

# The Great White Train: typhus, sanitation, and U.S. International Development during the Russian Civil War

Julia F. Irwin\*

University of South Florida, History, Tampa, FL 33604, United States

In January 2009, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton stood before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during her confirmation hearing for the post of Secretary of State. Time and again, Clinton affirmed her belief that U.S. national security depends on balancing three 'D's: Diplomacy, Development, and Defense. 'In order to protect and defend the United States of America, to advance our interests, and to further our values,' she stressed, 'we have to have all three of those elements of our power working in concert.'<sup>1</sup> In proclaiming a commitment to development, Clinton was attempting to set herself apart from her immediate predecessors in the State Department, whom she criticized for their failure to devote ample resources to foreign aid and assistance. Her multidimensional approach, however, was by no means a novel strategy of U.S. global engagement. Ninety years earlier, American policymakers were just as aware of the importance of each of these elements to their nation's relations with the world.

The winter of 1919 found the United States knee-deep in its intervention in Russia's Civil War. Two years earlier, on November 7, 1917, Vladimir Lenin had led a successful armed coup in Petrograd, declaring Bolshevik control of Russia and sparking a protracted battle for control of the country. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, along with many American citizens, deplored this new, radical phase of the Russian Revolution and threw his firm support behind the anti-Bolshevik factions. In the summer of 1918, the United States joined Britain, France, Japan, and Italy in sending armed forces to Russia – a military commitment made for a number of reasons, but especially to sway the outcome of the Civil War against the Bolshevik government and to aid Czechoslovak forces then stuck in Siberia. From August 1918 through April 1920, roughly 12,000 U.S. troops occupied the northwestern city of Archangel, the pacific port of Vladivostok, and their surrounding environs as part of this international coalition. Although these efforts to influence the Russian Civil War in favor of the anti-Bolshevik forces ultimately proved futile, the intervention nonetheless represented one of the most important U.S. foreign relations issues of the early post-World War I period (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

While the defensive and diplomatic aspects of this story have received much scholarly consideration, historians have paid less attention to the Wilson Administration's

embrace of the third 'D' in its foreign affairs arsenal, development.<sup>3</sup> Yet from the beginning, U.S. policymakers recognized that development – here defined as the use of medical, scientific, and technological interventions to improve a target population's quality of life – must constitute a central part of their approach. Both Russian soldiers and civilians suffered the effects of malnourishment, poor living conditions, and illness. By addressing these conditions, the U.S. government hoped to win hearts and minds, to persuade Russians of the legitimacy of both the U.S. intervention and of the White Russian (anti-Bolshevik) government. Beyond the clear propaganda value of such assistance, officials believed that tackling disease was essential to maintaining social order and stability and to counteracting the influence of Bolshevism. To complement the U.S. military intervention of Russia, the Wilson Administration therefore promoted a major humanitarian intervention as well. During Russia's Civil War, development would serve as a central piece of the U.S. foreign affairs arsenal.

## The American Red Cross goes to Russia

When the U.S. government takes on global relief and development projects today, it does so largely through such state organs as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. military. It also works through such international agencies as the World Health Organization. In the period from 1918 to 1920, however, things were very different. No such federal or global relief infrastructure existed. Instead, the Wilson Administration relied on a quasi-governmental organization, the American Red Cross (ARC), to administer foreign relief on its behalf. Established in 1881, the ARC was a privately funded and staffed association, primarily dependent on volunteer labor. However, it shared a special relationship with the U.S. government, formalized by the Geneva Convention and Congressional charters, which made it the 'the official volunteer aid department of the United States' in times of war and natural disaster.<sup>4</sup> During the First World War, the ARC had served as the nation's principal instrument for humanitarian relief, carrying out aid and assistance projects in some two-dozen European nations. When Wilson determined to send U.S. troops to Russia, he asked the ARC's wartime leaders to send relief workers there as well, a request to which they

\*Tel.: +1 8134049052.

<sup>1</sup> For this transcript see <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/13/us/politics/13text-clinton.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>2</sup> See N. Gordon Levin, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), ch. 1, and David Foglesong, *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

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<sup>3</sup> A key exception is David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> William Taft, "Proclamation by the President of the United States," 1911, Central Decimal File 811.142/218, Records of the Department of State, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.



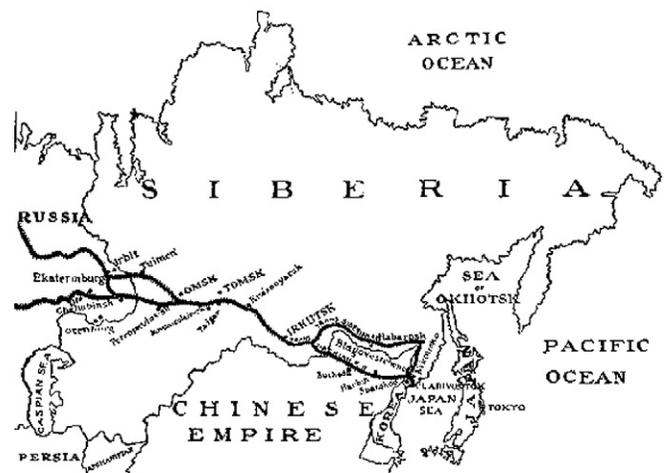
**Figure 1.** American Red Cross personnel in Archangel with a supply truck and reindeer-drawn sleigh, ca. 1919–1921. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

gladly consented. Though in part a private organization, the ARC thus behaved as an arm of the state, the U.S. government's official channel for aiding American soldiers, other anti-Bolshevik forces, and Russian civilians.<sup>5</sup>

