The State Department and the Russian Revolution: The Making of Policy, 1918-1924

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In November 1917, control of the Russian revolution passed from moderate social democrats to radical socialist workers' councils. The Soviets, as these councils were called, promised to overturn not only the economic, social and political order of Russia, but that of the entire world. The transformation of the Russian revolution from liberal democracy to evangelical communism was a shock to the West. In particular, the Allied nations, then fighting the Central empires, and the United States, which saw itself as the beacon of progress and democracy, felt betrayed. American government officials, who had lived through an era of unparalleled radicalism at home, feared that the cause of the bolshevik revolution would be taken up by native-born malcontents and by foreign-born Americans who had been infected with such doctrines in their homelands. It thus became necessary for the American government to halt the spread of Russian revolutionism. This effort came in different stages. First, there was reflexive attack on radicals in the form of interventions abroad and repression at home. Then, by the early 1920s, American policy softened, seeking only to isolate Soviet Russia and to convince the American people that those sympathetic to the new regime in Russia were dangerous revolutionists.

Scholarship on the American response to the Soviet Union has reflected the division between liberal sympathy for and conservative fear of Soviet Russia. Liberal scholars such as William Appleman Williams and other revisionists have seen in Soviet Russia an attempt, however

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primitive, to move Russia away from hundreds of years of imperial autocracy and tend to regard American hostility to the Soviets as reactionary, based solely on perceptions of economic and ideological threat. Conservatives and Burkean liberals such as George F. Kennan and other orthodox historians have seen the Soviet system and its communist international as a real menace, not only to American interests, but to the progress of mankind. Moving beyond this debate, the so-called post-revisionists such as John L. Gaddis have sought to examine the development of American policy outside the framework of these value systems. Nevertheless, studies of the American reaction to the Russian revolution still lack adequate analyses of the origins of the State Department's Russian policy and of the early development of its support apparatus. An examination of the ideas and activities of those in the State Department who sought to shape the American response to bolshevism demonstrates the important role played by the department's Russian and Eastern European divisions, and it helps to explain why the American policy of nonrecognition toward the Soviet Union persisted into the 1930s.

Beset with post-war peace-making problems and domestic battles over the peace, the administration of Woodrow Wilson never formulated a coherent policy toward the Soviet takeover of Russia. By 1919, however, the State Department was more successful in its search for a means to isolate the Soviets. Faced with the challenge of bolshevism and the breakdown of information on revolutionary Russia, the department established one of the first modern, specialized foreign policy bureaucracies. That year, the Division of Russian Affairs began to compile a meticulously documented case against the revolutionary aspects of the Soviet system and its desire to radicalize the workers of the world. This thesis on Soviet radicalism was then disseminated throughout the American government and to the American people. By 1924, the American refusal to recognize Russia and the State Department's determination to observe and counter the Soviet system were the cornerstones of American policy toward Soviet Russia.

To a considerable extent, the initial American response to the revolutions in Russia developed along parallel lines in the White House and the Department of State. As president, Woodrow Wilson took seriously what he considered to be his role as liberator of mankind. His sense of mission controlled both his foreign policy and his response to the bolshevik revolution. On one occasion, a Russian visitor moved the president to tears with pleas for his help in combatting radicalism and civil war in her homeland. Closely documenting the influence of the Russian Provisional Government's ambassador in Washington, Boris Bakhmetev, the historian Linda
Killen has suggested another source of presidential policy. As representative of the Kerensky government, Bakhmetev stood for a liberalized, westernized Russia and could be presumed an expert on Russian revolutionary politics, although in reality, no one long removed from the scene could possibly follow events there. According to Killen, both Bakhmetev and the American embassy in Moscow insisted that bolshevism could not survive and that it was the duty of the United States to help free Russia from it. Bakhmetev urged first nonrecognition of the Soviets and, ultimately, armed intervention to secure their overthrow. These suggestions jibed with allied interventionist policy and with the president's personal instincts, thus filling a policy vacuum.

