

# Briefing Memo

## Food and medical care assistance for the local residents during the Siberian intervention

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### Foreword

The prevailing view is that the Siberian intervention, in which Japan had sent troops during 4 years and 2 months from August 2, 1918, the day of the declaration of the Intervention, to October 25, 1922, the day of completion of withdrawal, was a failed war of interference in that “The war, opened without a declaration of war, consumed colossal numbers of troops and military expenses, and was forced to withdraw in defeat undergoing continuous military resistance and international criticism” (Teruyuki Hara). In addition, the Provisional Committee for Economic Assistance to Siberia (herein after referred to as “the Assistance Committee”), which played a great part in the idea of sending troops, had aimed at the exploitation of national interests while providing supply to the local site. Therefore, taking a point of “interests” seriously, it is often viewed that the primary purpose of the Japan’s intervention was to extract concessions from Siberia. In other words, the Siberian intervention was a war of interference against Russia in the midst of the Russian Revolution and, in general, it is regarded as a failed war of interference, which finally could not but retreat without achieving the purpose of securing Japan’s interests.

However, because the supply to the local site was listed as a purpose of the Assistance Committee, the Japanese troops provided supplies, mainly food, and medical assistance for the Russian people in the local site. Though these actions were not recognized as significant at first, it is considered to have gradually become greatly important in the course of the intervention. Moreover the troops sent to Siberia were surrounded by dangerous circumstance where battles against the Partisans occurred and no Japanese communication was possible. The Japanese troops had conducted assistance activities for the local site under such situations.

In this memo, I will clarify purposes, points and effects of the provision of supplies and medical assistance during the Siberian intervention carried out under the unstable situation in a foreign territory and, at the same time, will attempt to make a comparison study with other cases.

### The purposes of the Siberian intervention

The formal purpose of the Siberian intervention was to rescue Czechoslovakian troops. Publishing it as a principle, Japan stated in the declaration of the dispatch of troops that it would not violate the Russian sovereignty and would not interfere in their domestic policy,

and maintain friendly relations with the Russian people. Japan made efforts to assist local people, with the intention of competing with the U.S. which sent troops in cooperation with Japan. Due to the Germany's defeat, however, Japan was forced to shift the purpose of its intervention from the rescue of the Czechoslovakian troops to the self-defense for Japan. Behind its official position of sending troops, its true intention was that Japan wanted to obtain concessions in Siberia while establishing a foothold as far west as possible to prepare for future wars against Russia and Germany. For that reason, Japan assisted the White Army (Anti-revolution armies which resisted the revolutionary forces including the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution) and, as a part of the assistance, support for the local residents, specifically food supply and medical care assistance, were implemented. In particular, the Japanese government had recognized the necessity for Russian people to gain a favorable impression toward Japan, which would lead to the establishment of a pro-Japanese buffer state in the future, and also the necessity to prevent the U.S., which had started assistance activities earlier than Japan, from getting a better reputation by any means.

#### **Actual situation and results of the assistance**

There were two types of assistance to the local residents, that is, the provision of supplies and medical care, of which, the major supply item was food. There were two categories of food supplies, one for ordinary residents and a special one for the personnel of railway operations. They took into consideration especially that the railway was the keystone of traffic and logistics would be enormously influenced if railway workers walked out. As for the ordinary people's food, supplied quantities were 2,155,766 kg of flour, 112,373 kg of sugar and 375,097 kg of salt respectively as far as confirmed. On the other hand, regarding the supplied food for railways personnel, they were 2,027,655 kg of flour, 87,500 kg of sugar and 3,675 kg of salt respectively. All of them summed up to 4,183,421 kg of flour, 199,871 kg of sugar and 101,001 kg of salt.

100 g of flour is equivalent to 368 kcal. Therefore the total quantities supplied deserved 1,539,498,928 kcal. Assuming that required calories for an adult male were 2,000 kcal per day, it satisfied all the required calories for about 21,000 persons in a year. In addition, 100g of sugar is equal to 354 kcal and covers about 1,830 persons as well.

With regard to the medical care assistance, the aid of pharmaceuticals up to about 300,000 yen, typhus prevention fund of 5,000 yen and cholera preventive injection for 70,000 persons were provided as well as performing medical treatments for more than around 1,200,000 persons.