In the late summer of 1918, coincident with the deployment of U.S. troops, two contingents of ARC personnel arrived in Russia. The first, the Commission to North Russia, was the smaller of these. Based in Archangel, its staff focused primarily on relief efforts for U.S. soldiers and remained less than a year, departing when U.S. troops withdrew in July 1919. The second, the Commission to Siberia, would prove far more important and influential as an agent of aid and development. Under the command of an American physician named Rudolph B. Teusler, then superintendent of St. Luke's Hospital in Tokyo, the Commission to Siberia established headquarters in Vladivostok in September 1918. The Commission's personnel, however, did not remain in that port city; they carried out relief work along the entire 4,100-mile stretch of the Trans-Siberian Railway. For twenty months, from the fall of 1918 to the spring of 1920, over five hundred American doctors, nurses, and lay volunteers served as the staff of the Commission to Siberia. From Vladivostok in the East to Omsk in the West, they administered a far-reaching program of military and civilian relief.

During their time in Russia, Commission to Siberia personnel established or aided dozens of hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries. They equipped trains with medical supplies, food, and clothing, and distributed these items throughout the Siberian countryside. Going well beyond emergency and material aid, they offered nursing education classes to Russian women, established colonies to house and educate Russian orphans, and created employment opportunities for Russian civilians on ARC farms and in ARC offices. Through such a comprehensive approach to aid, ARC workers aspired to do more than feed rumbling

<sup>5</sup> For background on the ARC, see Foster Rhea Dulles, *The American Red Cross: A History* (New York: Harper, 1950), John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), esp. 224–277, Gustave Gaeddart, "The History of the American National Red Cross," unpublished four volume manuscript (Washington, DC: The American National Red Cross, 1950), and Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).



**Figure 2.** Original map of American Red Cross stations in Siberia. In Henry P. Davison, *The Work of the American Red Cross During the War* (Washington, D.C.: American National Red Cross, 1919): 84.

stomachs or cure acute illness. They intended to impose order on widespread upheaval, to transform local ideas about public health, politics, and social organization, and to prove to skeptical Russians the benevolence of the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Although the ARC Commission to Siberia employed a multifaceted approach to foreign aid, the remainder of this article will concentrate on one particular issue, typhus, and the rather unconventional approach the ARC's leaders and their allies took to respond to it. In the winter of 1918, shortly after the ARC arrived in Siberia, Commission leaders joined with representatives from the other co-belligerent nations to fund a mobile treatment clinic, dubbed the Inter-Allied Typhus Train. Over the next year and a half, ARC personnel used the train to carry out a major anti-typhus campaign for both soldiers and civilians at points all along the Trans-Siberian Railway. In so doing, ARC workers played a critical role in fulfilling the humanitarian, diplomatic, and military objectives of the United States (Figure 2).

### Tackling typhus

Typhus posed one of, if not the, greatest health problems facing Civil War Russia. At the time, the diagnosis 'typhus' could refer to two similar, yet distinct, diseases. The first, epidemic or spotted typhus, is caused by the bacteria *Rickettsia prowazeki*. It is an acute illness that causes extreme fever, weakness, and a full body rash. Left

<sup>6</sup> "The American Red Cross in Siberia," undated manuscript, Box 140, American National Red Cross Collection, Accession XX482-9.19/21, Hoover Institution Archives, Palo Alto, CA (hereafter ARC/HD); ARC Report to Ernest Lloyd Harris, Consul General of the US in Vladivostok, November 26, 1919, Ernest Lloyd Harris Collection, Box 2, Hoover Institution Archives (hereafter HI). Little has been written about the ARC Commission to Siberia. An important exception, however, is Jennifer Polk, "The Canadian Red Cross and Relief in Siberia, 1918–1921," MA thesis, Carleton University, 2004. Polk is currently completing a dissertation entitled "Angels and Uncles: The American Red Cross, the YMCA, and the Politics of Relief in Civil War Siberia, 1918–1923," at the University of Toronto, which deals even more explicitly with the American Red Cross and its efforts. See also Clifford M. Foust, "Sanitary trains and epidemic control: the American Red Cross in Siberia during the Russian civil war," in *Actas del XXXIII Congreso Internacional de Historia de la Medicina*, J. Carrillo and G. de Ros, eds. (Seville, 1994): 1005–1010. For older published works, see Lavinia Dock, *The History of American Red Cross Nursing* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1922), 910–936 and Ernest Bicknell, *With the Red Cross in Europe, 1917–1922* (Washington, D.C.: The American National Red Cross, 1938), 433–443.

untreated, infection can result in mortality rates upwards of forty percent. The second, recurrent typhus or relapsing fever, is caused by the bacteria *Borrelia recurrentis*. Like spotted typhus, infection results in a sudden, intense fever. However, as the name suggests, recurrent typhus is characterized by periodic episodes of fever, separated by long periods of normal body temperature. Death rates may be as high as seventy percent. Though caused by different bacterial agents, the two diseases had much in common. Both were spread by the human body louse *Pediculus humanus*, both caused high fevers and high death rates, and both were exacerbated by famine and close, unsanitary living conditions. Lacking a clear understanding of the etiology and unaware that the diseases were separate organisms, many scientists and physicians at the time referred to both as typhus, a linguistic convention that this article will follow. Whatever the causative agent, one thing was clear: typhus is and was a disease of poverty and war.<sup>7</sup>

