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Review of the book *Russia's Retreat from Poland, 1920: From Permanent-Revolution to Peaceful Coexistence*

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Drobnicki, John A. Book review of *Russia's Retreat from Poland, 1920: From Permanent Revolution to Peaceful Coexistence*, by Thomas C. Fiddick. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Russia's Retreat from Poland, 1920 is in some ways a misleading title, for Thomas C. Fiddick's revisionist book is not so much concerned with the Russo-Polish War as it is with examining Soviet Russia's political and military leadership during 1919-1920. Using a wide range of Russian source materials, Fiddick challenges the traditional view that the Bolshevik regime was bent on European, if not world, conquest.

Fiddick's argument is that internal problems, such as the terrible state of the economy and Wrangel's troops in the Crimea, were paramount in Lenin's mind, and that he had no desire to use the Red Army to export revolution in 1919-1920. Lenin was confident that the oppressed workers of Europe, especially the Versailles-burdened Germans, would revolt and overthrow their governments on their own. This view was shared by Trotsky, who even went so far as to turn some parts of the Red Army into four "Revolutionary Armies of Labour." When Piłsudski invaded the Ukraine in April 1920, Soviet Russia had very limited, definite goals, according to Fiddick: to defend their territory and force the Poles to make peace as quickly as possible, so the Soviet leadership could concentrate on negotiating trade agreements with the West and deal a final, crushing blow to Wrangel.

General Tukhachevsky, however, did not share the view of his Party leaders, a schism which Fiddick traces to the Soviet reply to Curzon's famous note. Tukhachevsky interpreted the Soviet rejection as "a green light for the Red Army to march forward" in "an all-out struggle between Russia and European capitalism," according to the author. Neither Lenin nor Trotsky wanted Tukhachevsky to attempt to take Warsaw, for it would jeopardize both trade negotiations with England and the upcoming battle against Wrangel's White Army; but Trotsky did, however, try to protect the General's overextended forces by adding some Southwestern Armies to his command, a move designed also to attempt to slow down the impetuous Tukhachevsky. Fiddick documents how Lenin, perhaps purposely, failed to notify Stalin (the commissar of the Southwestern front) of this transfer of command and actually led him to believe that these forces were still under his control. Thus, when *Glavkom* and Tukhachevsky formally requested that these troops be moved to the Polish front, Stalin, who opposed the march on Warsaw and who believed Wrangel to be the major threat, pointedly refused to send them. While Fiddick shows that both Tukhachevsky and Stalin bear much of the blame for the Polish victory, he believes that Lenin does also – "not for recklessly pushing Tukhachevsky toward Warsaw, as has so often been maintained, but for undermining attempts by Trotsky and *Glavkom* to protect him."

Those who are familiar with Norman Davies' *White Eagle, Red Star* (which is cited numerous times) will disagree with Fiddick's chronology of the Russo-Polish War. Fiddick begins his account of the war in April 1920 with Poland's invasion of the Ukraine, and he repeatedly speaks of "Polish aggression." According to Davies, however, the war actually began in February 1919, when Polish and Russian troops simultaneously moved into territory recently evacuated by the German army – thus, the war was the fault of *neither* side, or of *both* sides, since there was no established border between Poland and Soviet Russia at that time; Piłsudski's invasion of the Ukraine, then, would be the opening campaign of the *second* year of the war. Although he does not provide exact figures, Fiddick also writes that Poland was receiving aid from England and

France during the Russo-Polish War, something which several Polish authors have disputed – some even suggest that the Allies provided no aid to Poland until July 1920, after Poland agreed to the Allies' unfavorable settlement of her dispute with Czechoslovakia over Teschen.

These comments do not detract from the overall merits of *Russia's Retreat from Poland*, however, since the war is used as a back-drop to examine Soviet foreign policy and political and military leadership, at which it is very successful. Professor Fiddick provides valuable insight into a complex period of Soviet history, and into the activities of not only Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky, but also Felix Dzerzhinsky, Karl Radek, and Leonid Krasin. While his interpretations may differ from some of the standard works, they must certainly be reckoned with by those interested in the history of the early Bolshevik regime.

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