The effort to overthrow the Soviet government, however, failed to bring about change favorable to the West. By 1919, Wilson's policy was little more than a passive response, refusing to recognize a government it had been unable to change. Moreover, the Allied interventions in Northern Russia and Siberia had given the Soviets support for the claim that domestic Russian problems and bolshevist hostility toward the West were a result of outside efforts to crush their new order. Seeking to block such Soviet propaganda, the Department of State adopted a less ambitious, yet more difficult, goal than that of the president. To contain bolshevism and its virulent message, more would have to be known about the Soviet system and its evils would have to be exposed. So began a twenty-year effort to study the emerging Soviet system.

The American failure to anticipate the revolutions in Russia was a primary influence on the State Department's formation of post-war foreign policy. Secretary of State Robert Lansing and the top-ranking departmental officers believed that greater knowledge of Russian revolutionary politics would have enabled American diplomats there to prevent the bolshevist seizure of power and resolved never again to allow American information to fall so badly behind events. As Lansing realized, the American government now had to repair the damage to national security which had resulted from the breakdown of information on wartime political developments in Russia and elsewhere. The first steps to end American ignorance of emerging international political movements were taken in mid-1918, when Lansing instructed "the Diplomatic Officers of the United States" to gather information and to evaluate the strength of liberal, imperialist and revolutionary movements around the world. American diplomats were directed to suggest "means of strengthening the forces of Liberalism," as defined by Wilson's Fourteen Points. The secretary also sought personality profiles of international leaders in office and in opposition. In addition to gathering intelligence on emerging
political movements, the State Department also moved to meet an acute personnel problem by reforming and professionalizing the foreign service. A newly gathered corps of Russian experts were given a broad mandate to study the Soviet Union.

The need for information on revolutionary Russia was first met in late 1917 by the hasty creation of a State Department bureau to study the "various matters pertaining to Russia . . . in connection with conditions arising out of the World War and the Russian Revolu-
tion."5 Previously a section of the Near Eastern divi-
sion, the Russian bureau was headed by Basil Miles, a diplomatic officer who had long served in Russia before the revolution. By 1919, an independent Russian division was established under the temporary leadership of Miles. Later that year, DeWitt Clinton Poole, another old Russia hand, became chief of the division.

During the revolution, Poole had served as a consul and as charge d'affaires in Moscow and was sent south to establish an American liaison with the Cossacks, then fighting the Red Army.6 When this effort failed, he was made special assistant and counselor to the newly estab-
lished American embassy in Archangel. In Washington, as chief of the Russian division, Poole continued to foster hopes for the overthrow of the bolsheviks and the estab-
ishment of a democratic successor to imperial Russia.7 But as these hopes faded, so did the usefulness of men such as he.

Although the mainstay of the Russian division con-
tinued to be officers who, like Poole, had served in pre-
revolutionary Russia, they were no more effective in dealing with bolshevism than they had been during the revolution. Therefore, the Russian division was forced to seek other sources of information and analysis, relying on observers from outside the foreign service who were made State Department special assistants. Professor Samuel N. Harper, a Russian expert from the University of Chicago, and Norman H. Davis, an international business-
man and diplomatic appointee of the Wilson administra-
tion, were two such men. Arthur Bullard, a liberal writer deeply interested in the Russian revolutionary movement and associated with the propaganda efforts of George Creel's wartime Committee on Public Information, also became a special assistant. Bullard has been cha-

Aside from old Russia hands and special outside ex-
perts, the Russian division employed Earl L. Packer, a man who typified a new sort of officer being drawn into the State Department by events in Russia and by the de-
sire to study them more deeply. Like several other offi-
cers who were to direct State Department Soviet studies
for a generation to come, Packer entered the foreign service with the purpose of specializing in Soviet affairs. His early career had led him from a clerkship in the War Department to the American embassy in Petrograd. Packer arrived in Russia in February 1917, just before the first revolution. Through the turmoil and factional strife, he observed events leading up to the November revolution free of the preconceptions of older, more experienced officers. He enlisted in the Army in 1918, and was charged with military observation of the Soviets. Necessity and common sense dictated that Packer's skills be put to use. By 1920 Packer was made a special assistant in the Department of State and assigned to the Russian division.