The early twentieth century witnessed the eruption of major epidemics in areas of conflict across the globe, from Revolutionary Mexico in the 1910s to Serbia and much of the Eastern Front during the First World War.<sup>8</sup> In Russia, the disease had been a leading cause of mortality in both urban and rural areas for decades. It was largely responsible for the destruction of much of Napoleon Bonaparte's Army in the early nineteenth century. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, major epidemics cropped up frequently, especially in the cold winter months. Typhus morbidity in Russia increased markedly following the eruption of the First World War, but in the winter of 1917 and 1918, following the Bolshevik Revolution and the outbreak of the Russian Civil War, contagion rates truly began to skyrocket. Hunger, frequent refugee and troop movements, and the effects of constant wartime deprivation combined to generate one of the most virulent typhus epidemics in Russian history. By the winter of 1919–1920, the disease had overwhelmed the entire country. Some health officials at the time speculated that as many as 25% of Russians might have been infected. Though estimates vary widely, it is now clear that millions of Russian civilians and soldiers died from the disease, while tens of millions more contracted it.<sup>9</sup>

From the beginning, both Red Army and White Army officials understood that controlling typhus among their troops and supporters would be essential to turning the Civil War in their respective favors. By this time, both sides had some idea of how to combat its spread. In 1909, French bacteriologist Charles Nicolle had conclusively demonstrated the louse vector of transmission; by 1916, the bacterial agent of epidemic typhus had been identified as well. Nonetheless, many physicians and medical personnel continued to lack a clear understanding of the disease or to recognize that 'typhus' actually referred to

two diseases. A vaccination and effective antibiotic cures, moreover, both remained years in the future.

In the 1910s and early 1920s, physicians and public health officials thus had to rely on isolation of the infected and the destruction of lice to halt the spread of disease. In areas where epidemics raged at this time, it was common for both governments and private agencies to build disinfection stations where medical officials could delouse clothing and bodies, thereby targeting the vector of contagion. Such measures played some part in reducing typhus morbidity by decreasing the sheer numbers of lice. Indeed, before the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia's Tsarist government had seen some success in limiting the disease's spread by employing such methods.<sup>10</sup> In the end, however, the surest means of reducing the incidence of typhus was for societies to become more stable and prosperous. Furthermore, as a number of historians have argued, disinfection stations posed potential threats to civil liberties. In the hands of governments and health professionals, they often became tools for to achieve rather nefarious ends, namely the exercise of surveillance and discipline over individuals regarded as foreign or threatening. Disinfection stations, in short, had clear limits. Nonetheless, they played a major role in typhus management strategies in the early twentieth century world.<sup>11</sup>

Adopting these contemporary methods of lice abatement, Soviet officials, together with the Russian Red Cross, worked to combat the disease's spread through the construction of disinfection stations and hospitals in the areas that they occupied. Anti-Bolshevik forces, too, tried to establish similar operations in the regions they controlled. As part of its wider intervention into Russian political and social life, the United States would play a leading role in helping the White Army control the spread of typhus in Siberia. Given the relatively small scale of the U.S. military and diplomatic machinery at the time, the task of orchestrating this campaign on behalf of the United States fell not to U.S. government agencies, but instead to the newly arrived American Red Cross Commission to Siberia.

The American Red Cross volunteers who arrived in Siberia in 1918 and 1919 expressed tremendous shock at the state of the hygiene, sanitation, and illness they encountered. 'The condition of the Military Trains was the worst thing I have seen over here,' reported Annie Williams, a nurse from New York City who had spent much of her career working in tenements. 'The filth was unspeakable in these cars. Some of the men delirious from typhus were lying on the hard floors of the cars. They had not even a shirt on and were crusted with the filth and excretions from their own bodies.'<sup>12</sup> Colleagues describing civilian conditions had little better to report. 'While we were waiting at one town a refugee train came in and it surely was awful,' a volunteer named Carrie Pickett wrote to her

<sup>7</sup> Robert Argenbright, "Lethal Mobilities: Bodies and Lice on Soviet Railroads, 1918–1922," *Journal of Transport History* 29 (September 2008): 259–276.

<sup>8</sup> For more on modern understandings of typhus, see Y. Bechah, C. Capo, J.L. Mege, and D. Raoult, "Epidemic typhus," *Lancet Infect Diseases* (2008): 417–426.

<sup>9</sup> For more on this epidemic, see John F. Hutchinson, *Politics and Public Health in Revolutionary Russia, 1890–1918*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) and K. David Patterson, "Typhus and its Control in Russia, 1870–1940," *Medical History* 37 (1993): 361–381.

<sup>10</sup> Argenbright, "Lethal Mobilities," 265.

<sup>11</sup> For more on early twentieth century typhus control, see Paul Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. ch. 1; Alexandra Minna Stern, "Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1910–1930," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 79 (1999): 41–81.

<sup>12</sup> Annie Lee Williams, "A Narrative Report of Siberia," 1920, Box 4, Foreign War Relief Collection: Siberian Commission, Annie L. Williams Collection, Hazel Braugh Archives, Lorton, VA (hereafter HB).

parents. 'People huddled into filthy box cars like a lot of sardines, their faces are the most pathetic things I have ever seen, a patient and resigned sort of looking and the poor little babies had the same look.'<sup>13</sup> Ida Appenzeller, another nurse, lamented that wherever she went she 'saw filthy military hospitals and yellow faced typhus patients.'<sup>14</sup> Typhus, these ARC workers and their superiors recognized, was omnipresent. Crowding, filth, poverty, hunger, and wartime upheaval conspired to create an environment hospitable to lice and therefore to contagion. Only by cleaning up these conditions, American humanitarians believed, could they stop the scourge of typhus.

