



GALCON 2026

Reds vs. Whites: The Russian Civil War



**Crisis Committee
Research Report**

Definitions

Bolsheviks: The Bolsheviks and their supporters, also referred to as the Red Movement. Are members of a wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party.¹ They split from the Mensheviks in 1903.

The White Movement: The anti-Bolsheviks, mainly consist of five factions: Social Revolutionaries (SRs), Monarchists, Liberals, Mensheviks, Ultra nationalists. Sought to return elements of the old order by removing the Bolsheviks from power.²

Parliament: the supreme legislative body of a usually major political unit that is a continuing institution comprising a series of individual assemblages.³ In Russia, the parliament is referred to as the State Duma. Alongside the state council, the Duma constituted the imperial Russian legislature until its dissolution in the March 1917 revolution. The state Council constituted the upper house of the parliament, while the Duma was the lower house.⁴

Revolution: a fundamental change in political organization, usually done using violent means, which results in an overthrow of a dominating class and its replacement with another.⁵

Soviets: councils in which decisions regarding collective actions are decided democratically.⁶ After the revolution the word soviet was used for the higher councils that the local soviets elected, as well as the local governments elected by the workers.⁷

Liberalism: the belief that the freedom of the individual is the most important, and it should be the government's main role to protect that freedom.⁸ In Russia, the liberal party included groups like the Kadet party, opposing both the Tsarist autocracy and radical socialists.⁹

Tsar/Czar: the supreme ruler of Russia from 1547 until the 1917 revolution¹⁰
(with Nicholas II being the last Tsar/Czar).

¹ [Bolshevik | Definition](#)

² [The Russian Civil War](#)

³ [PARLIAMENT Definition & Meaning](#)

⁴ [Duma | Definition](#)

⁵ [REVOLUTION Definition & Meaning](#)

⁶ [Soviet \(council\)](#)

⁷ [Soviet - Definition](#)

⁸ [CLASSICAL LIBERALISM](#)

⁹ [Russian Revolution](#)

¹⁰ [TSAR Definition](#)

Armistice: a formal agreement between groups at war to stop fighting, serving as a temporary cessation of hostilities (a truce) to allow for peace negotiations.¹¹

Background

Tsarist Russia in its Dying Years

The decline of the Russian Empire saw its first sign with its humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905).¹² The Russo-Japanese war led to the first glimmer of revolutionary action in Russia as recurring defeats shook the people's trust in the Tsar and in the competence of his regime. The financial costs of the war crippled the Russian economy, which led to massive strains on the unready Russian society as they faced higher taxes, food shortages, increasing unemployment, rising prices, and other suffocating measures.¹³ On January 9th, 1905, in the event known as "the **1905 Revolution**," Russian streets began to fill with a peaceful march of workers led by father Georgy Gapon. They began approaching the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to deliver Tsar Nicholas II a petition requesting better labor conditions, basic civil liberties, and fair wages. However, the peaceful marchers were met with gunfire, resulting in hundreds of workers injured or dead.¹⁴ Outrage filled the streets of the Russian empire. Seeing the Russian streets filled with rage, Tsar Nicholas II sensed that his position was in jeopardy and understood that it was time for a change, especially one that would calm the Russian streets. In that year, he issued the **October Manifesto** document, which promised the Russian people civil liberties such as freedom of speech, assembly, and press, all while promising the people the opportunity to vote and create an elected parliament that would be in charge of approving new laws. On April 23rd, 1906, as the Fundamental Laws were introduced, a parliament, called the Duma, was established. This opened the door for many political parties to organize legitimately within the empire. The Fourth elected Duma, voted in 1912, was in heavy contention and included a wide range of competing ideological parties including the Bolsheviks, Octobrists, Kadets, Nationalists, reactionary parties and others.

