad appeared to prove the Red accusation that they were in league with the foreign interventionists. The Civil War had produced a paradoxical situation in which the Reds were able to stand as champions of the Russian nation as well as proletarian revolutionaries.
- Waging war is not just a matter of resources and firepower. Morale and dedication play vital roles. Throughout the struggle the Reds were sustained by a driving sense of purpose.
- The Red Army was brilliantly organized and led by Trotsky as the Bolshevik war commissar. He created an army with an unshakable belief in its own eventual victory.

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MAP OVER THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR