

Historical Committee

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Introduction from the Chairs

Hello delegates,

We are your chairs Sofia Vitória, Gustavo, and Chanwoo for the Historical Council for GMUN XI! We are so excited to see you debate the Kornilov Affair – a topic of the utmost importance. As chairs, we will monitor the flow of debate and support you in any way we can. We understand that this may be the first Model UN conference for some of you, and we are so thrilled that we get to be a part of this learning experience with you. This topic guide is the first way through which we help you; we have compiled some background information that we hope you will utilize to learn more about your topic in addition to your individual research. For more experienced delegates, we hope you take this opportunity to improve your skills and take on challenges. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to any of us. We are here to help and look forward to watching you debate!

Kind regards,

Sofia Vitória, Gustavo, and Chanwoo

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Guide to Researching

The following information will serve to guide you in your research.

The first thing you should do is find the basics about your historical figure. The sources you use should be reliable— meaning that the writer (whether that be an organization, a well-known author, an expert in the field, or a governmental organization) is credible and trusted by most. Sources such as Google Scholar and some websites that end with `examplewebsite.edu` are also great tools since they are both for educational purposes. Continue reading and understanding the information within the topic guide, and extend your knowledge by asking yourself more questions and searching for the answers! Your chairs have worked very hard to make sure this topic guide gives you foundational knowledge on what you will be discussing, but don't be afraid to take your learning further!

Good luck and please reach out to us if anything is needed,
Sofia Vitória, Gustavo, and Chanwoo

Topic A: The Kornilov Affair



General Lavr Kornilov at a military parade in 1917 (Miami University)

Background Information

Origin of the problem,

In order to understand the Kornilov Affair of 1917, it is imperative we explore the social context that evoked such a revolt. 1917 in Russia was a time of extreme social distress and dissatisfaction with the government, tensions that were fueled by World War I, yet that can be traced back all the way to 1905. In terms of foreign policy, one of Russia's greatest interests since the 18th century was acquiring a warm-water port, one that would allow them to participate in trade year-round, a luxury all other great powers of the time had. Unsatisfied with the port of Vladivostok, which would freeze for 6 months of the year, Russia had attempted to expand westward during the years prior to 1905 and was met with defeat in acquiring their port. Thus, the logical solution was to attempt to expand eastward, into Asia. Russia was interested in Port

Arthur in Manchuria, which through the Yellow Sea, would give the Russians access to the Pacific Ocean. Russia would go on to fight a war over this territory, known as the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), and shockingly to the overconfident Russia, Japan completely annihilated the former and incapacitated their army for many years to come.

At home, the Russians were humiliated by the defeat, and domestic unrest sparked as the illusion that Russia would attain Asian hegemony shattered. This unrest was vocalized in the form of strikes and student riots organized by the Union of Liberation (Russia's first major liberal political group, founded in January of 1904), and is today known as the Russian Revolution of 1905. One of the most commonly known events of the revolution is Bloody Sunday, where, on January 22nd 1905 (the previous date is using the Gregorian calendar, which is what most use today, however at the time Russia utilized the Julian calendar and it is a common historical practice to write both dates to avoid discrepancies; in the Julian calendar, that would be January 9th 1905), imperial guards massacred peaceful protestors that were marching towards the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. Bloody Sunday represents the wedge that was being driven between the people of Russia and the Tsar Nicholas II, as it seemed the ruling class was corruptly responding with violence instead of actually listening to its subjects. Tsar Nicholas II tried to appeal to the Russians with the October Manifesto, the culmination of the 1905 revolts, in which Russia was transformed from an autocracy into a constitutional monarchy. The Tsar also established a Duma, a form of parliament in order to convince the Russians that their interests were being heard and entertained, yet the sheer amount of times Tsar Nicholas II would go on to dissolve the Duma exposed his hypocrisy.