World War I began in 1914, and Russia found itself on the side of the UK, France and eventually the USA in a large-scale war against Germany and Austria-Hungary. As the war kept progressing, the Fourth Duma started to lose its satisfaction with the government and its incompetence due to setbacks on the field and the heavy burdens it imposed to finance the war effort. By 1915, the Fourth Duma had reached a state of constant opposition to the imperial regime.¹⁵ As the World War progressed even further, the Russian incompetence kept getting exposed constantly as soldiers went to the front lines without Rifles or ammunition, and were ordered to pick up weapons from fallen comrades. The

¹¹ [Armistice | Definition.](#)

¹² [Russian Revolution | Definition, Causes, Summary, History, & Facts | Britannica](#)

¹³ [The Causes of the 1905 Russian Revolution: A Structural Analysis](#)

¹⁴ [Russian Revolution of 1905: Origins, Major Causes and Outcome](#)

¹⁵ [Duma | Definition, Facts, & History | Britannica](#)

incompetence of officers worsened and increased the losses and casualties, and corruption in supply chains led to lack of food, uniforms, and medical care. By 1917 Russia had millions of casualties which greatly impacted soldiers' morale negatively. The Russian public also faced an unbearable economic situation; food shortages and supply crises¹⁶ which led to protests and oppositions, helping the Socialist and Bolshevik parties to gain popularity and support.

The February Revolution 1917

On February 22nd 1917, strikes broke out in Petrograd, which now saw the rise of a Soviet (a council representing the workers) that dominated many of its industrial sectors. What began as a protest led by women demanding bread, evolved into a strike with hundreds of thousands of metal workers filling the streets demanding an end to the war and the abdication of the Tsar.¹⁷ This led to the shutdown of most industries and the Russian economy came to a standstill. Seeing that he had lost the army's support and obedience, and under the advice of army chiefs and ministers, the Tsar decided to abdicate the throne and named his brother as the heir on March 2nd 1917.¹⁸ The Tsar's brother refused to accept the position due to the hazardous situation; consequently, the Tsardom was abolished.¹⁹

Russia became a constitutional democracy, electing its first provisional Duma in March 1917. The main parties that dominated the new Duma were the left-wing socialist parties along with some liberal representation. They included the Socialist Revolutionary Party, Mensheviks, the Cadets, Octobrists, and others. Conservative and Monarchist forces remained on the scene but were very under represented in the political system. There were also minority voices that demanded more radical changes, considering the revolution to have not gone far enough. These included some Anarchists, but the most major force in the opposition were known as the Bolsheviks, who supported increasing the power and representation of the workers' unions (known in Russian as Soviets). They also advocated an immediate stop to Russia's participation in the war against Germany, something that the new government opposed, hoping that they can remain on the winning side with their French and British allies. However, the Bolshevik leadership had a minority support in the Duma and they were not the dominant power in the workers council and soviets that they advocate for. Their leaders were divided as to their best strategy: should they attempt to influence power by working within the electoral system, or should they focus on revolution?

October Revolution 1917

Into this chaos, Vladimir Lenin returned onto the scene. He was one of the most influential and radical leaders of the Bolsheviks and advocated for further revolutionary action; one that is gained via the organising of the working class and, if necessary, armed struggle. In February 1917, he was in exile in Switzerland and was allowed by the Germans to return to Russia following the February revolution, as they hoped that his presence could help bring

¹⁶ [Russian Empire - Tsar, Revolution, WWI | Britannica](#)

¹⁷ [Russian Revolution - The February Revolution | Britannica](#)

¹⁸ [What Was The February Revolution Of 1917? | Imperial War Museums](#)

¹⁹ [Nicholas II - Last Tsar, Abdication, Execution | Britannica](#)

Russia out of the war. Arriving in Petrograd in April 1917, he immediately began organizing and worked on convincing the rest of the party towards his positions. It took him less than a month to win the majority of the Bolsheviks over his strategy with his mantra: “All power to the Soviets!”²⁰

In August 1917, Alexander Kerensky, who served as Prime Minister of the Provisional government, convened a State Conference in Moscow, which was composed of members of the Duma as well as Soviets representatives. The aim was to bridge the gap between the different parties regarding the war effort and proposed reforms to the political and economic system of Russia. While the Bolsheviks fought for a peace treaty with Germany and wanted Russia out of the war, the provisional government led by Kerensky wanted Russia to continue fighting in World War I to honor alliances and maintain Russia’s international position. The Bolsheviks also advocated for radical land and economic reforms, while Kerensky and others prefer lighter reforms that incrementally lead to change. The gap between both sides remained wide and these tensions led to the **Kornilov Rebellion (1917)**, when Lavr Kornilov attempted a military coup to seize control of Petrograd. The rebellion was pushed back by armed workers of the Petrograd Soviet with the backing and support of the Bolshevik leaders. This boosted the Bolsheviks influence, positioning themselves as defenders of Petrograd and setting the stage for their next big move.²¹

