

The Far Eastern Republic and Historical Memory

“To all governments and nations of the world:

The two and a half years’ heroic struggle by the revolutionary people of the Russian Far East against the hated regime of the usurping atamans and their adherents has ended in a complete victory of the people. Owing to the international situation and with a view to preventing the Far East from becoming a permanent base of warfare against Soviet Russia, the people of the Russian Far East have given up their sacred wish of an immediate reunion with their mother country Russia and have entered upon the course of establishing within the territory of the Russian Far East an independent sovereign republic.”¹

The Far Eastern Republic (henceforth FER) was a liberal democracy which existed within Russian Far East from 1920-1922. It was established as a way to prevent armed conflict between Imperial Japan and the Russian Federation of Socialist Soviet Republics (henceforth RSFSR) and, paradoxically, to preserve the territorial integrity of the Russian Empire from Imperial Japanese and Entente intervention forces. The FER was distinct from other Russian Civil War polities in two ways: first, it was explicitly a buffer state, and second, it was a state based around regional boundaries rather than national identity. After the FER served its purpose as a buffer state and as a vehicle for the Bolshevik Party to interact diplomatically with the rest of the world, it was voluntarily reabsorbed into the nascent USSR. However, the memory of the FER in contemporary and later documents can be used as a tool to trace trends in how the Russian Civil War and allied intervention were perceived. Through the records about the FER found within state sanctioned media such as textbooks and maps, one can follow contemporaneous attitudes towards the Russian Civil War, the allied intervention, and the strange polity which was the FER.

¹ Shiloff and Sukhovy, “Declaration of the Constituent Assembly of the Far Eastern Republic,” in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1921*, ed. Joseph Fuller and Tyler Dennett, vol. 2 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1936), 736–38, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1921v02/d698>. 736-7.

The Role of Maps in Conceptualizing the FER

Historical maps are integral to how a state such as the FER is remembered. The existence or non-existence of an entity upon a map as well as the details surrounding the entity are indicative of the historical narratives surrounding the entity and in turn influence said narratives. Whether or not something is placed on a map, in what style it is portrayed and in what context it appears matters when one considers an entity as a historical memory.

The first map to be examined is a 1928 illustration titled *The Liquidation of Kolchak and his Followers* (Fig. 1) which is found within the 1928 book *War Path of the Red Army 1917-22*, a book meant to act as a pedagogical tool. *Liquidation* is, as the name suggests, primarily concerned with the 1919-22 armed struggle between the Bolshevik-aligned Red Army and White Army-aligned forces under the leadership of Admiral Kolchak. The Far Eastern Republic was involved in this conflict and *Liquidation* depicts that when it shows flags with ДБР (the Cyrillic acronym for the FER) written upon them aiding red figures in driving out black horsemen meant to portray Kolchak and his forces. However, this is the extent of the representation of the FER; ДБР does not appear upon the map in any context other than upon flags supporting Red Army advances. There is no clear delineation between the land nominally controlled by the FER and that controlled by the RSFSR or by white forces. On the map, red bleeds into white, which in turn bleeds into grey across the map with red and black arrows delineating points of conflict. Moreover, there is nothing which actually places the FER upon the map as a state in and of itself. Instead, the FER is mixed in with the RSFSR without distinction. We should note that the FER is not the only republic which receives that treatment; the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic receives the same portrayal as the FER, as did the other national republics. The analysis which logically follows is that the USSR in 1928 did not feel comfortable with a historical memory of

non-united states. At that time the civil war was recent enough that the USSR could not simply erase potentially centrifugal historical entities such as the Ukraine or the FER from collective memory. However, both could be and were minimized.

The next map comes from the 1939 *Great Soviet Atlas of the World* (fig. 2). In contrast with *Liquidation*, the FER is not shown at all in *Great's* depiction of the civil war. This is probably because the FER fits even less within the then emerging historical narrative of the Stalinist USSR. Stalin's cult of personality is evident in the narrative shown in *Great's* map; not only are other Soviet Republics not shown on the map at all, but areas where Stalin cannot be semi-accurately labeled as having been are irrelevant to the historical narrative. *Great Soviet Atlas of the World's* map of the Russian civil war represents a departure from a historical narrative which emphasized struggle between the Red and White aligned groups (which in turn had a place for the FER) towards a narrative that emphasized heroic figures such as Stalin and Lenin, within which the FER must be absent. An additional factor may be that the *Great Soviet Atlas of the World* was published the year after the founder of the FER, Alexander Krasnoschekov was purged.²

The next time the FER is depicted in a meaningful manner in cartography aimed at a mass audience is in the 1970 *Atlas of the History of the USSR for grade 7* (fig. 3). In *Grade 7's* map titled *the breaking of the interventionists and White forces in the Far East* the FER appears again. Not only is it labeled on a map for the first time in many decades, but it also has clearly delineated borders; hatch marks separate it from the rest of the RSFSR. While the historical narrative of the USSR now permits the FER to exist in memory as something separate from of the rest of the USSR, it is still unequivocally part of the greater Soviet Union. The land which

² John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1994), 221.

makes up the FER is shown as part of the territory which was reclaimed in April 1920-November 1922, and it is the same red on the map as the rest of the land which makes up the USSR. The reason for this can be found in the changing circumstances of the Soviet Union. Brezhnev's USSR has a fundamentally different historical narrative surrounding both the FER and the civil war. Probably because of the relative stability of the era and the lack of a Stalinist cult of personality, a different view of the FER was allowed to exist in the historical memory of the Russian civil war as long as the FER appears to be a definitive part of the USSR. Any autonomy which the FER might have had is not part of official Soviet memory.