Under the direction of Poole, the Russian division began developing the methods of information-gathering which were to become the hallmark of State Department Soviet studies. Beginning in late 1919, the division began to document and communicate to Congress and the public the claim that the Soviet government was not an acceptable member of the international community. This was accomplished by placing before them closely reasoned and intensively documented materials on the nature of the Soviet Union and on its propaganda and revolutionary efforts. The documentary expose of Soviet propaganda was to serve a dual purpose. Soviet claims of peaceful intent would be refuted by their active support of international revolution, and the policy of nonrecognition would thus be vindicated.

Two memoranda compiled for congressional hearings into bolshevik propaganda efforts in the United States trace the early development of State Department Russian studies. The first memo, dated October 1919, was produced within a month of Poole's assumption of leadership of the division. Coming as early as it did, and based on what appear to have been materials randomly gathered from military intelligence at Riga, Latvia, it seems primitive in comparison with a second memo produced just six months later in March 1920. As early as 1919, however, the assumptions and methods which were to direct policy formation in the State Department were already taking shape as the division began to collect, translate and excerpt Soviet publications, using the most extreme of their propaganda statements to justify the wary American attitude toward the Soviet Union.

Completed just two years after the Communist party had come to power in Russia, the first memo looked forward to the overthrow of the Soviet government. Two documents, one the statement of an "American Representative from Finland," and the other a "Report of American Representative of Statements from a Personal Friend Who had Escaped from Soviet Russia," illustrate the type of
material that the Russian division then presented to the public. The first statement assured Americans that "not 1 per cent of Soviet Russia's population will be against intervention. . . . Kolchak or any other power will be welcomed. There will be a slaughtering of Bolsheviks as soon as the deliverers are near. . . ." Similarly, the second statement pleaded for American "Help for Russia," again, through "liquidation of Bolshevism." Notwithstanding such emotional appeals, the major support for the memorandum was eighteen Soviet documents collected and translated from the Riga listening post.

The second of the two memos is a much more refined example of the work of the Russian division under Poole. Entitled "Memorandum on the Bolshevist or Communist Party and its Relations to the Third or Communist International and to the Russian Soviets," it omitted the earlier attempt to indict the Soviets as the enemies of mankind. In its place, the memo documented the role of the Communist party in the Russian government and of the party's efforts to export revolution. Rather than railing against the Soviet system, the memo dispassionately set forth the structure and self-described purpose of government in Russia and allowed the reader to draw the self-evident conclusions. While the condemnation of Soviet activities was as forceful as before, it now lay more implicitly in the supporting evidence. Nowhere was there the call to action that there had been before, and the memo's seventy-four substantiating documents were drawn exclusively from Soviet sources.

By 1920, a new State Department policy toward the rule of the Soviets in Russia began to emerge. From the simple refusal to recognize the Soviet government, a policy developed which sought to defend nonrecognition and to refute Soviet peace propaganda. The next step was to publicly present a comprehensive defense of American policy which would convince the public that isolation of Soviet Russia was necessary and proper. In February, Bullard, as acting chief of the Russian division, set before his colleague Felix Cole, who had served in Russia from 1912 to 1918 as a representative of American business interests and as a consul, his thoughts on Soviet Russia and the domestic problems it created. Bullard opened his policy review by noting the American desire for peace with the Russian people and claimed that even their experiments with domestic radicalism need not be an obstacle to that goal. The real problem, as he saw it, was that the communist leaders of Russia had set as their task the incitement of international class warfare and the destruction of bourgeois governments everywhere.

Thus it was impossible for even those of the best will to coexist with the Russians. In words which predated George Kennan's call for containment of the Soviet
Union a generation later, Bullard stressed that the Soviet "propaganda offensive will be too insidious to be held back by any 'Cordon sanitaire,' or to be suppressed by force of arms." Moreover, the problem of countering Soviet propaganda was compounded by the fact that even as they promoted revolution, Russian leaders claimed to be interested only in peace with the West. Bullard felt that these claims had deceived many liberal journalists into believing that it was the United States which threatened the Soviet Union and not vice versa. The press had convinced much of the public that the United States had wronged Russia. American policy therefore had to follow two tacks: one, the forthright policy of information on the true nature of Soviet revolutionism, and the other, a more cynical attempt to discredit Bolshevik peace propaganda.