On November 7th (October 24th according to the Julian calendar in use in Tsarist Russia), Bolshevik Red Guards began to take control of key points in Petrograd including railway stations, telegraph centers, and government buildings in order to overturn the provisional government.²² The coup was a success and on November 9th, Lenin announced the Bolsheviks takeover of the power. This event, known as **the October Revolution**, transformed Russia’s constitutional democracy into a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” as power laid squarely with the Bolsheviks and their allies who claimed to represent the working class and the soviets. 18 hours after seizing power, Lenin issued the Decree on Land,²³ which abolished large private estates and transferred land to the peasants, ending landlord ownership and allowing peasants to use the land themselves.²⁴ While opposition parties were initially allowed to be represented in the newly established Constituent Assembly (replacing the Duma as the legislative body of the newly formed Russian Soviet Republic), it was closed as early as January 1918, with power going squarely to the Bolsheviks who held all key positions in government. On March 3rd, the representatives of the Russian Soviet Republic signed an armistice treaty with Germany known as the **Brest Litovsk Treaty**. While it ended the war, the Russians had to pay a heavy price: the loss of massive tracks of lands in the Baltics, Poland and Ukraine, who became German protectorates, and the payment of large sums of reparations to the Germans.

²⁰[The April Theses: Lenin rearms the Bolshevik Party – Solidarity Online](#)

²¹ [Russian Provisional Government | Facts, History, & Summary | Britannica](#)

²² [The October Revolution in Russia | Origins](#)

²³ <https://alphahistory.com/russianrevolution/russian-revolution-timeline-1917/>

²⁴ <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/11/08/cen3-n08.html>

The Bolshevik's brutal rise to power and the resentments brewing amongst other left wing parties (and conservative and reactionary forces), quickly led to the disintegration of the control held by the Bolsheviks over the whole country. Opposition parties coalesced and became nicknamed as "the Whites," who opposed the Bolshevik "Reds." The Whites' aims were varied, depending on the faction involved, but they were united by their opposition to the Bolshevik government, who has now moved the capital from Petrograd to Moscow. The Whites were able to take over many regional areas, in the Caucasus, in the North of Russia and in the East. Allied forces, who demanded the return of Russia to the War against Germany and the repayment of their debts, landed forces in the North of Russia and the Ukraine to support the Whites. Socialist Revolutionary elements attempted a failed coup in July 1918 against the Bolsheviks. In response to all of this, the Bolshevik government implemented "War Communism," which were economic policies that aimed at boosting the war effort, and allowed the Cheka (the Soviet secret police) to make thousands of arrests in order to deter further coups against the government in Moscow. The situation became tense as the Czechoslovak Legion, one of the strongest regiments amongst the White Army, came close to rescuing Tsar Nicholas II and his family, who were under house arrest in Yekaterinburg. Consequently, Moscow sent orders to execute the Royal family. The Tsar and his family were executed without trial on July 17th, 1918.

Timeline^{25 26}

1917

January 9th – hundreds of thousands of workers in Petrograd go on strike in commemoration of 1905's Bloody Sunday.

February 19th – The February Revolution begins.

March 2nd – Tsar Nicholas II abdicates the throne, a Liberal Provisional government is declared.

April 3rd – Vladimir Lenin returns to Russia.

July – Large protests led by Bolsheviks against slow government reform and against the continuation of Russia's participation in WWI.

August 30th – Kornilov's mutiny is stopped by workers of the Petrograd Soviet and the Bolsheviks.

November 7th – The October Revolution. Lenin announces the takeover of power from the Provisional Government and the establishment of the Soviet Republic of Russia.

²⁵ <https://alphahistory.com/russianrevolution/russian-revolution-timeline-1917/>

²⁶ <https://alphahistory.com/russianrevolution/russian-revolution-timeline-1918-1919/>

1918

January 18th – The Bolsheviks shut down the legislative Constituent Assembly.