In late 1918, Rudolph Teusler, the head of the ARC Commission to Siberia, met with representatives from the British, French, Italian, Japanese, and Czechoslovak militaries to determine their plan of attack. The assembled delegates, declaring themselves the Inter-Allied Typhus Commission, recognized that establishing enough stationary disinfection clinics and isolation hospitals to sufficiently deal with the typhus crisis would take time and would require significant resources. While they decided to construct as many of these permanent institutions as possible, they also came up with another idea to facilitate the prevention of disease more quickly: they decided to bring a delousing station to the people. In the winter of 1918–1919, the members of the Inter-Allied Typhus Commission determined to organize a sanitary train to carry medical care and disinfection services to the far reaches of Siberia. Originally, the Inter-Allied Typhus Commission planned only to treat soldiers in the easternmost provinces of northern Russia. Ultimately, however, its members decided to extend their operations further west, and to assist both civilians and troops in the far reaches of Siberia. The six Allied governments agreed to defray costs for the train, but all concurred that ARC physicians and nurses would design it and staff it. This decision gave the ARC (and, by extension, the United States) a disproportionate share of control over its operations. While the Typhus Train would be an international enterprise in spirit, in practice it was largely an American undertaking (Figure 3).<sup>15</sup>

### The work of the Great White Train

In charge of the outfitting the expedition, the ARC Commission to Siberia prepared the Inter-Allied Typhus Train – or the 'Great White Train' as it came to be called – for its work. ARC leaders filled several train cars with medicines and fresh clothing and transformed the others into a mobile delousing clinic. The completed train included a bath car, a car with a water tank and boiler, and cars for sterilizing clothes, dressing and undressing patients, and cutting hair. ARC leaders staffed the train with thirty-one medical and nursing professionals and other personnel. Originally, only two of the train's staff members were American, though more would join later. The ARC's leaders hired many Russian *Feldshers* and *Sanitars*, or



Figure 3. Russian civilian ill with typhus near American Red Cross building, ca. 1919–1921. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

healthcare workers, to assist them, as well as several staff members from the other participating Allied nations. With the Russian words for 'American Red Cross' emblazoned on its side, however, the Typhus Train plainly announced that it was the United States that had come to Russia's aid.<sup>16</sup>

On February 2, 1919, the train's first crewmembers departed Vladivostok for the Typhus Train's inaugural medical mission. Fifteen days later, they arrived in the city of Irkutsk and began work. Over the next few months, they traveled west to stops in a number of other cities including Chelyabinsk, Petropavlovsk, Novonicolavsk, Tomsk, and Omsk. In each town they visited, the Typhus Train's personnel utilized a number of approaches to kill lice and prevent further contagion. They bathed and cut the hair of soldiers and civilians. They disinfected old clothing and distributed new garments. Those found to have the disease were given medicine and, when the facilities were available, taken to a hospital for convalescence. Workers on the Great White Train prized efficiency; disinfection procedures resembled a factory assembly line. Workers treated hundreds of people per day, with a record 990 patients on one day alone. Bukeley reported that 'if it were possible to keep the men moving into and out of the cars for 24 h, it would be well within the capacity of the train to handle 2,000 cases.'<sup>17</sup> Working like cogs in a machine, ARC personnel and their allies launched an all-out assault on *Pediculus humanus*.

In addition to treating patients, the Typhus Train's work included education and preventive services for local Russian civilians and their civic and military leaders. At each stop, staff met with local doctors, health officials, and army officials to plan their strategies. In advance of their arrival, ARC officials requested that these individuals provide all the information they could about typhus in their towns to better facilitate their work. Once reaching a town, ARC workers then surveyed local health and

<sup>13</sup> Carrie Pickett to Her Folks, June 23, 1919, Box 1, Carrie Pickett Collection, HI.

<sup>14</sup> Personal Account of Ida Appenzeller (Crom) of Siberian Commission, 1920, Ida Appenzeller Crom Manuscript Collection, HB.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of meeting convened by General S. Inagaki, Chair of Inter-Allied Typhus Expedition, to Director of Medical Bureau of ARC Siberia, Dec 10, 1918; Rudolph Teusler, memorandum re. Allied Anti-Typhus Campaign, January 25, 1919; both Box 135, ARC/HI.

<sup>16</sup> "The War Against Typhus Waged by the Red Cross," *The New York Tribune*, August 3, 1919, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Rudolph Bukeley, paraphrased in "Work of the American Red Cross: The Great White Train," *The Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* 3 (September, 1919): 136.

hygiene conditions on their own in order to determine what more might be done for each region. They then reported back to ARC bases in larger cities, which in turn sent out supply trains loaded with the requested medical and hospital supplies and other forms of material relief. At the same time, plumbers and engineers inspected local baths and hospital facilities to make recommendations on how to improve these sites. ARC personnel also worked with local public health officials to organize anti-typhus campaigns, hoping to educate the public about the disease and its prevention. Going far beyond treating and preventing typhus on the train itself, Bukeley and his staff aspired to reshape the entire Russian medical landscape.