First the Russian division would need to prove that Soviet Russia sought to export its social and economic system to unwilling nations around the world. Bullard felt that only those who had been in Russia, had seen the work of the bolsheviks, and had access to "secret unobtainable knowledge" of Soviet activities could understand the impossibility of living in peace with Soviet Russia. Bullard did not, however, suggest the release of any such knowledge. Rather he proposed to fight Soviet propaganda with American propaganda.

In the following months and years, American policy followed the lines first set out by Bullard in February 1920. The United States government sought to convince the public that coexistence with Soviet Russia was impossible because the Soviets had no real desire for peace. The Russian division continued to supply Congress and the public with a constant flow of information on the international revolutionary activities of Soviet representatives, particularly those in the United States, such as Ludvig C. A. K. Martens who fled the United States to avoid federal prosecution in early 1921.

As part of the American effort to counter Soviet propaganda, Samuel Harper urged that friendly newsmen be given special access to departmental information. In a memo dated August 9, 1920, Harper suggested that two "sanely and solidly anti-Bolshevik" reporters for The Washington Post, Malcolm Davis and Simeon Strunsky, be given access to otherwise closed files. Harper noted, however, that "All of the above suggestions hold only for Strunsky and Davis, both of whom are absolutely O.K. so far as I have been able to discover, very well balanced and acquainted with the problem." Bullard also recommended that the United States launch its own "peace offensive" in answer to that of the Soviets:
I advocate starting some negotiations with the Bolsheviki—rather noisily so that all the world will hear—not because I hope that it would bring Peace, but because I think it would, if properly staged, quiet a great deal of unrest at home... 

... the "Nation" would not go on saying that the Soviets had made twenty-one offers of peace and had been rebuffed by our Capitalists...

There is one other point of importance, the man chosen to represent us should be a new man in Russian affairs, who has not been publicly committed to [an] anti-Bolshevik attitude. And he should be a man who really believes that there is a chance of real peace.14

He argued that the American effort would best succeed if we made "our conditions very few and simple, so that any violation of them would be at once obvious to all the world." The United States would thereby unmask Soviet duplicity and one of three things would result:

(a) An insulting rejection of our overtures, and freedom for us to turn back to our home problems with a clearer conscience and lighter heart; (b) An insincere acceptation [sic] in order to gain a 'breathing space.'... At the first violation we would discontinue our relief and withdraw our representative. Or, (c), if I am wrong in my estimate, we might have peace.15

In spite of the cynical tone of this memorandum, Bullard and most of those with whom he worked believed that the Soviet threat to the United States was imminent and that strong measures were justified in order to protect national security. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that the State Department was involved in creating the Sisson documents which falsely purported to prove that there had been German-Soviet wartime collusion, even though Harper was one of the few scholars who accepted their authenticity.

In order to further convince the public of American generosity toward the Soviet Union, the Wilson administration lifted official restrictions on trade in nonmilitary goods to the Soviet Union in June 1920. At the same time, the State Department warned "all desiring to take advantage of this that they can expect no official aid from this Government in view of the fact that there is no official Russia with whom we could deal."16 Joan Hoff-Wilson and other historians consider this attitude somewhat anomalous. As the United States was hardening its political response to the Soviet Union, it relaxed restrictions on trade. Hoff-Wilson therefore sees American
policy toward the Soviets as divided along bureaucratic lines between political revulsion and a desire for economic access to a newly developing Russia, a conflict between economics and ideology.\textsuperscript{17}

Given the small volume of trade between Russia and the United States which had existed before the war and which was likely to result from the 1920 State Department action, the relaxation of sanctions can better be seen as a gesture. It was part of the effort to refute bolshevik claims that the West was still trying to destroy Soviet Russia. If there was any economic motivation underlying the relaxation of sanctions, it was secondary to the more political concerns of the State Department. In 1920 Russia was in economic ruins. No one could then foresee either the New Economic Program of 1921 or that in the latter part of the decade, Joseph Stalin would seek to push Soviet industrialization by broadening unofficial trade with the United States. As that trade later developed, the Department of State came to fear that greater economic involvement would lead to either Soviet or American demands for political ties.\textsuperscript{18}