During the same period, the situation of the European region in Russia, where the Bolsheviks had effectively ruled, was, for example, that a ration of bread in Petrograd had been reduced to about 50 g per day since April 29, 1918. Meanwhile, in Tambov, grain consumption per person decreased from a yearly average of about 293 kg (1909-1913) to about 69 kg in 1920. Consequently, due to the malnutrition, epidemics including typhus and cholera raged there, so that the death rate of cholera patients in Voronezh reached 65% in summer, 1918. In the meantime, the outbreak of cholera patients in Siberia was suppressed. It was certain that not a few residents in Siberia were actually saved from starvation thanks to the food supplied by the Japanese troops and the medical aid also seems to have worked

to reduce the number of deaths to some extent compared to the situation of cholera raging in the European region of Russia.

### **Factors affected to the assistance**

Though Japan conducted the assistance including the food supply in order to gain a good impression toward Japan, the residents' response was unfavorable. The residents accepted foods the Japanese troops provided, but they showed only superficial gratitude. Furthermore the residents shouted for joy over retreating Japanese troops in 1921 without expressing any concern about their withdrawal. Judging from the attitude the Russian people had taken when they received assistance and the reactions against the withdrawing Japanese troops, the Russian people was not friendly to Japan and eventually Japan failed to realize its initial purpose of fostering pro-Japanese sentiment. Possible causes are supposed as follows.

First, there was always a tendency for Japanese aid to be compared with that which was accepted from the Americans. Second was the fact that the Russians primarily had a negative view of Japan. The Russians clearly remembered the Russo-Japanese War and moreover, the Bolsheviks fanned the people's memory of the war, so that their feelings towards Japan were not good from the start. The most influential reason, however, seems to have been the behavior of the Japanese soldiers.

The most decisive conduct, which hurt the Russian feelings towards Japan, was illegal actions against the local Russians. The records of soldiers sent to the front and various reports in those days concretely described illegal behaviors conducted by the Japanese soldiers. "Heishi no Kokoroe" (Regulations for a Soldier) compiled by Headquarters of the dispatched Japanese troops also warned against illegal behavior, which suggested they had actually carried out such deeds.

With regard to the attributes of soldiers who conducted such illegal actions, the Military Police Commander's reports regarding the reputation of soldiers who had stayed in Hiroshima city before departing the Ujina port suggested that the people in Hiroshima assessed them as relatively gentle and excellent compared to the soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War. There must be some reasons why highly evaluated soldiers were so ruined as to commit such wrongful conduct.

First, the reason for the mission was unclear and they were not able to discover a reason for putting their lives on the line in battle. Second, hostilities against the Russian arose from Japanese troops being killed or injured in battles with the Partisans indistinguishable from ordinary citizens. These circumstances probably drove the gentle soldiers into illegal behaviors.

Moreover, through the battle with the Partisans, the Japanese troops killed even ordinary people as Partisans. For example, on March 22, 1919, the Japanese troops surrounded Ivanovka village, Amur Oblast, killed 216 villagers and burned 130 village houses. Cases of indiscriminately killing ordinary people were commonly found in the soldiers' journals though they were not so large scale as the above case. The dispatched Japanese troops recognized how important it was to distinguish citizens from Partisans and to prevent a scandal when they engaged with Partisans. Therefore the order "Take combat

action with care or you will be easily charged of injuring innocent people” was issued. However, specific measures to comply with it had not been taken.

### Conclusion

In the Vietnam War, the U.S. carried out various kinds of assistance for local residents while combatting with guerillas as the Japanese troops did during the Siberia intervention. In the course of counter guerilla warfare, U.S. troops killed and injured ordinary people as seen in the case of the Son My massacre and eventually the Republic of Vietnam, the regime U.S. had backed, collapsed similarly to the White Army. These are all close to the case of the Siberian intervention by the Japanese troops.

The collapses of the Republic of Vietnam and the White Army were seemingly caused by various kinds of factors including political ones. Considering, however, that scandals such as killing and injuring local residents by troops sent to foreign countries commonly occurred, battles with irregular forces might potentially cause such casualties. An illegal act will offset the effect of a humanity support to local people.

As General Paik Sum Yup, who was victorious in counter guerilla warfare at Jirisan during the Korean War, recalled that it was difficult for troops sent to foreign countries to be accepted by local residents. The troops should assist them in a way that suits local customs and social institutions in order to be welcomed. The Japanese troops had the idea of using Russian Orthodox priests for propaganda but it ended up a failure.

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(Completed on March 25, 2014)

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