Even as the Train's staff endeavored to tackle typhus, they experienced some serious setbacks as a result of the disease as well. Originally in charge of the train was F. A. Dallyn, a Captain in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, assisted by business manager Rudolph Bukeley, an ARC staff member from Honolulu, Hawaii. Within a matter of weeks, however, Dallyn succumbed to typhus himself. Though he survived, his departure left Bukeley in charge of the train for the duration of its time in action. Dallyn was not the only Typhus Train member to fall victim. By the summer of 1919, fourteen of the original thirty-one staff members had contracted the disease, forcing Bukeley and his colleagues to find replacements. The louse proved a formidable adversary.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, the Great White Train soon proved its value as a mechanism for reaching Russians far and wide. Within the first six months of operations, its staff had provided care to an estimated 20,000 civilians and soldiers and offered lessons in health and hygiene to hundreds of local physicians.<sup>19</sup> The Train remained an important fixture of the ARC's work throughout the duration of its time in Siberia. Beginning in the summer of 1919, in fact, the ARC would enjoy even greater autonomy over its operations. With the typhus situation among Allied soldiers better under control, the Inter-Allied Typhus Committee ceded direction of the Great White Train fully to the ARC. Under Bukeley's command, the Typhus Train continued to operate until May 29, 1920, when it was forced to close following the ARC's decision to withdraw from Siberia (a point to which we will return shortly). During that year, the Typhus Train traveled an estimated 11,000 miles and treated over 1,000,000 soldiers and civilians. Certainly, the ARC's efforts did not bring an end to the typhus epidemic in Russia, but they did offer care and preventive services to vast numbers of people. Perhaps more importantly – at least in American minds – such efforts served vital U.S. diplomatic agendas and therefore represented a central part of the wider U.S. intervention into Russia's civil war, a theme to which we now turn (Figure 4).<sup>20</sup>

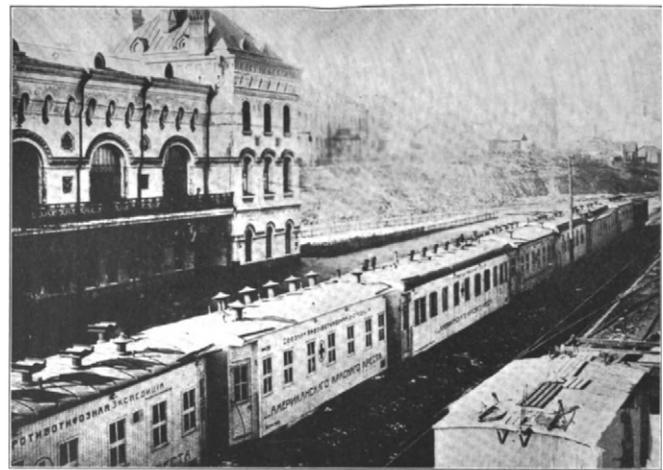


Figure 4. Photograph of the American Red Cross Typhus Train. In "Work of the American Red Cross: The Great White Train," *The Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* 63 (September, 1919): 135.

### The purposes of anti-typhus work

On the surface, the purpose of the Inter-Allied (and later ARC) Typhus Train appeared clear cut: to improve the wellbeing of Russian soldiers and civilians by overcoming the scourge of typhus. To be sure, many of the Typhus Train's personnel understood this as their principal goal and saw their work as overwhelmingly beneficent. But although individual humanitarian relief workers may have been motivated by altruistic convictions, their efforts nonetheless served the interests of the Wilson Administration and the Anti-Bolshevik coalition in several ways. Analyzing the intended outcomes of aid and its perceived value calls attention to the important role that medical and scientific relief projects played in the period's foreign relations.

First and foremost, decreasing the incidence of typhus at the immediate moment served clear American strategic interests. Typhus was a serious health crisis for the Russian people, but for American and other Allied military and diplomatic officials, it was also a tactical nightmare. Military leaders rightfully understood that the disease imperiled their White Army allies and their own troops. Consular officials, meanwhile, recognized that the epidemic threatened the morale of Russian civilians and risked making the existing social upheaval even worse.<sup>21</sup> Working to reduce the incidence of the disease, these policymakers realized, offered several obvious benefits to the anti-Bolshevik cause. First, by improving the health of Allied and White Russian soldiers, anti-Bolshevik forces would claim a distinct advantage over their opposition in terms of strength and vitality. Second, successful eradication of the disease among Russian women, children, refugees, and other civilians could go a long way towards reducing unrest and increasing resolve against the Bolshevik forces.

<sup>18</sup> American Red Cross, Press Release for Sunday Morning Papers, August 3, 1919, Central Decimal File 811.142, Volume 875, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter DOS).

<sup>19</sup> Rudolph Bukeley to ARC Commission to Siberia, May 15, 1919; Riley Allen to Chair of Inter-Allied Typhus Train Committee, June 28, 1919; both Box 135, ARC/HL.

<sup>20</sup> Riley Allen to Inter-Allied Sanitary Committee, May 15, 1920, Box 155, ARC/HL; Ernest Bicknell, *With the Red Cross in Europe*, 435.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. diplomatic officials frequently warned of the threat of typhus. See for instance Consul Harris at Irtutsk to Secretary of State via Chargé in China, December 3, 1919, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919. Russia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919): 228; "Refugees in Siberia Dying in Trains: Typhus and Hunger Take Terrible Toll," *New York Times*, August 11, 1919.