At the same time, State Department Soviet experts were not blind to political opportunities afforded by economic exchanges with the Soviet Union, as long as they did not undermine policy. Throughout the era, the Russian and Eastern European divisions took advantage of the minimal trade and industrial relations between the Soviet Union and the United States to gather information on Soviet conditions from Americans who had visited Russia on business or for pleasure. In addition, the State Department assigned Felix Cole to the Commerce Department's newly vitalized Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce in 1921.\textsuperscript{19} Cole served not only as an expert on commercial contacts with Russia but also as a watchdog, and his appointment reflected the ambivalence of American policy toward Russia prior to 1923. Despite State Department opposition to political as well as possibly entangling economic contacts with the Soviets, lingering hopes for reform in Russia fueled interest in commercial and economic conditions there. The department anticipated the day when the United States could safely reopen trade in a Russia free from the bolsheviks. But in the early 1920s, matters of trade and economics were, for the State Department, secondary to political issues, as Bullard's program for a propaganda counteroffensive continued to shape American isolation of the Soviet Union.

Later in 1920, the new secretary of state, Bainbridge Colby, took advantage of a dispute with the Italian ambassador to the United States, Baron Camillo Avezzano, to publicly issue a comprehensive defense of nonrecognition. Avezzano called on Colby, who could or would not see him. The Italian left his calling card,
on the back of which he scrawled the query, "So what about Russia?" Colby seized the opportunity to proclaim the continuity of policy toward the Soviet Union. In all particulars, Colby's response to Avezzano followed Bullard's February prescriptions. Colby stressed the American desire for peace with Russia and the importance of a government there which existed on "the broad basis of popular self-government." But according to both the Secretary of State and Bullard, the major impediment to satisfactory relations between the two nations was the commitment of the Soviet government to international revolution.

Apart from the State Department effort to study and to expose the emerging Soviet system through 1920, the Wilson administration continued to search for a means to reform the Soviet government. John Spargo, a social reformer and historian of the Colby era in the State Department, has asserted that late that year the secretary of state set before the president a plan which revived the Versailles Prinkipo plan and which would have had Hjalmar Branting, the social democratic prime minister of Sweden, call on the Soviets to accept a scheme for the reconstruction of their government along democratic lines. The Swedish government, however, declined to become involved in such an effort.

The advent of a new administration and a new secretary of state, Charles Evans Hughes, brought some minor changes in emphasis in American policy toward Russia. Like Woodrow Wilson, Hughes steadfastly opposed recognition of Soviet Russia. In 1921 he rebuffed a Soviet overture in a major policy statement which emphasized the impossibility of dealing normally with a regime so economically radical as that of Russia. As hopes for the early collapse or reform of the Soviet government faded, the United States continued to insist on official isolation of the Soviets while it quietly allowed private economic contacts, particularly those which provided favorable impact on public opinion or additional information on Soviet developments. The State Department also extended and refined its resources for the study and observation of the Soviet Union.

In August 1921, the American Relief Administration concluded an agreement in Riga with a Soviet representative, Maxim Litvinov, to provide American assistance to victims of famine and civil warfare in the Soviet Union. While the establishment of the ARA in Russia was less a consequence of Bullard's proposal for a cosmetic demarche and more the result of Herbert Hoover's desire to alleviate hunger, suffering, and the specter of widespread revolution in postwar Europe, the ARA's Russian program was also a conspicuous display of American goodwill toward Russia. The State Department hoped to
gain firsthand information on conditions in Russia from the officers of the ARA. But for all concerned its value as a gesture toward the people of Russia overshadowed other considerations. As Bullard had anticipated the ARA had little impact on relations between the United States and Soviet Russia. It brought neither peace nor rapprochement as the two nations continued to wage their unabated propaganda war against one another. Nonetheless, the ARA gained a political victory for the United States by evoking expressions of gratitude from the Soviet government and lending credibility to the American claim that the United States was no more responsible for tensions between the nations than Russia.26

Regardless of its propaganda value, the ARA failed to fulfill State Department hopes for reliable information on conditions in the Soviet Union. Three factors limited its usefulness as an information source. First, the ARA's senior officers decided not to endanger their relief efforts in Russia and elsewhere by engaging in political observation and reporting. Secondly, most ARA officers in the field had neither the language training nor the skills to be accurate political observers. Equally important was the fact that their mission took ARA officials to areas hardest hit by war and famine and most resistant to Soviet rule. Thus, policy makers could not rely on information from the ARA as an accurate depiction of economic and political conditions in Russia.27 By 1922 the State Department was becoming more discriminating in its use of information coming out of Soviet Russia. As it built up observation posts in the newly independent Baltic and Finnish republics, the department began to rely less on untrained observers and hearsay evidence from anti-bolshevik sources, and it concentrated more on close study and interpretation of primary Soviet sources.