March 3rd – The Bolsheviks sign the Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany.

April-June – Many Anti-Bolshevik forces join the White Army and control a lot of the regional territory of Russia, especially in the East and the North.

July 6th – Socialist Revolutionary Party attempts a failed coup in Moscow.

July 17th – Tsar Nicholas II and his family are executed by the Bolsheviks.

November 11th – the armistice between the allies and Germany begins, pulling Germany from the areas in the East that it had conquered during the war.

Current Situation

It's 11 November 1918, Germany has just signed the Armistice, ending World War I. Russia stands unstable, with the Civil War worsening as the Whites expanded their control over regional areas following the execution of the Tsar and the Reds losing ground, but maintaining their control over the large industrial cities. The Bolsheviks had the backing of the worker class in the cities and amongst a substantial number of the peasants in rural regions. They considered Lenin's communist ideology as a door for change. As a result, more and more people are joining the Red army, giving it power by quantity. They are taking charge of political oversight on several fronts, most notably Petrograd, and shaping the internal power of the Bolsheviks in order to complete the revolution. Opposing them are a diverse set of forces: Admiral Kolchak, from Siberia, who leads one of the strongest White factions. He is the current Minister of War for the government in Siberia. He is working to combine powers and is rumored to be planning on declaring himself Russia's Supreme ruler. His forces hold the Imperial gold reserve in Omsk, granting the Whites major purchasing power. The Whites work closely with the Czechoslovak Legion, which is made up of 50,000 foreign Czech and Slovak soldiers who have managed to control the Trans-Siberian Railway. Other liberals and conservative officers rally around Kolchak, or other regional White commanders, in the North of Russia or in the Caucasus. Meanwhile, Allied expeditionary forces have landed in Russia to support the efforts of the Whites. They include British, French and American troops in the North of Russia, French Troops in Odessa and Japanese troops in Manchuria.

Outside of Russia, after Germany's surrender, the massive German 'Ober Ost' army is withdrawing from areas it has conquered from the Russians. This prompted many regions to declare independence, including the Baltic states, Poland, and two rival governments in Ukraine. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, Nestor Makhno's anarchist Black Army, or the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine, is fighting to create a stateless, sovereign society in southeastern Ukraine, and has carved out a self-governing territory. It is currently aligned with the Red army against the White forces. Germany itself faced social and political chaos

as the German Kaiser abdicated the throne, opening the way to the declaration of a liberal republic November 9th. On the same day, another declaration was made by communist and left wing forces within Germany announcing the establishment of a “Free Socialist Republic of Germany.” Consequently, Germany was brought into a whirlwind of political and violent disputes between the liberals, socialists, and the reactionary and conservative forces, with each group attempting to shape Germany after suffering its grave defeat in WWI. It is within this context that the events transpiring in Russia can have world-shattering potential: will the allies and the White army end the specter of Communism and preserve world order after a devastating world war, or will Lenin and his comrades break the chains and turn Russia into the starting point of a world socialist republic?

Treaties and Organizations

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk: Formally withdrawing Russia from WWI, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk guaranteed Russia peace in exchange for the surrender of territories such as Ukraine and the Baltic States. Although it's a humiliating treaty, it allowed the Bolsheviks to concentrate on their domestic enemies.^{27 28}

The Bolshevik Party: The radical faction that came off the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903 after disagreements. They believed in a neatly organized party and supported a violent revolution.²⁹ Led by Vladimir Lenin, the Bolsheviks fought for a direct move to socialism in Russia without a stage of capitalism.³⁰

The Socialist Revolutionary Party: A socialist party that focuses on peasants rather than industrial workers.³¹ They supported land redistribution and gained immense popularity in rural Russia. They won the 1917 constituent Assembly elections, but were later sidelined by the Bolshevik party and are currently opposed to it and make up part of an uneasy alliance with the Whites.³²

The Kadet Party: A liberal political party representing the middle class. The Kadet party supports civil rights, Constitutional Monarchy, and parliamentary democracy.³³ They played a major role in the Provisional Government, but later lost the support for continuing the war.