Post-Soviet historical memory allows for new narratives to emerge. This is reflected in the 2015 *Recent history of the 20th and 21st century*, a state recommended pedagogical aid (fig. 4). Not only does the FER exist in *Recent' History's* depiction of the civil war, but it has clearly defined boundaries as a discrete entity from the USSR and from the military struggles thereof. In *Recent History*, the FER appears as a separate state from the USSR, one which is involved in military affairs that are separate from the rest of the USSR. Moreover, in the 2015 *Recent History*, the discrete nature of the FER is emphasized when compared to earlier cartographical depictions of the civil war. The historical narrative surrounding the Russian civil war in general and the FER in particular had shifted to such an extent from its 1920s foundations that an independent and autonomous FER is no longer a particular issue. It is however notable that the historical memory of other states within the Russian civil war is further changed in the 2015 *Recent History's* map. The Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic is no more, nor are other nationalist republics. The historical memory of the Russian Federation evidently has space for regional states which were nominally liberal democracies, more so than for Ukrainian socialist republics, if the maps used in public schools are to be believed.

The cartological representations of the historical memory of the FER provide visual representation of underlying trends of historical memory. When the memory of the Russian civil war was fresh in the minds of the USSR and a state was being forged, there was little place for disunity. As time passed and Stalin's cult of personality coalesced, there was little room in the memory of the civil war for anything but Stalin and, to an extent, Lenin. Later, as the Russian civil war began to lose its cachet as a foundational myth and as the risk of disintegration lessened, the FER returned to the historical memory, first of the USSR and then of Russia. Still later, a regionalist liberal democracy in the Far East became less of a centrifugal but irrelevant memory and more an accepted fact of life, and the historical memory of the FER as reflected in maps of the Russian civil war shows this.

The FER in official documents: a shifting perspective

Even more important than maps to the historical memory of a state are state sponsored texts such as school books, military manuals and encyclopedia articles. These texts delineate what should be remembered about a state or an event. As such, they provide an official historical memory. The historical memory of the intervention and the Far Eastern Republic changes overtime, as can be shown through state sanctioned literature.

The 1938 *Short History of the All Union Communist Party* outlines the history of the Bolshevik party before, during and after the Revolution and the civil war. The historical narrative found within *Short History* concerning the civil war and the FER is one primarily concerned about class conflict. Notably, the Japanese intervention into the Far East is described in dispassionate terms: "The Japanese landed troops in Vladivostok, captured Primorye, dispersed the Soviets and supported the White Guard rebels, who later restored bourgeois order."³ There is

³ *История Всесоюзной Коммунистической Партии (Большевиков) КРАТКИЙ КУРС* (Moscow: Pravda, 1938), <https://sheba.spb.ru/shkola/istoria-vkpb-1938.htm>. 216.

little to no mention of actions taken against civilian populations and the beginnings of the intervention in the Far East is highly abstracted. It happened, and the bourgeois moved back in.

The narrative is dispassionately focused upon class.

This continues in the discussion of the Czech Foreign legion and its actions across the length of the Trans-Siberian railway:

This corps, consisting of prisoners of war, was allowed by the Soviet government to go to their homeland through Siberia and the Far East. But it was used along the way by the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Anglo-French to rebel against Soviet power. The rebellion of the corps served as a signal for a revolt of the kulaks on the Volga and in Siberia and the Socialist Revolutionary-minded workers at the Botkin and Izhevsk factories. On the Volga, the Samara White Guard-Socialist-Revolutionary Government was created. In Omsk - the Siberian White Guard Government.⁴

Again, the narrative about the civil war and the allied intervention is relatively dispassionate and is highly focused on class; there is no moralizing language within *Short History* although it does notably characterize the social groups which oppose the red army as kulaks. This is likely a continuation of early Stalinist historical narratives surrounding the role of Kulaks within the revolution and the Stalinist trend of characterizing all who opposed his projects as class enemies.

In fact, there is no mention of the Far Eastern republic at all within *Short History*. The only hint that an autonomous state might have existed in the Far East occurs in the discussion of the reunion of the USSR, which is described as follows:

In October 1922, the Soviet Republic celebrated a great victory: the Red Army and partisans of the Far East liberated Vladivostok from the Japanese invaders, the last piece of Soviet land that was in the hands of the invaders...Now that the entire territory of the Soviet country was cleared of interventionists, and the tasks of building socialism and the country's defense required the further strengthening of the union of the peoples of the Soviet country, the next question arose was the closer unification of the Soviet republics into a single state union. It was necessary to unite all the popular forces for the construction of socialism. It was necessary to organize a strong defense of the country. It was necessary to ensure the comprehensive development of all the nationalities of our

⁴ Ibid., 217.

country. For this purpose, it was necessary to bring all the peoples of the Soviet country closer together.⁵

According to *Short History*, the message to be drawn from the civil war is one of unity; the invaders have been thrown out and all must come together to build socialism. The FER itself as a regional entity had no place within said narrative and so it was excluded. The only nod urred towards its existence is the description of the Japanese intervention into the Far East.