A successful campaign to combat typhus augured great potential as a tool of the war effort.

A related, yet distinct, rationale behind anti-typhus work was its usefulness as a form of public diplomacy. By relieving Russians of the burdens of disease, ARC workers and their allies hoped to persuade them of the benevolence and superiority of the anti-Bolshevik cause. The goal of the ARC's mission to Russia, as the Director of Publicity for the ARC's Commission to Siberia put it, was 'to express its friendship and sincere sympathy in an hour of need,' and to ensure that Russians always remembered 'the cause of freedom and democracy for which the Allies fought.'<sup>22</sup> In case Russians did not recognize this message themselves, ARC workers strove to make sure that it was crystal clear. Wherever they distributed aid, they hung large posters and handed out fliers and other publicity materials to advertise their work, with the objective of ensuring that 'the people in the villages understand that these supplies were from the American people.'<sup>23</sup> ARC workers understood the diplomatic importance of advertising their aid. They sought not only to 'do everything possible to improve the condition of the Russian civilian,' as one worker put it, but at the same time 'to impress upon the Russian in these small towns the work which the Amred-cross [sic] is doing in Siberia.'<sup>24</sup> Through their assistance, another reasoned, 'America, which had meant nothing more to them than a distant democracy which was vaguely friendly and sympathetic,' would take on 'a new meaning.'<sup>25</sup>

While supporting anti-typhus work offered clear benefits in the short term, finally, it also represented a means of shaping Russia's scientific development for years to come. Bukeley bemoaned the conditions he found on his trips through Siberia, remarking frequently on the unavailability of drugs, the poverty and lack of material goods, and the lack of sanitary and medical services comparable to those found in the United States. The Russians, in his mind, suffered from 'their own pitiful, unorganised, unscientific helplessness.' In making such a judgment, Bukeley either overlooked or dismissed the Tsarist government's success in controlling typhus before the Revolution. Rather than blaming the disease's upsurge on wartime chaos, he assumed that Russians were naturally backward, behind the West in terms of scientific and biomedical achievements. It was therefore his fervent hope that the 'American people may hear of these conditions, may learn of these conditions, so that they, out of their own generous hearts, may pour forth money and personnel, and make such conditions impossible in this, the 20th century.' Through the Typhus Train and other assistance, Bukeley stressed, the ARC was instilling 'the Germ for the development of organised scientific work on a large scale.'<sup>26</sup> With their humanitarian intervention, Americans hoped not only to cure Russian

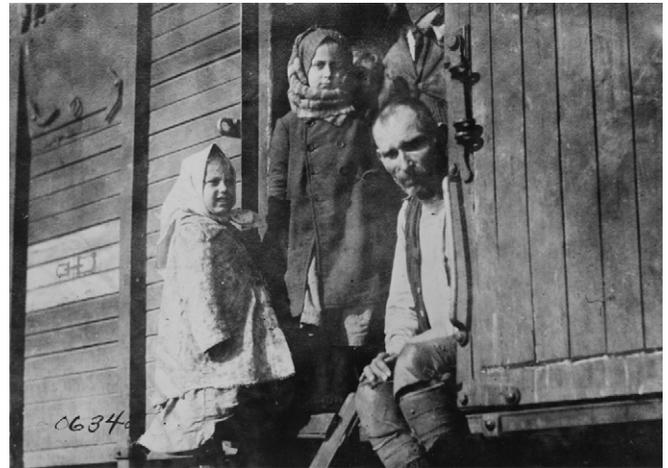


Figure 5. Siberian refugees aided by the American Red Cross, ca. 1919–1921. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

bodies, but to uplift them and modernize their society in the process. As such, their work in Russia represented an early twentieth century attempt at nation building.

Collectively, the ARC's anti-typhus work and other humanitarian activities served the international agendas of U.S. government and many American people. Never simply a sideshow to U.S. diplomatic or military engagement, the ARC's efforts in Russia offered an important way for Americans and their government to engage with and shape the world beyond their borders (Figure 5).

### The end of the line

Eventually, the success of the Bolshevik faction in the Russian Civil War brought the work of the Anti-Typhus Train – along with the ARC's Commission to Siberia and the U.S. military intervention – to an end. Bolshevik forces began to advance eastward across Siberia through the fall and winter of 1919–1920. As they did, ARC leaders feared for the safety of the American physicians, nurses, and other workers stationed in those regions. Consequently, they started to evacuate all personnel east to Vladivostok.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, the U.S. military, recognizing the futility of its intervention, started to withdraw its remaining troops. By April 1920, the last American armed forces had departed Russia. By late May 1920, ARC leaders had sent all but a few workers back to the United States and shut down the Typhus Train and most other projects.<sup>28</sup> While a couple of ARC workers remained in Vladivostok through December to close up operations, the work of the Commission to Siberia was largely complete.<sup>29</sup>

The politics of war thus imposed real limits on the reach of humanitarian aid. This outcome, however, came as a surprise to many of the Americans involved in the ARC endeavor. ARC workers often declared their work in Siberia to be purely selfless and entirely devoid of politics and grew frustrated when Russians thought otherwise. 'There was a wide misrepresentation of the composition and aims of the A.R.C. among various classes of the Russian people,' noted one ARC worker in the region. 'Many

<sup>22</sup> Riley Allen to Manager of Western Division, November 13, 1919, Box 157, ARC/ HI.