By 1914, during the outbreak of World War I, the Russian military was still recuperating. Although Russia did have effective offensives during World War I, such as the Brusilov Offensive (1916), the massive amount of casualties (over 2 million Russians died) and the extension of supply lines eventually forced the army to retreat. The war caused dire economic hardships in Russia, and simply existing was becoming harder by the day. Inflation rates turned the most basic necessities into unaffordable luxuries, and the collapse of the railway system meant citizens had to face the freezing Russian winters with barely any coal or food. The blame for such circumstances was being placed directly on the Tsar, especially since the Tsar took

personal command over the military in 1915, and it is this blame and resentment that would eventually grow into the February Revolution of 1917, where Tsar Nicholas II would be forced to abdicate, ending three centuries of Romanov rule.

The issue at hand,

After the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, governing power in Russia was being shared by two groups: the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviets. The Provisional Government was originally the Provisional Committee, and was formed by members of the Duma in March of 1917 (utilizing the Julian calendar, it was February of 1917). With the exception of Aleksandr Kerensky, from the Soviet Revolutionary Party, all members of the Provisional Government were liberal ministers and thus believed the most ideal progression for Russia's future was to become democratic, with a fully elected Constituent Assembly. The Petrograd Soviets were the workers' councils and represented the beliefs of the industrial workers; major decisions by the Provisional Government required support from the Soviets. This relationship became more tumultuous after Lenin's arrival in Petrograd in April of 1917, especially as he spread his ideal and slogan that power should be concentrated in the hands of solely the Soviets.

After a series of uprisings in July (known as the July Days), the government was reorganized and on July 21st 1917 (July 8th with the Julian calendar) Kerensky became the prime minister. The Provisional Government wanted to improve the army in order to win World War I, which is why Kerensky appointed General Lavr Kornilov as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian military in July of 1917. Although initially the two attempted to cooperate for the future of Russia, it was during the Moscow State Conference that the hostilities between the two distinct political groups they represented came to light. Kerensky had called the State Conference in Moscow in August of 1917 to reinforce his authority, nonetheless was then faced with the starkly contrasting opinions about the left and right about the conduct of the war. The left believed in democratizing the army and achieving peace, yet the right advocated for the return of military discipline. It is pivotal to mention that this newly-formed right, although believing in more traditional means, was in no way monarchist. They did strive for a democratic Russia, yet

believed that strengthening the national defense was of utmost priority. One of the greatest spokespersons for the right was General Kornilov.

It was on September 3rd 1917 (August 21st Julian calendar) that the Germans occupied Riga, the capital of Latvia, where Latvia is on Russia's western border. Due to this, Petrograd, Russia's capital, was believed to be in danger. This only fueled the right-wing politicians' beliefs about the need for a more effective military, yet it also convinced Kornilov he should perhaps take control over the civil government through a coup d'état and remove the Bolshevik influence from such entity. Upon receiving note about this, on September 9th (August 27th Julian calendar), Kerensky stated in a radio telegram to all of Russia: "I hereby announce...General (Lavr) Kornilov sent to me...a demand for the surrender by the Provisional Government of all civil and military power, so that he may form, at his personal discretion, a new government to administer the country." Kerensky then declared Kornilov a traitor and removed his position as commander of the army. In retaliation, and also in order to restore military discipline, Kornilov sent three cavalry divisions to capture Petrograd. These were Cossack divisions under the command of Akensadr Krymov, chosen for the offensive as the Cossacks were known for their strong military traditions. Kornilov was also himself a Cossack, which may have influenced his loyalty. For defense, Kerensky looked to the Petrograd Soviets and the Bolsheviks, where even Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky expressed support for Kerensky from jail. Influenced by their leader, the Bolsheviks demonstrated their assistance by arming the Petrograd workers, underscoring the breach that was being placed between the military and its people. These very same workers also began to tear up the train tracks to disrupt the arrival of Kornilov's army.

By the 11th of September (August 29th), there were 40,000 armed workers in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks began spreading their propaganda to the Cossacks, ruining the morale of an already unstable army. Bolshevik soldiers also began to arrive from Kronstadt and Vyborg, with orders to shoot at those loyal to Kornilov. By the 12th of September, the army was so demoralized to fight that they had simply quit. It was announced that the Soviets had defeated Kornilov's army. Krymov committed suicide on the 13th, and Kornilov was arrested and jailed.

Current Situation

As of September 1917, the aftermath of the Kornilov Affair has left Russia in a state of suspension. While the official government holds the power nominally, the streets hold the means of enforcing power. Now, General Lavr Kornilov and his colleagues are currently confined at the Bykhov Fortress; their failed coup d'état has acted to destabilize the provisional government. Currently, as of mid September 1917, Prime Minister Alexander Kerensky has attempted to control authority by forming a new Directory — often viewed as a declaration of Russia as a Republic. However, this new declaration is mostly displaced by the public, viewing it with dismay; rather, the population has moved towards an extreme radicalization. Once again, the Provisional government exists in name only, possessing the Winter Palace but lacking the military degree to enact any decree.

As of now, the most critical standpoint is the emergence of the Bolsheviks. To stop Kornilov's advance, Kerensky had to ally with the far left, resulting in the mass release of Bolshevik prisoners (most notably, Leon Trotsky) and the distribution of 40,000 rifles to factory workers. Known as the Red Guards, the workers now are better armed than most of the city garrison. Having supposedly saved the country from Kornilov, the Bolsheviks have achieved a political victory, amounting to a majority in the Soviet Petrograd. Now led by many of their infamous slogans, such as "Peace, Land, and Bread", the masses view the Provisional Government as a roadblock to their true revolutionary progress.

At the same time, expectedly, the Russian military is experiencing its disintegration. The once influence held by Kornilov has undoubtedly disrupted the chain of command. Soldiers, embodied by Soviet Order No 1., now view any officer who demands discipline as a counter revolutionary, so-called "Kornilovite," resulting in a mass desertion from the front. Obviously, the Eastern Front is widely open, leading the German Empire to seize Russian territory, including the recent Riga. Partnered with this catastrophe, economic collapse haunts the public, caused by hyperinflation and the collapse of the railway system, amounting to a food crisis as the winter approaches.

Most importantly, the failure of the coup left a massive power vacuum, waiting to be filled. Kerensky, currently, is loathed by the Right (the military elite) for betraying Kornilov but

also mistrusted by the Left (the Bolsheviks and the Social Revolutionaries) for his secret negotiations with the General. The duality between the Duma and the Soviets has now been shattered. Russia, no longer governed by legislation, is now governed by the street. The ultimate question in the upcoming Democratic Conference is no longer how to maintain the Provisional Government, but how to manage the transition of power before the Bolsheviks seize it by force.

Suggested questions for further research

- Did Kornilov genuinely intend to establish a military dictatorship, or was he attempting to restore order within a collapsing state?
- To what extent did Kerensky's actions create the conditions for the Kornilov Affair?
- Was the Provisional Government ever capable of exercising real authority after February 1917?
- How did the collapse of military discipline redefine what "power" meant in Russia in 1917?
- Why did Kornilov's troops ultimately refuse to act decisively?
- What does the failure of military obedience reveal about the relationship between the army and the state?
- Could any faction in 1917 realistically govern without the loyalty of the armed forces?
- How did soldiers' committees and political agitation undermine traditional command structures?

Bloc Positions

Bloc 1, Aleksandr Kerensky

Alexander Kerensky was the prime minister of the Russian Provisional Government in 1917 and the central political authority during the Kornilov Affair. Politically, Kerensky positioned himself as a defender of the revolution while also believing that Russia needed strong authority to survive war, economic collapse, and social unrest. This contradiction is one of the key aspects of his leadership. He relied on the legitimacy of democratic institutions but lacked a loyal power base, forcing him to balance between the army, conservative elites, and the Petrograd Soviet. During the crisis, Kerensky initially sought to strengthen state authority by empowering General Lavr Kornilov to restore discipline in the army and suppress radical threats, particularly from the Bolsheviks. Kerensky believed Russia should remain a democratic republic governed by the Provisional Government, with himself as the legitimate executive leader balancing revolutionary gains with order. Crucially, Kerensky authorized the arming of workers and released Bolshevik leaders to help stop Kornilov's forces. This decision halted the military threat but severely weakened Kerensky's authority. By relying on the Soviets and the Bolsheviks to preserve his government, Kerensky undermined his own position as leader of Russia. After the affair, the Provisional Government survived formally, but Kerensky's leadership was exposed as fragile, indecisive, and dependent on forces openly hostile to his continued rule.