In the 1952 *History of the USSR* textbook for grade 10, the historical narrative about the civil war and the FER changed to one largely characterized by its opposition to the US, presumably because of the Cold War, which was then intensifying. It is notable that the section on the intervention begins with the authors noting that “The United States’ attitude towards the Soviet Russia was distinguished by hypocrisy and treachery. In all official documents and speeches, the leaders of the US government declared their love for the Russian people and their intention to “help Russia”. In fact, they sought to eliminate Soviet power, dismember Russia and turn it into their colony.”⁶ This is a primer for a historical narrative which defines itself largely in opposition to other states. The story of the Russian Civil War in 1952’s *History* is largely one of opposition towards other states. The narrative becomes highly condensed into ‘us versus them’.

This narrative is further evidenced by claims of American-Japanese partnership in their military adventures:

To completely dominate the Far East, the US government drew up a plan to send to Siberia an "economic and educational" mission that would take over all the wealth of Siberia and Far East. At the same time, the United States sought to transform Kolchak into the instrument of its policy and provided him loans and military assistance. England and France, fearing the strengthening of the United States and claiming "Russian inheritance", began to support Japanese claims in Primorye and Transbaikalia. The Japanese army, together with the Anglo-American forces, occupied Primorye, Amur and

⁵ Ibid., 218-9.

⁶ К Bazilevich et al., *История СССР (с 1905 По 1951) 10 Класс 1952 Год* (Moscow: State textbook ministry of the RSFSR, 1952), <https://sovietime.ru/istoriya/istoriya-sssr-10-klass-1952-god-skachat-sovetskij-uchebnik>.267.

Transbaikal regions. The organizer of this intervention was the USA. Not having enough military forces to subjugate the eastern territory of Russia, Wilson and his government decided to form a coalition and took over financing of the anti-Soviet campaign of powers. The main partner of the United States in this campaign was imperialist Japan.⁷

Probably because of major events such as the Second World War and the Korean War, *History* heavily ties the US to the actions of Imperial Japan. The text characterizes US actions as barbaric, noting how “they exported to Japan a huge amount of food and forest materials. Japanese imperialists brutally cracked down on everyone who showed them the slightest resistance. The village of Ivanovka was subjected to repeated Japanese raids. Once the Japanese broke into Ivanovka, brought 300 peasants to the square, built them in rows and began to machine-gun fire mow one row after another. Then they set fire to the village from all sides and, surrounding it, nobody survived.”⁸ In the context of the 1952 *History*, the most important part of the narrative surrounding the civil war and the FER was the atrocities committed by imperial powers upon the Soviet people. It is also notable that instead of accusing the US of committing atrocities, the authors of *History* tie their current enemies to the atrocities of their supposed ally Japan. In this the narrative of *History* both provides justification for opposition of the United States on the grounds of a long-standing historical animus towards those which allied with the Imperial Japanese. It also provides historical context for the creation of the FER, which it describes as:

The party and the Soviet government decided to create a “buffer” state in the Far East, which would for a certain time would save the RSFSR from direct contact with Japan. Lenin sent to the Siberian Revolutionary and command of the V Army a directive, which proposed the creation of a buffer state. So in 1920, the Far Eastern Republic (FER) emerged - a state in the form of a bourgeois-democracy, but governed the Bolsheviks. The formation of this state made it possible for the Soviet Republic to avoid a war with Japan in conditions unfavorable for Soviet Russia and to accumulate strength for decisive battles with Japanese imperialism. Japanese imperialists, seeing that their position in the

⁷ Ibid., 270.

⁸ Ibid., 270

Far East was becoming increasingly shaky, more than once tried to create reason to continue the intervention.⁹

The narrative around the FER in 1952 was one which simultaneously acknowledged its status as a buffer state and the relative weakness of the party on an international stage while portraying the party as strong. *History* notes that while the FER may have been a bourgeois-democracy, it was still one which was governed by the Bolsheviks and it was still under Bolshevik control. The idea that Bolsheviks might have lost some control over their territory and that the FER could have potentially been something other than a vehicle for avoiding war with Japan was unthinkable. The 1952 narrative around the creation of the FER is one which heavily emphasizes Soviet power while simultaneously noting the hostile attitude of western powers (and Japan) towards the nascent Soviet State.

The 1952 narrative ends with its description of the retaking of the FER by Soviet and Soviet-aligned forces as well as a depiction of how Imperial powers reacted to the re-expansion of Soviet power. *History* begins by noting that “The uprising [against Kolchak and Imperial Japan] began in Transbaikalia. In October, partisans and units of the people's revolutionary armies of the FER occupied Chita. Influenced by these events Japan was forced to start negotiations with the FER on the evacuation of Japanese troops. At a conference in Dairen Japanese the imperialists put forward 17 demands on Soviet Russia, which, if adopted, would transform the Far East to the Japanese colony.¹⁰ In this work the process by which the USSR began to reclaim the FER is characterized as a popular uprising; the extent of credit given to partisans is notable, as is how the army of the FER is characterized as a people's revolutionary army.