Following the departure of American diplomats from Russia in mid-1918, the State Department instructed Evan E. Young, a career foreign service officer, to establish a diplomatic counterpart to the military observation post in Riga. Young was United States commissioner to the secessionist Baltic provinces from 1920 until 1922. When the United States formally recognized the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, he was appointed minister to the new Baltic nations. Young lacked any background in Russian or Soviet affairs. But, as had been the case with Earl Packer, this was no handicap, for it left him free of the disabling preconceptions of more experienced officers. Unlike Poole, Young did not believe in the emergence of a democratic Russia or that the collapse of the Soviet regime was imminent. Rather, he felt that for some time to come the United States would need to observe
and study the Soviet system in order to counter its threat. Young was a skilled administrator and was able to recruit from the Military Intelligence Division men of talent for the State Department's new Soviet service. As commissioner and minister to the Baltics from 1920 to 1923, he made the American legation at Riga the preeminent information-gathering center on the Soviet Union and on international bolshevik activities. For years to come, the State Department and the entire American government would look to the Riga legation, which fed current information on the Soviet Union to Soviet experts in Washington, as a window on Russia.

The next step in the establishment of State Department Soviet studies was to supplement the offices in Riga with a geopolitical division in Washington able to compile and analyze the material now coming in from the Baltics. By 1921, the State Department clearly could not continue to rely on existing resources, particularly since two of the Russian division's most effective analysts, Arthur Bullard and Samuel Harper, had left with the Wilson administration. Recognition of Baltic independence was thus followed in 1923 by a minor shift in policy as a new Division of Eastern European Affairs replaced the Russian division. These changes signalled the official end of hopes that a democratic government would replace the Soviet regime. Policy now focused exclusively on the study of the Soviet system and support for nonrecognition. The United States would seek neither to reform nor to aid Russia for the subsequent decade.

During the next nine months, Poole directed the new Eastern European division as he had the old Russian division. He expanded its scholarly resources but continued the commitment to change in Russia. With the Riga legation established, however, Young was called back to Washington in June 1923 to build up the Eastern European division as he had the legation. To fulfill this task, he employed a few of the people used by Poole, most notably Earl Packer, and brought into the division others he had enlisted in Riga, such as Loy W. Henderson and Robert F. Kelley. Within two years Young was able to turn over the direction of the offices in Washington and Riga to Kelley, who had been trained in Russian studies at Harvard and the University of Paris and in intelligence-gathering by the United States Army.

The years between 1923, when Young took over from Poole, and 1925, when he handed the division over to Kelley, were spent in further securing both policy and its supports and preparing Kelley to assume leadership of State Department Soviet studies. In January 1924, Kelley testified before a Senate subcommittee hearing into bolshevik propaganda in the United States. Commending his Senate appearance, Secretary Hughes observed that,
Both the preparation of the case, as well as the manner of presentation, left nothing to be desired, and I know, both from my own experience, as well as from what Mr. Young tells me, how important a part you played throughout.32

This was high praise from a man who was notorious for the demands he made of subordinates.33 In the annual efficiency rating prepared for the Division of Foreign Service Personnel in November 1924, Young wrote what he considered an "unusually high commendation." He praised Kelley as "one of the few outstanding students of Russia and Russian affairs" and as "a man of rare and exceptional ability."34 In his first year of service in the Eastern European division, Kelley secured the praise of his chief and that of the secretary of State. The State Department had found its Russian expert.

In another year, Kelley would assume the direction of the division. But first, as spokesman for departmental policy, he had to prove himself able not only to present the government's case, but also to deal with criticism of nonrecognition, which even then the State Department began to anticipate. In December 1924, Kelley produced for the division an eleven-page memorandum in which he comprehensively reviewed the arguments in favor of American recognition of the Soviet Union. He began by observing that

It is universally agreed that a foreign state cannot legitimately concern itself with the form or origin of a new government. . . . In the long run, it is not the constitutionality of a government which makes it legitimate, but its effective power--its stability. . . .35

He further argued that even illegal action on the part of a new government did not justify the severance of relations, branding such a step "illogical and . . . ineffective."