²⁷ [Treaties of Brest-Litovsk | Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary | Britannica](#)

²⁸ [Treaties of Brest-Litovsk - Facts, World War I | HISTORY](#)

²⁹ [Bolshevik | Definition, History, Beliefs, Flag, & Facts | Britannica](#)

³⁰ [V.I. Lenin Library: Works Index](#)

³¹ [Socialist Revolutionary Party | Peasant-based, Populist, Radical | Britannica](#)

³² [Captives of Revolution: The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Dictatorship, 1918-1923](#)

³³ [Kadet | Tsarist Era, Constitutionalists, Liberalism | Britannica](#)

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The State Duma: A national parliament established after the revolution of 1905. It introduced a representative government, but the Tsar still had the ultimate power, which often led to the frequent dissolution of the Duma.³⁴

Okhrana: The secret police of the Tsarist. It monitored, infiltrated, and repressed rebel and revolutionary groups through surveillance, arrests, and banishments. Its brutality fueled resentment against the autocracy.³⁵

The Petrograd Soviet: A council representing workers in Petrograd. It exercised real power alongside the Provisional Government.³⁶

Soviets: Local councils across Russia that represent ordinary people.³⁷

The All-Russian Congress of Soviets: A national assembly of soviets which approved the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917.³⁸

The Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom): The Bolshevik Government led by Lenin which replaced the Provisional Governments.³⁹

The Military Revolutionary Committee: A body controlled by the Bolsheviks that organized the October revolution. It coordinated Red Guard units and seized key instrumental locations in Petrograd.⁴⁰

The Cheka: The Bolshevik secret police. It enforced political control through executions, repressions, and other violent and non-violent ways during the Russian Civil War.⁴¹

The White Army: A coalition of anti Bolshevik forces, including monarchists and liberals.⁴²

Questions to consider

1. Where are your character's assets, abilities, motivation and background?
2. What is the best ideology for the preservation of Russia and world peace?

³⁴ [Duma | Definition, Facts, & History | Britannica](#)

³⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Okhranka>

³⁶ [Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies | Russian revolution | Britannica](#)

³⁷ [soviet](#)

³⁸ [All-Russian Congress of Soviets | Britannica](#)

³⁹ [People's Commissars, Council of | Soviet government | Britannica](#)

⁴⁰ [Military Revolutionary Committee | Russian revolution | Britannica](#)

⁴¹ [Cheka | Soviet secret police | Britannica](#)

⁴² [White Army | Russian history | Britannica](#)

3. Were the Bolsheviks justified in their revolution against the newly established liberal constitutional republic?
4. What position should ethnic minorities hold within Russia and the region? Should Russia regain control over the territory it held before WW1?
5. Should Russia, whether Red or White, pay its debts to the allies?
6. Should the Russian revolution be exported to other countries in the region

Characters List

Vladimir Lenin - Red
Leon Trotsky - Red
Felix Dzerzhinsky - Red
Mikhail Tukhachevsky - Red
Joseph Stalin - Red
Jukums Vacietis - Red
Alexander Kolchak - White
Anton Denikin - White
Nikolai Yudenich - White
Pavel Bermond-Avalov - White
Grigory Semyonov - White
Pyotr Krasnov - White
Nestor Makhno - Black
Edmund Ironside - British Expeditionary Force
Maurice Janin - French Expeditionary Force
George Evans Stewart - American Expeditionary Force
Tomas Garrigue Masaryk - Czechoslovak Legion
Simon Peliura - Ukrainian People's Army
Henri Berthelot - French Expeditionary Force
Józef Piłsudski - The Second Polish Republic

Helpful Resources

[Russian Civil War - The White Army - October Revolution](#)
[Russian Civil War | Casualties, Causes, Combatants, & Outcome | Britannica](#)
[Russian Revolution timeline 1918-1919](#)
[Russian Revolution and Civil War: Crash Course European History #35](#)
[Russian Civil War](#)
[Revolutions: The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk - David Stone](#)

World map on November of 1918⁴⁴



⁴⁴ <https://omniatlas.com/maps/northern-eurasia/19181101/#event-539>

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[Cheka | Soviet secret police | Britannica](#)

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<https://omniatlas.com/maps/northern-eurasia/19181101/#event-539>