⁹ Ibid., 270

¹⁰ Ibid., 271

The 1952 narrative of the reclamation of the FER heavily casts it as a violent popular initiative rather than a geopolitical movement. The campaign to retake the FER from the White-aligned provisional government introduced patriotism to the narrative of the retaking of Vladivostok, described as follows:

The fighters went into battle with the slogan "Win or die." Neither 12-row wire fences, nor hurricane fire, nor frost and piercing wind stopped the heroic attack of the Red fighters. In the entry of the people's revolutionary army into Vladivostok October 25, 1922 they chopped barbed wire with checkers, knocked it down with rifle butts, threw overcoats on the wire and crawled over it to enemy trenches under machine-gun fire. After two days White soldiers could not withstand the onslaught and retreated to Khabarovsk. On February 14, 1922, the people's revolutionary army occupied Khabarovsk. Continuing the offensive, the Red army cleared Primorye of the Whites. In October, the last stronghold of the Whites was taken - Spassk. On the 25th of October 1922 revolutionary troops occupied Vladivostok.¹¹

The rhetoric around the retaking of the Far East is very similar to the rhetoric around the Great Patriotic War. Therefore it is likely that there was no differentiation between the forces aligned with the FER and those aligned with the USSR. In this, *History* uses the Russian Civil War and the FER to echo the narrative about the great patriotic war. In the Civil War just as in the Great War Red army soldiers united to throw out invaders with notable heroism. The FER is in this narrative a footnote; its existence cannot be denied and it played a part in the struggle, but the main players in the narrative are heroic Red army liberators and the leadership of the Bolshevik party. The chapter on the FER and the Eastern intervention ends with a quote from Lenin to further drive the point home:

Lenin said this about them after the end of the civil war: The brave sons of the Russian people with heroic courage defended the native land of the Far East, they expelled the last invaders from Soviet soil. On the fifth anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, in November 1922, Soviet power was restored in the Far East.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., 273.

¹² Ibid., 273

Hero worship and foreign Imperial antagonism were integral to the narrative of the Soviet reclamation of the Far East and the Soviet memory of the FER in 1952. When the FER fit within that narrative it was included within historical memory, such as the memory of the Dairen conference. When it did not, it was excluded.

The 1957 military tract by S. Shishkin, *Civil War in the Far East*, provides a distilled version of the aforementioned 1950's era narratives about the Civil War and the FER. The Civil War was at its heart a struggle against imperial interventions as well as internal enemies.

Shishkin characterizes the formation of the FER as follows:

“On April 6, 1920, the congress declared the formation of a new state - an independent democratic Far Eastern republic... The creation of a buffer state - FER was one of the brilliant manifestations of Lenin's strategy and aimed to paralyze the plans of the interventionists in the Far East, to expose their aggressive goals to the whole world and, using the imperialist contradictions between America and Japan, to push international predators on the Far East with their foreheads.”¹³

Shishkin heavily emphasizes the two main historical narratives espoused in earlier works, the claim that the USSR was under attack by duplicitous imperialist powers over the course of its formation, and the hero worship of Lenin and Stalin. Shishkin ties both together when he praises the creation of the FER as Lenin's strategy to attack foreign invaders. In Shishkin's description of the FER's formation the primacy of the heroic figure is coupled with antagonism towards the US and Japan.

In his account of the Civil War in the East, Shishkin not only emphasizes the aggression of the Imperialist powers, but he also emphasizes the united nature of the FER and the RSFSR.

Shishkin describes the creation of the army of the FER as follows:

“Together with the organization of the Far Eastern Republic, and even somewhat earlier, its armed forces, the People's Revolutionary Army, began to be created. At first, the cadres of this army were the East Siberian and Baikal partisans, as well as some Kolchak

¹³ S Shishkin, *Гражданская Война На Дальнем Востоке* (Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense of the USSR, 1957), <http://www.biografia.ru/arhiv/grvoyna.html>.270

units that came over to our side. ...However, the organization of these formations proceeded extremely slowly due to the poverty of the material base and the lack of the necessary personnel of qualified command personnel. The troops of the Soviet Eastern Front, in particular, the 5th Red Banner Army, were used as instructors, commanders and political workers and supplied the People's Revolutionary Army with the necessary military equipment, which greatly assisted the army being created.”¹⁴

Using his area of competence, Shishkin emphasizes the continuity between the army of the RSFSR and the FER as well as the unity of the two. Shishkin is a military officer writing a military work, therefore he expresses the overarching historical narratives of his time through his specific lens. Shishkin’s depiction of the creation of the army of the FER shows the solidarity between the two states and emphasizes that the FER was not militarily autonomous. This overarching narrative of unity against imperialist aggression is evident in his description of the end of the Civil War. Shishkin begins by noting:

From the middle of 1922 the last stage of the struggle against interventionists began in the Far East. It proceeded in a more favorable environment for the Far Eastern Republic and ended with the complete expulsion of the enemy. But under the changed situation, when the Soviet Army defeated all the Entente campaigns and the military intervention crashed completely, the American monopolists sought to shift the center of gravity of their aggression into the economic field in order to enslave the Soviet people economically. Japanese troops in this matter could only serve as a hindrance. In addition, the United States did not want to strengthen Japan - its rival in the enslavement of the peoples of Asia. Japanese troops in this matter could only serve as a hindrance. In addition, the United States did not want to strengthen Japan - its rival in the enslavement of the peoples of Asia. ¹⁵

Shishkin simultaneously praises the heroism of the Soviet army while engaging in an anti-western imperialist historical narrative. Even when the crisis of invasion is averted and forestalled, Shishkin makes a point to note that the attack on the USSR by the West had not ended and that the West was not to be trusted. Even in the triumph of victory in the civil war Shishkin made a point to note that the West could still be relied upon to attack the USSR. This echoes

¹⁴ Ibid., 282.