Bloc 2, General Lavr Kornilov

Lavr Kornilov was the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army and the leading advocate of military authority during the Kornilov Affair. Kornilov believed that Russia required strong, centralized leadership backed by the army to prevent national collapse, defeat internal enemies, and continue the war effort. During the affair, Kornilov acted on the belief that the Provisional Government was incapable of maintaining order and that revolutionary politics were destroying the army. He viewed the Soviets and socialist parties, especially the Bolsheviks, as existential threats to Russia's war effort and state stability. Kornilov advocated restoring strict military discipline, curbing the power of soldiers' committees, and suppressing revolutionary

agitation by force if necessary. During the summer of 1917, conservative politicians, industrialists, and army officers increasingly saw Kornilov as the only figure capable of preventing total collapse. As a result of this support, Kornilov ordered loyal troops to move toward Petrograd with the stated goal of restoring discipline, suppressing radical elements, and protecting the government from Bolshevik influence. However, Kornilov lacked political legitimacy and mass support. His troops were intercepted, persuaded to defect, or refused orders altogether. The failure of Kornilov's action demonstrated that military force alone could not determine leadership in revolutionary Russia and permanently discredited authoritarian, army-led solutions.

Bloc 3, Leon Trotsky

Leon Trotsky was a leading Bolshevik revolutionary who played a decisive role in defeating Kornilov while positioning himself for future power. During the Kornilov Affair, Trotsky opposed Kornilov unequivocally, framing the advancing troops as a counterrevolutionary threat to the revolution and the Soviets. Trotsky supported the leadership of Russia by the Soviets, particularly under Bolshevik control, and rejected both military dictatorship and the Provisional Government's authority. When Kornilov's troops advanced, Trotsky and other Bolsheviks positioned themselves as defenders of Petrograd, organizing Red Guards, mobilizing workers, and coordinating resistance through the Petrograd Soviet. Acting through the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky organized workers, railway employees, and Red Guards to block troop movements, disrupt communications, and persuade soldiers to abandon Kornilov. Trotsky avoided directly challenging the Provisional Government during the crisis, instead allowing it to collapse politically on its own. After Kornilov's defeat, Trotsky used the affair as proof that the Provisional Government could not defend the revolution and that only the Soviets could lead Russia. The crisis dramatically increased Bolshevik credibility, weapons access, and popular support, directly paving the way for Trotsky's rise and the October Revolution.

Bloc 4, Irakli Tsereteli

Irakli Tsereteli was a leading Menshevik and a prominent figure in the Petrograd Soviet, representing the moderate socialist position during the Kornilov Affair. Tsereteli opposed Kornilov's military advance, viewing it as a dangerous threat to revolutionary freedoms and civilian authority. At the same time, he rejected Bolshevik calls for immediate seizure of power, supporting continued leadership by the Provisional Government in cooperation with the Soviets. During the affair, Tsereteli worked to mobilize Soviet resistance to Kornilov while maintaining legal order and avoiding civil war. He supported Kerensky as the legitimate leader of Russia, believing that stability required a coalition between moderate socialists and liberal politicians. However, Tsereteli's position was fatally weakened by the crisis. The exposure of a military threat discredited conservative forces, while the arming of workers empowered the Bolsheviks. Tsereteli's insistence on compromise left him isolated as political polarization intensified. After the Kornilov Affair, Menshevik influence declined rapidly, and Tsereteli's vision of a democratic, moderate socialist Russia lost credibility, effectively removing the political center from Russian leadership.

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