<sup>23</sup> James Mills to John P. Carey, February 1, 1919, Box 905, RCNA2.

<sup>24</sup> C. McDonald to Rudolph Teusler, December 7, 1919, ARC/ HI.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Lewis, "A Short History of the Red Cross in North Russia," July 1, 1919, Box 867, RCNA2.

<sup>26</sup> Rudolph Bukeley to ARC Commission to Siberia, May 15, 1919, Box 135, ARC/ HI. Some of Bukeley's comments about Russian life are also published in Lavinia Dock, *The History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 918–926.

<sup>27</sup> See Rudolph Teusler to F. P. Keppel, January 15, 1920, Box 144, ARC/ HI.

<sup>28</sup> Riley Allen to Inter-Allied Sanitary Committee, May 15, 1920, Box 155, ARC/ HI.

<sup>29</sup> E. Alfred Davies to L.D. Gholson, January 25, 1921, Box 137, ARC/ HI.

believ[e] the A.R.C. to be a part of the Allied work in Siberia,' he explained, while 'many think the A.R.C. a part and parcel of the U.S. Government altogether, forgetting the fact that the money is donated by the American people.'<sup>30</sup> But although ARC workers might have denied it, their relief efforts – aimed as they were at anti-Bolshevik soldiers and civilians – were in truth deeply political in design and execution. Recognizing this fact, one official later advised that, 'If such a suggestion be possible along this line, it would be that future work be entirely non-political.'<sup>31</sup> Such a recommendation, of course, was impossible. In the early twentieth century, just as it is today, American foreign relief represented a central pillar of American foreign relations. Though administered by a quasi-governmental organization, humanitarian aid was essential to U.S. international political designs and could not be divorced from them.

In addition to charges of partiality, a second factor – cultural insensitivity – hindered the ARC's efforts. It may have been the Bolshevik advance through Russia that ultimately compelled the ARC's withdraw, yet all along, the organization had experienced serious problems among Anti-Bolshevik factions as well. In their zeal to aid Russia, ARC personnel provoked significant resentment among those very individuals they intended to help. Not every ARC worker recognized or admitted this fact. In official reports about their time in Siberia, many personnel praised the organization for its anti-typhus work and its other humanitarian aid. In late 1919, Commissioner Rudolph Teusler told his superiors in Washington that the 'American Red Cross work [is] now highly appreciated in Siberia.'<sup>32</sup> Annie Williams, the New York City nurse, confirmed this optimistic appraisal in her own report on her service. 'It has been a privilege and a pleasure to work among the Russian and Siberian people even for a few months,' she wrote. 'I have found them always ready to cooperate. They, in fact, solicited advice.' Williams went on to explain that 'The peasant classes were a little suspicious of us at first,' but '...we each gained their confidence. The educated classes,' she added, 'were deeply touched by the kindness and generosity of the American people.'<sup>33</sup>

In stark contrast to these rosy evaluations, a number of ARC workers privately criticized the organization's work, telling a very different story. Physician Frederick Lee Barnum, for one, confided to his diary that 'The Russians did not want the R.C. here.' While Barnum admitted that perhaps 'they did want help in the way of clothing, food & supplies,' he reasoned that 'it was throwing away money to send doctors and nurses and other personnel here, for they were not needed. The Russians had plenty of these. Fully as capable as any we could furnish – more so in fact, because our personnel could not speak the language.' Barnum went on to note that 'we have to absolutely force our help on them,' and that assistance had only been

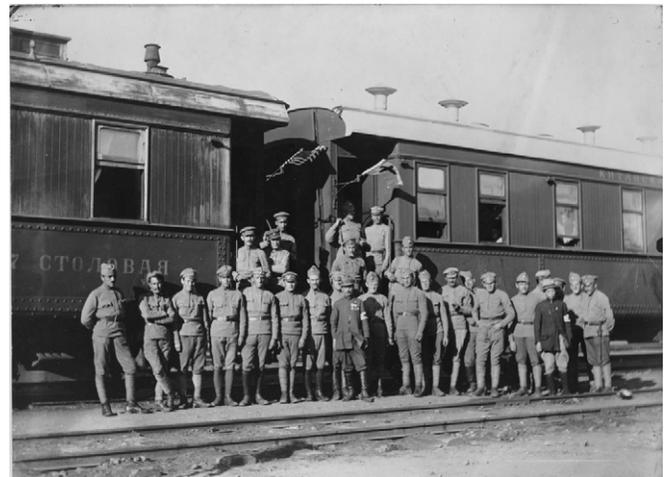


Figure 6. American Red Cross personnel alongside a sanitary train in Siberia, ca. 1919–1921. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

accepted 'grudgingly & reluctantly' by the Russian people.<sup>34</sup> Bessie Eddy Lyons, one of Barnum's colleagues, echoed such criticisms in two 'confidential letters' to her brother at home, which she admittedly snuck out without the knowledge of the Army censor. 'The Russians don't like us,' she told him, because 'We are superior and we show it.' Lyons went on to explain, quite caustically, that 'If we saw a pigsty we would say, 'Poor pigs, I'll come and show you how to live, I'll stay a while and clean you up.' That's what we are doing to these Russians and they resent our interference with a deep, dark, wholehearted resentment.'<sup>35</sup> Such indictments, stinging in their assertions, were a far cry from the glowing appreciation documented in official ARC reports.