¹⁵ Ibid., 284.

broader contemporary historical narratives around class struggle between imperialist and proletarian nations.

This emphasis on struggle is combined with the cult of Lenin in Shishkin's narration of the reintegration of the FER to the broader USSR. Not only does Shishkin emphasize the voluntary nature of the reintegration of the FER by way of the Peoples' assembly but in the Soviet style, he inserts a pertinent Lenin quote:

November 20, 1922 V.I. Lenin, speaking at the plenum of the Moscow Council, pointed out: "You know perfectly well how many sacrifices were made when what was done, you know how long the civil war dragged on and how many forces it took. And so, the capture of Vladivostok showed us (after all, Vladivostok is far away, but, after all, it is a city of ours), it showed us all a universal desire for us, for our conquests. Both here and there - the RSFSR. This desire has delivered us both from civil enemies and from external enemies that attacked us."¹⁶

Shishkin uses Lenin as a vehicle to drive home the overall historical narrative that the USSR was under attack from internal class enemies and external imperial enemies; moreover the use of Lenin emphasized the importance of key figures within the historical narrative. It is not enough for Shishkin to write the narrative, he must find an appropriate quote from an appropriate figure to do the talking for him.

The final and most notable part of Shishkin's work is his handling of the conclusion of the intervention. In Shishkin's *Intervention*, it does not end for a good deal of time. In fact he notes that "After forced withdrawal from Southern Primorye, Japanese troops continued to remain in northern Sakhalin for some time. In addition, several small White Guard units survived their last days on the northern outskirts of the Far East. The largest of them was the so-called Siberian Volunteer Squad, led by the former commander of the 1st Kolchak Army, General Pepelyaev."¹⁷ In this Shishkin ties the intervention in the civil war and to an extent the FER to later events

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 302.

which would befall the USSR. Shishkin's *Intervention* does not end with a clean close, but instead allows one conflict to bleed into another. In Shishkin's historical narrative the allied intervention and threat of foreigners to the USSR never truly ends.

The 1961 *World History Encyclopedia* provides a further example of how historical narratives evolved. The *Encyclopedia* of 1961 is significantly less belligerent towards the west, potentially because of Khrushchev's foreign policy of relative detente. *Encyclopedia* describes the formation of the FER as follows:

By April 1920, American and other foreign troops were evacuated from Siberia and the Far East, with the exception of the significant forces of the Japanese interventionists still remaining here. The advance of the Red Army to the east could lead to widespread military action against them. Striving for a peaceful settlement of the issue, the Soviet government decided to temporarily stop the Red Army at the turn of Lake Baikal...Power in Vladivostok, Verkhneudinsk and other liberated centers passed to the Zemstvo regional government, in which the Communists played a leading role. In early April, in Verkhneudinsk, at a congress of workers and partisans in the Baikal region, a democratic state formation was created - the Far Eastern Republic. Not being Soviet in form, this republic essentially pursued Soviet policy, defended the interests of the working people, and fought for a peaceful respite in the Far East. The Far Eastern Republic was tasked with easing the pressure of the Japanese imperialists and playing the role of a buffer on the border of Soviet Russia.¹⁸

It is notable that in 1961 the *World History Encyclopedia* stressed that the Red Army had searched for a peaceful solution regarding the allied intervention in the Far East. It is also notable that although the *Encyclopedia* allows that the FER was not necessarily Soviet in nature, it still stressed its essentially proletarian formation and its role as an organ of the Soviet State. The essential unity between the FER and the USSR is emphasized; the FER is not remembered as an autonomous state, but rather as a puppet of the USSR, connected by the strings of the Communist party back to Moscow. It is also notable that the actions of Japanese Imperialists are highlighted, whereas American Imperialism is not mentioned. The historical narrative

¹⁸ | Mints et al., eds., *Всемирная История. Энциклопедия. Том 8'* (Moscow: Publisher of Social and Economic Literature, 1961), <http://historic.ru/books/item/f00/s00/z0000183/index.shtml>. 340.

surrounding the foundation of the FER no longer mentions American imperialism, probably because of contemporary geopolitical considerations. Attempts at de-escalation and detente would have to be justified to civilian groups, and one way to do so would be to remove bellicose rhetoric towards the group which is being reconciled with.

What is even more notable is how the section in *Encyclopedia* ends with a narration of the events of 1920:

“With the support of the Japanese interventionists, the White Guards strengthened in the areas they captured and in Transbaikalia. The dominance of the Semenovians and Kappelites in Transbaikalia (especially in Chita) prevented the unification of the regions of the Far Eastern Republic and the relationship between them. In order to eliminate the "Chita jam", the People's Revolutionary Army of the Far Eastern Democratic Republic launched a series of attacks; however, whenever the defeat of the whites became obvious, Japanese troops entered the battle, and the command of the People's Revolutionary Army, despite the favorable prospects of the battle, withdrew troops in order not to succumb to the provocation of the war with Japan...Meanwhile, the Japanese command was increasingly convinced of the impossibility of capturing the entire Far East. The Japanese forces intensified revolutionary and anti-war sentiment. By mid-October 1920, the Japanese withdrew their troops from Transbaikalia, the Amur Region, concentrating them in Southern Primorye. In October 1920, the troops of the Amur Front defeated the Semenovists and Kappelites and liberated Chita. But the main task - the complete expulsion of the interventionists from Primorye - remained unresolved so far.¹⁹

While *Encyclopedia* retains an air of chest thumping, it is not as bellicose as earlier publications. In fact it is notable that *Encyclopedia* does not narrate the liberation of Vladivostok from the White forces at all, but instead leaves it as a cliffhanger. The reintegration of the FER and the conclusion of the civil war are all abstracted in the 1961 historical narrative. The details which remain are those which are considered important: foreign (Japanese) forces invaded the USSR and were thrown back by the people. The notable difference between the 1950's era narratives and the 1961 *Encyclopedia* is that there is far less mention of the heroism of Soviets in the civil war; stirring stories of individual heroics are largely reserved for the Great Patriotic War.