What followed was a restatement of the political and economic arguments against American policy used by emerging pro-recognitionist groups and their spokesmen. Kelley pointed out the logical fallacy of recognizing no sovereign over a major territory and its people, and the harm done by the lack of protection for American interests in Russia and vice versa. He noted that so long as the United States refused to recognize the U.S.S.R., only the more disreputable members of the American business community would venture to do business there, thus creating even more problems between the nations.

Kelley also contended that legally, "recognition is not a mark of approval or of disapproval," but a basic
matter of international affairs. The memo argued further that recognition would refute Russian claims that foreign hostility was the major cause of problems with the West. Kelley finally presented the reformist argument for recognition: that an end to the international isolation of the Soviet Union might serve to moderate the policies of the bolsheviks and ultimately transform them from international revolutionaries to Russian nationalists. Without elaboration he observed "the realities of the present. . . favorable to the recognition of the Soviet government." Prepared just before he assumed direction of the Eastern European division, Kelley's memo set forth the case for the other side and anticipated rising opposition to the policy of nonrecognition which most other nations were abandoning.

As a study in the formation of policy and the assumptions which underlay it, it is worthwhile to examine several other possible explanations for this memo. In doing so, it must be kept in mind that during the 1920s the State Department never seriously reconsidered nonrecognition and throughout a long career in Soviet-American relations Robert Kelley never wavered in his opposition to Soviet Russia.

The most intriguing hypothesis about this memo deals with its timing and intent. The moving spirit of bolshevism, V. I. Lenin, had died just eleven months earlier and, by the end of 1924 it became clear that there was an ongoing struggle for succession in Russia which was not to be fully resolved before 1929.36 It is conceivable, therefore, that some in the State Department might have argued for an overture from the United States designed to strengthen those elements in the bolshevik leadership still arguing for moderation. If this were the case, however, it is curious that Kelley's memorandum contains no explicit mention of succession. The possibility that elements in the State Department had the flexibility and responsiveness to create a policy designed to promote Soviet political reform is intriguing. But since no evidence beyond this memo exists, it is unlikely that Kelley or his superiors actually considered such an overture.

Instead, throughout the 1920s the American government pursued a policy which cast the Soviet Union as an outlaw, unfit to be dealt with as other nations were. In its first public pronouncement, the Eastern European division in September 1923 set American policy in opposition to

1. Repudiation by Russia of her obligations to the United States. . . . 2. Continuation of revolutionary propaganda in the United States.37
In December, Secretary of State Hughes rebuffed another overture from Soviet Foreign Minister Georgii Chicherin, demanding of the Soviet Union that it fully repay all repudiated Russian debts in the United States as a precondition to any discussions.38

In his first annual message as president, Calvin Coolidge took up the same theme. In what was to become a major policy statement for his administration and the next, Coolidge proclaimed that

Our government does not propose . . . to enter into relations with another regime which refuses to recognize the sanctity of international obligations. I do not propose to barter away, for the privilege of trade, any of the cherished rights of humanity.39

The United States would encourage the Soviets to return to "the ancient ways of society." But until Russia had essentially accomplished that transformation and had shown a willingness to assume their traditional international obligations, the American government would continue to shun the Soviets. At the same time, the Eastern European division refused to encourage false hopes for the overthrow of bolshevism. The division advised Coolidge in 1923 that it would serve no purpose for him to receive officially Alexander Kerensky, the exiled former prime minister of the Russian Provisional Government, who wished to call on him.40

The State Department had built by 1924 a comprehensive policy of nonrecognition based on American objections to bolshevik propaganda and the Soviet refusal to honor Russian debts and to follow standard commercial practices. Any reading of Kelley's "prorecognition" memo must regard it as an exercise which summed up and anticipated the arguments most likely to confront Kelley as the State Department's chief Soviet expert and its spokesman for policy. As was to be the case with so much of the work of the Eastern European division in the latter part of the 1920s and into the 1930s, this document was designed to defend rather than to question established policy. It shows the degree to which the State Department took seriously any challenge to policy. The tone and presentation of Kelley's memo suggest that the State Department considered contending policy options only to the extent that they represented a potential threat.