As such sober assessments reveal, Russians did not always welcome the ARC and its aid with open arms. Although millions of Russian civilians and soldiers received aid and assistance from the Great White Train and other ARC projects, statistics alone must not be taken to imply total consent to the American presence in Siberia. Though many soldiers and civilians did visit the train, they did not necessarily do so of their own volition. Instead, their social and military superiors may have coerced them into taking part in the regime of undressing and disinfection. Others, of course, never used the ARC's services in all. As Barnum pointed, Russians could appreciate the ARC's material supplies while simultaneously objecting to the presumptions of its staff. In their interactions with local military and medical officials, as Lyons understood all too well, ARC personnel often trumpeted their own biomedical and cultural superiority to such an extent that they provoked a profound backlash from those on the receiving end of assistance. Local resistance, in short, did not prevent the ARC from carrying out its work in Siberia, but it surely limited its effectiveness (Figure 6).

<sup>30</sup> F. H. Delgado to Davison, March 16, 1920, Box 157, ARC/HL.

<sup>31</sup> E. Alfred Davies to Riley Allen, June 12, 1920, Box 137, ARC/HL.

<sup>32</sup> Rudolph Teusler to Livingston Farrand, November 11, 1919: Central Decimal File 811.142/9838, Volume 874, DOS.

<sup>33</sup> Annie Lee Williams, "A Narrative Report of Siberia," 1920, Box 4, Foreign War Relief Collection: Siberian Commission, Annie L. Williams Collection, HB.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Lee Barnum, Diary, entries for September 39 and October 9, 1919, MS29, Rare Books and Manuscript Division, Columbia University Libraries, New York, NY.

<sup>35</sup> Bessie Eddy Lyon to Brother Jim, August 21, 1919, Box 1, Bessie Eddy Lyon Collection, HL.

## Conclusions

The history of the ARC's time in Siberia has much to suggest about the emergence of international development initiatives as an element of early twentieth century U.S. foreign policy. Admittedly, applying the term 'development' to such efforts could rightfully be regarded as an anachronism – ARC workers did not refer to their efforts as such, instead preferring such terms as 'relief' and 'aid.' Nevertheless, the concept is a useful one for thinking about the function of humanitarian assistance. ARC workers did not simply intend to relieve Russia of typhus. They hoped to bring new approaches of typhus control to the Russian people, to develop their understanding of the disease and their knowledge of how to cure and prevent it. ARC workers sought to convince the objects of their assistance of the value of American science and medicine and then, by extension, to convince them of the value of American ideas writ large. If they could win Russian hearts and minds through typhus control, ARC workers stood to win Russian allegiance to American forms of political and social organization as well. A number of historians have examined the flowering of this logic of modernization and development during the Cold War period and the ways that these ideologies influenced U.S. foreign affairs in that era.<sup>36</sup> Clearly though, these concepts had deep roots in the early twentieth century. Although the U.S. government itself had not yet developed the official infrastructures necessary to carry out international development initiatives on its own, policymakers found it quite possible to achieve developmentalist goals by relying on such organizations as the American Red Cross.

Perhaps most significant to readers of this journal, the history of the ARC's anti-typhus work demonstrates that medicine, science, and technology have long been essential elements of international relations, for not only the United States but many other nations as well.<sup>37</sup> Rather than trying to coerce the consent of foreign peoples through military might, governments have utilized scientific and medical assistance as tools to persuade foreign populations of their righteousness, an approach to world politics that political scientist Joseph Nye has termed 'soft power.'<sup>38</sup>

Such a strategy does not always work as intended, a fact evidenced by the failure of the United States and its anti-Bolshevik allies to achieve their objectives in Russia. Nonetheless, it is one that policymakers have embraced and employed throughout much of the modern era, and therefore one that merits scholarly attention.

Beyond its historical significance, the story of the Great White Train holds important lessons for the present day as well. In the twenty-first century, U.S. State Department and military leaders have come to regard development as an essential pillar of U.S. foreign policy. Many other nation-states and many international non-governmental organizations, too, have assumed the obligation to improve the world's health, understanding this as a key to securing global peace and stability. Yet just as they did in Siberia ninety years ago, modern development initiatives run the risk of breeding local resentment and opposition, thereby limiting their effectiveness. Target populations may see them as too inherently political, or they may resist aid projects as a forced imposition of western scientific and cultural ideals. In recent years, for example, the government in the Nigerian state of Kano boycotted a World Health Organization-sponsored mass immunization campaign against polio, due to widespread suspicion of dubious western – and especially American – intentions.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a leading U.S. global health philanthropy, has been criticized for its top-down approach to aid and its unwillingness to take local needs and desires into account in its aid planning.<sup>40</sup> These and other instances of resistance to international medical assistance sound an important cautionary note. If modern development initiatives are to succeed in reducing global disease and suffering, the policymakers and humanitarians who organize them must take local concerns into account, must work to preempt accusations of political intent or cultural imperialism. By remaining cognizant of the drawbacks and failures of past aid endeavors, the proponents of international development stand a far better chance of achieving their noble goal, the improvement of global health.

<sup>36</sup> See for instance David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Michael Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Good discussions of this point can be found in Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Michael Adas, *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America's Civilizing Mission* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Judith R. Kaufmann and Harley Feldbaum, "Diplomacy And The Polio Immunization Boycott In Northern Nigeria," *Health Affairs* 28 (2009): 1091–1101.

<sup>40</sup> See for example Anne-Emanuelle Birn, *Marriage of Convenience: Rockefeller International History and Revolutionary Mexico* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), epilogue.