¹⁹ Ibid., 344.

The 1978 edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* is significantly less bellicose towards the Japanese than previous editions. It does, however, inject a relatively new historical narrative into the introduction of the intervention:

The weakening and collapse of the Russian Empire was in full compliance with the plans of Germany and its allies, as well as the interests of the Entente countries. The goal of Great Britain during the First World War was the mutual weakening of Germany and Russia. The goal of Germany was to expand its living space in the East, which was contrary to the interests of England, France and the United States. Therefore, the conclusion of the Brest Peace not only worried the Entente countries, but also made them directly intervene in Russian affairs. In March 1918, English and French warships with small military units arrived in Murmansk. In April, the Japanese landed in Vladivostok, in August - the British, Americans and French. In the fall of 1918, the entire Far East was already under the rule of the interventionists.”²⁰

What is notable is that *Encyclopedia* equivocates the goals of the central powers, the Entente and Germany, during the First World War. This suggests an overriding historical narrative which privileges the great patriotic war and its goal of repulsing invaders over historical context. However, it is notable that there is no mention of massacres or appropriations in the narrative surrounding the entente intervention, which would suggest that the rhetorical ties to the great patriotic war are not particularly tightly bound.

The section on the Far Eastern Republic and the Russian civil war provides further evidence of changing historical narratives regarding the civil war and the FER. The 1978 *Encyclopedia* defines the FER thus:

FAR EASTERN REPUBLIC (FER), a temporary buffer state entity created on the initiative of Soviet Russia (April 6, 1920 - November 14, 1922). The goal of the creation of the Far Eastern Democratic Republic was the desire of Soviet Russia to put an end to Japanese intervention in Transbaikalia and the Far East by peaceful means. It was established by the congress of workers in the Baikal region held in Verkhneudinsk (now Ulan-Ude). The created FER Government was led by the Communist A.M. Krasnoshchekov.²¹

²⁰ S Khromov and E Azovtsev, eds., *Большая Советская Энциклопедия* (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, 1978). 750.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 748

The historical narrative surrounding the creation of the FER continued to lose its bellicose nature. It is notable that in the 1978 edition of the *Encyclopedia* there is no mention of military conflict with the Imperial Japanese army necessitating the creation of the FER. The historically important parts of the narrative are that the FER was created to preserve peace in the region and that it was headed by a Communist. Even more notable is that Krasnoschekov appears by name for the first time in the *Encyclopedias*. It would appear that enough time has passed between the FER and Krasnoschekov's fall from grace to rehabilitate him to an extent. This change in the historical narrative surrounding Krasnoschekov suggests a further distancing from the ideals and politics of the civil war and the Stalinist USSR.

The 1978 *Encyclopedia* highlighted the FER's status as a Democratic republic to a large extent, noting that:

“On January 9–11, 1921, elections to the Constituent Assembly of the Far Eastern Democratic Republic took place, which on April 17, 1921 adopted the Basic Law (Constitution) of the Far Eastern Democratic Republic. The Constitution declared the FER, a democratic republic, granted all citizens political rights and freedoms, introduced universal, equal, direct suffrage by secret ballot, the equality of all citizens before the law, regardless of gender, occupation, nationality, religion and membership of a political party, allowed a multiparty system, private ownership of tools and means of production and private trade.”²²

This is probably meant to contrast with the competing White governments throughout the civil war; it is meant to show that the Communists were capable of creating a more or less ideal regime. It is notable that the description of the FER portrayed a state very different from that of the USSR, and it is also notable that the FER is described in relatively positive terms. The message which one might take from this is uncertain, but this change in historical narrative could be seen as either an editorial oversight or a liberalizing shift in meta-narratives.

²² *Ibid.*, 749

This, however, is not to say that the 1978 *Encyclopedia* narrates the FER as a truly independent state. Solidarity with the USSR is still heavily emphasized: “On May 14, 1920, the Soviet government officially recognized the FER and began to provide it with financial, diplomatic, economic and military assistance. With the support of the RSFSR, a regular People's Revolutionary Army (NRA) was created.”²³ While the authors of *Encyclopedia* may concede that the FER was a liberal democratic republic, in their narrative they still feel the need to emphasize its unity with the USSR. The FER did not stand on its own, nor could it, it was a buffer state with full support of the USSR. Moreover, any military successes of the FER are credited to the larger Red army by virtue of the training provided by the RSFSR. According to the historical narrative found in the 1978 *Encyclopedia*, the FER may have existed, but it was in no way shape or form an autonomous state.

