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Ataman G.M. Semyonov's Failed Political Zigzag: August 1920

Abstract

The publication introduces into scientific use six unique documents concerning political actions of G. M. Semenov in August 1920 and analyses them. At the time Semyonov was formally Commander-In-Chief of all armed forces and Field Ataman of all Cossack troops of the Russian Eastern outskirts. He presented himself as a successor to Admiral Alexander Kolchak, Supreme Ruler of Russia and Leader of the counter-revolution in the Russian Far East. Documents were deposited in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (fond of the Council of People's Commissars) and in the State Archives of the Novosibirsk Region (fond of the Siberian Bureau

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of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and that of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee). Five out of six documents have been classified and unavailable to researchers for decades. The article reviews Soviet and post-Soviet historiography on Semyonov's biography, military and political activities, noting an abundance of publications of all genres and a great variety of opinions on key issues, and concludes that a further widening of the source base is necessary for an adequate representation of the Ataman as a political actor and to explain 'the phenomenon of Semyonov'. The publication serves this end and shows a surprising side of Semyonov. The documents contain information communicated by Semyonov to the Bolshevik leaders through different channels: on the Ataman's intent to avoid participation in formation of the Far Eastern Republic, to come over to the Soviets, and even to join the Red Army in order to fight Japan. He explained his shift of stance from anti-Soviet to pro-Soviet as born from his patriotism and inspired by General Aleksei Brusilov's example. However, these arguments did not deceive the Bolshevik leaders, experienced politicians as they were; they understood that Semyonov's 'zigzag' was brought about by forfeited Japanese support. The reply of the Red Army Leader L. D. Trotsky shattered Semyonov's illusions: amnesty was only possible if he arrived in Moscow accompanied by the appointees of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee chairman. Semyonov's initiative prompted Bolshevik leaders to redouble their efforts to combat propaganda in areas controlled by the Ataman. Soviet press and democratic newspapers of the Far East informed the population how the Ataman requested Trotsky to let him join the Red Army, thus tarnishing Semyonov's reputation. The Ataman's scam was in vain, and, moreover, put him on the back foot.



Keywords

Ataman Semenov, source base, documents, politics, counter-revolution, Transbaikalia, Japan.

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