In the period from 1918 to 1924, there emerged within the State Department a sophisticated bureau of expertise on Soviet Russia. From the reflexive but uninformed desire to destroy bolshevism in Russia, American policy developed toward a realistic, but hostile,
assessment of Soviet intentions and capabilities which stressed the economic unreliability of the Soviet government as well as its commitment to international revolution through propaganda and subversion. The emergence of the State Department's Division of Eastern European Affairs was therefore significant for two major reasons. First, it gave a studied and rational voice to American opposition to Soviet Russia. Regardless of whether its assessments of the Soviets were accurate, the Eastern European division also represented the State Department's pioneering effort to shape foreign policy in a more studied and rational manner than had been previously attempted.

For the next nine years, the division would concentrate on the defense of the American refusal to deal politically with the Soviet Union. As time went on and nonrecognition became increasingly controversial, opposition to policy would grow among a small but influential minority of Congress, the business community, and the general public. Rather than modify Russian policy in response to what the division regarded as subversion, it devoted increasing amounts of State Department resources to the defense of existing policy. Thus, the division faced both public opposition to its policy and the hostility of those in the State Department who opposed policy formation by geographical divisions. These disputes over the role of the department in foreign policy making were to impede the future development of expertise in American foreign affairs. The course of World War II and postwar American diplomacy was thereby influenced by this early State Department attempt to create a corps of foreign policy experts, largely in response to the perceived threat of the Russian revolution.

NOTES

1. The historiography of Soviet-American relations is vast in its scope and extent, and no attempt will be made here to survey it. Daniel Yergin's revisionist work, Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), provides an exhaustive bibliography on the subject. See also the more selective bibliographical essay in John Lewis Gaddis's Russia, the Soviet Union and the United States: An Interpretive History (New York: John Wiley, 1978), which stands as the major survey of Soviet-American relations for the foreseeable future. George F. Kennan's Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956, 1958) not only provides a comprehensive orthodox study of the beginnings of Soviet-American relations, but also sets a standard for scholarship in the field which has rarely been met or matched. William Appleman Williams's American-Russian Relations, 1781-1947 (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1952) is the "bible" for those who see the problems in Soviet-American relations as primarily the fault of the United States. But, as Gaddis points out, much of Williams's argument, while thought-provoking, is no longer convincing. Moreover, it does not reflect the past thirty years of extensive work done in Soviet-American relations. In particular, his view of the State Department role in early Soviet-American relations is one dimensional, ignoring the political and popular response to bolshevism and the complex interrelationship of these factors in policy making.

2. Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, Woodrow Wilson and
4. U.S. Department of State to the diplomatic officers of the United States, June 18, 1918, Record Group 59, 800.00/33a, Decimal Files, Department of State, National Archives, hereafter cited as RG 59, by decimal number, DSNA.
8. Kennan, Russia Leaves the War, pp. 46-49.
13. S. N. Harper to AJC, August 9, 1920, RG 59, Policy Books, DSNA.
15. Ibid.
19. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Department of Commerce, to Department of State, July 28, 1921, RG 59, 123 C 673/81, DSNA; Wilbur J. Carr, Director of the Consular Service, to Henry P. Fletcher, Undersecretary of State, July 19, 1921, RG 59, 123 C 673/92, DSNA.
21. Schuman, American Policy Toward Russia, pp. 345-349.
25. See "Documents of the American Relief Administration, Russian Operations 1921-1923," (Stanford University: typescript, 1931), in the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa; also Benjamin M. Weissman, Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia, 1921-1923 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), provides a brief history of the ARA in Russia.


34. Evan E. Young, chief, Division of Eastern European Affairs, to Charles E. Eberhardt, Office of the Executive Committee of the Foreign Service Personnel Board, "Robert F. Kelley, Foreign Service Officer, Class VIII," November 1, 1924, Kelley Papers.


37. Young to William Phillips, Undersecretary of State, September 7, 1923, RG 59, 661.1115/453, DSNA.


39. Ibid.