However, a further shift in meta-narrative appears in the 1978 *Encyclopedia*'s narrative about how the FER was reintegrated into the USSR and how the civil war was won:

The military-political situation in the republic had changed. In heavy battles near Volochaevka (see Volochaevskaya operation) and Spassky, the White Guards suffered defeats and were forced to leave Vladivostok . On October 25, 1922 , the People's Revolutionary Army of the Far Eastern Democratic Republic entered the city from where the Japanese troops had evacuated the day before.. The cessation of Japanese intervention meant the disappearance of the main reasons for the creation of the Far Eastern Democratic Republic. The Sovietization of its territory began... On November 13, 1922, the first session of the FER People's Assembly opened, and the very next day the FER government resigned and transferred all power to the republic, to Dalrevsky led by the communist P. A. Kobozev. At the same time, the National Assembly turned to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee with a request to include the territory of the Far Eastern Democratic Republic in the RSFSR, after which it dissolved.²⁴

The military defeat of the White armies and the Japanese intervention is noted but it does not receive the same degree of focus as in other works. Instead the chief focus of the historical

²³ *Ibid.*, 750

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 751.

narrative surrounding the dissolution of the FER and the end of the civil war is the voluntary nature of said dissolution. As the forces of Imperial Japan had left the area, there was no longer any need for the FER as a state, and therefore it willingly returned to the USSR. This is factually correct, but the detail within the narrative surrounding the political processes of the dissolution of the FER is unusual. In the 1978 narrative found within *Encyclopedia*, political processes are significantly more important than military victories, a point which stands in stark contrast to earlier works. There is no mention of brave Red army soldiers running through machine gun fire, and the narrative surrounding the war in general is tame. Moreover, there is little to no mention of class struggle within the 1978 narrative in *Encyclopedia*, which is a sharp break from earlier iterations of the *Encyclopedia* and represents a change in meta-narrative direction. It is likely that as class struggle became less important in iterations of the *Encyclopedia*, it was more permissible to outline the liberal democratic nature of the FER.

The 1983 iteration of the *Soviet Encyclopedia*'s section on the Russian Civil war and Intervention in the USSR describes the FER and the intervention in the Far East by means of a historical narrative that draws attention to human rights abuses perpetrated by the Japanese government. For example, while the formation of the FER is relatively lightly covered, Japanese massacres are highlighted: "The Japanese troops, using the incident provoked by them in Nikolaevsk-on-Amur, on the night of April 4-5, 1920, attacked the revolutionary troops and organizations of Primorye and killed thousands of people. Thanks to the diplomatic efforts of the government of the Far Eastern Republic in July 1920, it was possible to conclude an agreement on the evacuation of Japanese troops from Transbaikalia (ended in October)."²⁵ By the mid-1980's, the overall historical narratives of the USSR had shifted to such an extent that diplomacy

²⁵ S Khromov, E Azovtsev, and G Gimpelson, eds., *Гражданская Война и Интервенция в СССР (Энциклопедия)* (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, 1983). 245.

and human rights abuses are brought to the forefront. Focus has at this point shifted from patriotic fervor to more contemporary issues such as the rights laid out by the Helsinki accords. The historical narratives proposed in the 1983 *Encyclopedia* generally privilege diplomatic and economic events over patriotic or other focused narratives. For example the *Encyclopedia* describes the dissolution of the FER as follows:

In February 1922, the People's Revolutionary Army of the Far Eastern Republic under the command of V.K. Blucher defeated the White Guards near Volochaevka and liberated Khabarovsk. The White Guards led by General M.K. Diterichs tried to organize a struggle under kulak-monarchist slogans, but were not supported by Japan (whose new government began to evacuate troops from Primorye). In October they were defeated by the People's Revolutionary Army under the command of I.P. Uborevich (under Spassky). On October 25, Vladivostok was liberated.²⁶

Compared to earlier rhetoric about the Russian civil war (such as the 1952 *History*), this is remarkably tame; it is entirely matter of fact. To the extent that the Far Eastern Republic is mentioned in *Encyclopedia*, it is described in a similar fashion. It is a dispassionate fact that the FER exists, but there is very little excess verbiage is wasted upon it. In *Encyclopedia* the FER comes across as somewhat of a trivial fact: the FER existed in the historical narrative as a blip which allowed it to act as a vehicle for discussions of class struggle. The most notable change in historical narrative within the 1983 *Encyclopedia* was the criticism levied on the economic conditions under wartime Communism:

By the end of the Civil War, the country was experiencing extreme economic disruption, aggravated by the poor harvest of 1920 and famine. In connection with the demobilization of the army, unemployment was created. The mass unrest of the peasantry reappeared, which was dissatisfied with the system of "war communism", wanted to abolish the surplus appropriation system and wanted to freely dispose of surplus production. The difficulties and hardships that were taken for granted during the Civil War now provoked discontent not only among the peasants, but also among the working class.²⁷

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 256.

This represents a departure from previous narratives, which either did not talk about the economic privations during the civil war or blamed them upon external sources ranging from Imperialist states to Kulaks. Accepting that war communism was not necessarily a good thing for the working class represents a clear and notable shift from previous narratives and shows a further change in the overall historical significance of the Russian civil war in Soviet historical narratives.

The 2000 *National Atlas of Russia* portrays the civil war in terms which in some ways are reminiscent of Stalinist historical narratives. *Atlas* highlights the aggression of Japan and to an extent the west. *Atlas* describes the formation of the FER thus: “In the Far East, the struggle with the White Guards and the Japanese invaders continued until the fall of 1922. In order to avoid a military conflict with Japan, the Soviet government formed a “buffer” Far Eastern republic, which had its own people's revolutionary army.”²⁸ *Atlas*, like *History*, emphasizes how the nascent USSR was under attack from western powers and how the people of the USSR had to fight back against them. Notably, *Atlas* lacks any mention of social classes or bourgeois-democracy in its narrative, forming a contrast with earlier narratives about the civil war or the FER. Evidently the fact that the FER was ostensibly a bourgeois-democracy was no longer noteworthy when Russia became one. The narrative surrounding how the civil war ended and the FER ceased to exist is similarly reminiscent of earlier ones. *Atlas* writes:

“All attempts by Japan to liquidate the Far Eastern Front by the forces of the White Guards were unsuccessful, and in June 1920 the Japanese government concluded a ceasefire and with it withdrew troops from Transbaikalia... The defeat of the White Armies on February 1922 near Volochaevka and in October in Primorye forced Japan to evacuate its troops from the Far East. Captured by units of the People's Revolutionary

²⁸ R Shayapov, Y Vedenin, and A Sakharov, eds., “Гражданская Война 1920-1922 Гг.,” in *National Atlas of Russia* (Moscow: National atlas of Russia, n.d.), <https://xn--80aaaa1bhncclcci1cl5c4ep.xn--p1ai/cd4/161/161.html>.

Army On October 25, the last stronghold of the White Guards - Vladivostok ended the Civil War in Soviet Russia.²⁹

The narrative surrounding the FER and the allied intervention returns to one similar to that of in-group versus out-group; however, the narrative shown in *Atlas* is not one which espouses a specific ideology, nor does it necessarily identify with the USSR to create an in-group. The narrative in *Atlas* regarding the FER and the intervention represents a break from the past while simultaneously still retaining a memory of who in the past had wronged the Russian people.

The historical memory of the intervention into the USSR and the FER is one which reflects the priorities of the Soviet state at the time. When the state had to emphasize order and solidarity, then memories thereof were brought to the forefront. When great leaders and cults of personality dominate the discourse, then the historical memory of an event recedes and the mythos of the 'Great Figures' comes to the fore. When foreign tensions are high, the Other, i.e. the foreign menace, rises in prominence, and when they are low, the specter of the Other falls away again. The historical memory of the intervention in the Far East and the Far Eastern Republic is indicative of general trends of historical memory in the USSR and in Russia today. What is important to the contemporary moment will be remembered.

²⁹ Ibid.



Fig. 2. A Gorkin, *Great Soviet Atlas of the World*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Scientific and Publishing Institute of the Great Soviet Atlas of the World, 1939).

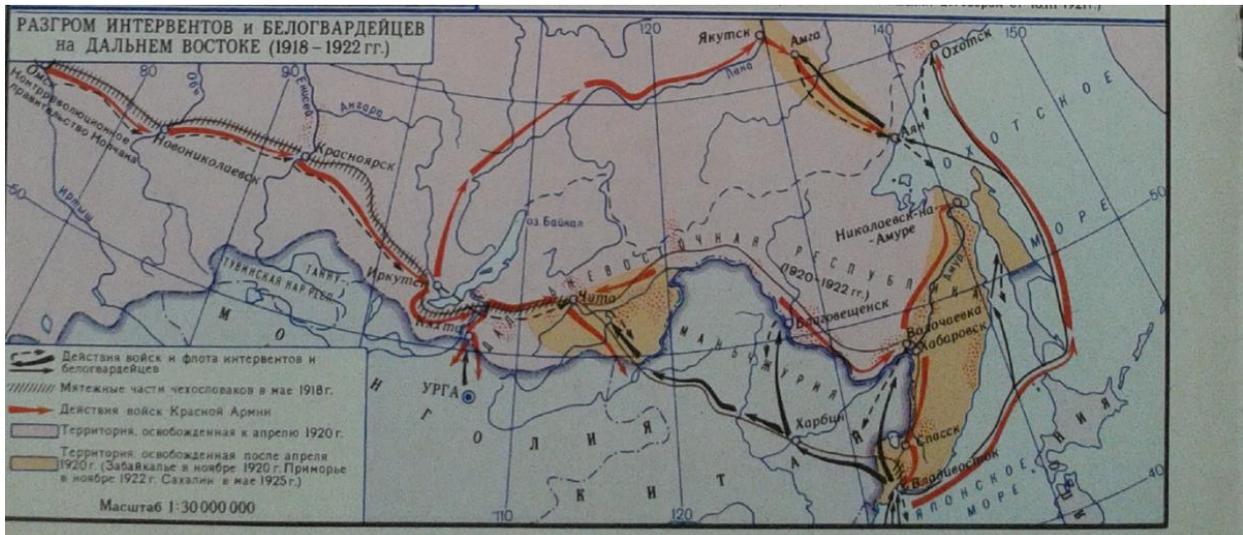


Fig 3. A. P. Averyanova, T Bekovoi, and G Gabrelova, eds., *Атлас Истории СССР Для Средней Школы* (Moscow: Atlas of the Soviet Union, 1967). 12



Fig. 4. Dyk Drofa, *Recent History- The Civil War and Foreign Intervention in Russia*, vol. 10 (GEF, 2015), <https://gdz-history.ru/atlas-9kl-drofa-2015-p10.html>. 10.

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