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To cite this article: Peter Whitewood (22 Dec 2024): 'A few regrettable cases': Civil war violence and the recognition of the Russian Red Cross Society, 1918–21, The International History Review, DOI: [10.1080/07075332.2024.2441888](https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2024.2441888)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2024.2441888>



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'A few regrettable cases': Civil war violence and the recognition of the Russian Red Cross Society, 1918–21

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how and why the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) officially recognised the Bolshevik-controlled Russian Red Cross Society (ROKK) in October 1921, a decision that enabled more effective humanitarian relief in Soviet Russia but interlinked the ICRC with its new revolutionary, and authoritarian, regime. The Bolshevik takeover of the Russian Red Cross in 1918 posed a significant problem for the ICRC and disrupted relief to approximately 2,000,000 POWs still in Soviet territory at the end of the First World War. The extreme violence of the Russian civil war raised further the urgency of humanitarian aid. ROKK, however, was distrusted in Geneva and was not just subservient to the Soviet government but proved to be a vocal defender of Red Army atrocities against civilians. Even though these were violations of the international conventions underpinning the Red Cross movement's authority, the ICRC, after three years of resistance, decided to officially recognise ROKK in 1921 nevertheless. This article argues that pointing to pragmatism within the ICRC explains this turnaround, but taken alone obscures the steep compromises made against its principles, which shaped the Red Cross movement in ways running counter to the ICRC's wider goal of professionalising humanitarian relief.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 August 2024
Accepted 9 December 2024

KEYWORDS

Red Cross; Russian civil war; humanitarianism; Bolsheviks; state violence

Introduction

Recent histories of humanitarianism have frequently underlined how the violence and mass destruction of the First World War, and the conflicts sparked across East and Central Europe thereafter, shaped humanitarian norms for the rest of the twentieth century and significantly increased the scale of relief efforts.¹ In these years of cataclysm, millions of military personnel and civilians fell victim to new and devastating methods of warfare; hospitals struggled to treat countless sick and wounded; while POWs faced routine violence and exploitation in rudimentary prison camps. International agreements preexisting the outbreak of war – namely the 1864 and 1906 Geneva conventions and the 1899 and 1907 Hague conventions – proved ineffective against the stark horrors of war and had been narrowly conceived to safeguard military personnel and civilian populations under military occupation only. It was clear to the leading members of the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the preeminent body in European humanitarian affairs during the war years, that existing legal frameworks for victims of war needed urgent revision and national Red Cross societies had already adopted new roles as

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multiple crises overlapped from 1914. In the face of total war, the national societies sought to deliver aid to a more broadly defined category of 'victim of war', including not only wounded and sick soldiers but POWs and civilians – those injured, displaced, and imprisoned – and they launched a range of public health initiatives to combat the grave danger of epidemics.²

This imperative to broaden humanitarian protections remained high after the armistice in November 1918 as fresh conflicts erupted across Finland and the Baltic states through to Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia; areas where the Red Cross's attention had never been as strong when compared to the former Western front.³ The most destructive of the conflicts, the 'Russian' civil war, an overlapping series of internal and external wars coming on the heels of the Russian Revolution, saw millions killed through violence or succumb to disease between 1918 and 1921. Yet the ways in which the Russian civil war shaped humanitarian practices and frameworks has never been at the forefront of historical scholarship. Far more prevalent has been the decades' worth of work by historians of the Soviet Union on the related area of Bolshevik state violence and terror in 1918–21; or from scholars examining international relief efforts amid the devastating 1921 Soviet famine, a subject which has long attracted both scholarly and public attentions.⁴

This article, therefore, focuses on one facet of the broader subject of humanitarian aid in the Russian civil war – the ICRC's relationship with the Bolshevik-controlled Russian Red Cross – to examine how the Red Cross movement intersected with new Soviet authoritarianism. At the outset of the civil war in 1918, there were no clear answers to how humanitarian intervention would apply in internal conflicts, but the effective delivery of aid was especially difficult because of the unsanctioned seizure of the Russian Red Cross Society by the revolutionary Bolshevik Party (and for clarity, this article will use the acronym 'ROKK' to refer to the Bolshevik-controlled Russian Red Cross from 1918 and the 'former Russian Red Cross' to refer to its predecessor).⁵ By October 1921, however, at the end of the civil war, the ICRC granted official recognition to ROKK after years of denying them this status. This article agrees with the historians who point to the pragmatism behind this decision, driven by a pressing need to ensure humanitarian aid was as widespread as possible in Soviet Russia, especially in the context of the deepening famine in 1921.⁶ And as one other historian notes, the ICRC was seeking to professionalise humanitarian affairs in the early twentieth century and secure further legitimacy as a leading actor when new international organisations, principally the League of Nations, were in ascendancy.⁷ More effective humanitarian aid in Soviet Russia helped paved the way towards this goal. This article, however, highlights more uniquely that although the ICRC had good reasons to embrace ROKK, it did so in full knowledge of the latter's repeated defences of awful acts of violence committed by the Red Army against civilians and Red Cross personnel, representing violations of the very international humanitarian laws underpinning the Red Cross's moral authority. Bringing ROKK into the Red Cross movement, by extension, bestowed legitimacy on the Soviet government, which openly endorsed methods of extreme state violence. In this way, by 1921, some middle ground between Red Cross humanitarianism and Soviet authoritarianism had been achieved, but the stark nature of the compromise complicates the history of the ICRC's efforts to professionalise twentieth-century humanitarianism. At the same time, this article underlines the importance of deeper research into Bolshevik aid and relief practices, where the contours of a 'Soviet' humanitarianism can be seen.

The takeover of the Russian Red Cross Society

The Russian Revolution of 1917 significantly disrupted Red Cross activity across the former Russian empire. Just months into power over new Soviet Russia, Bolshevik Party leader Vladimir Lenin moved quickly to take control of the Russian Red Cross Society in early 1918. Founded in 1867 as the Russian Society for the Care of Injured and Sick Troops during War and renamed the Russian Red Cross Society in 1879, its roots in Russia ran deep. The Russian Red Cross enjoyed the patronage of tsarist officialdom, and with impressive resources it became one of the most

active societies in the Red Cross movement.⁸ On 6 January 1918, however, and through a government decree, Lenin ordered its personnel arrested and the appropriation of its property and resources.⁹ Protest from Geneva made no difference, and the ICRC was left without a stable link to Russia. Although the Soviet government simultaneously ordered the Russian Red Cross to be reorganised into Soviet form (ROKK), the ICRC had little faith that it would be anything but a tool of Moscow.

The immediate concern now in Geneva was the severe humanitarian challenges ahead in Soviet Russia. Approximately 2,000,000 POWs, mostly Germans and Hungarians, were held in POW camps across the country. Many lived in desperate conditions, with camp disease rising and resources scarce. Like other national Red Cross societies elsewhere in Europe, which took on new public health responsibilities from 1914, the Bolsheviks relied upon ROKK as an essential service from 1918. In Soviet Russia, however, there was a tension between recognising the continuing value of holdover institutions like ROKK and the belief, prevalent to the post-1917 years, that world communist revolution was soon at hand. Even senior ROKK officials, such as the chief legal theorist Evgeny Korovin, believed there was little long-term future for the Red Cross. The 1917 revolution, he claimed, had rendered the movement's functions 'redundant and pointless' and 'doomed to die out' with future world revolution. Before reaching this, however, Korovin acknowledged that the inevitability of military conflict between capitalist and socialist forces made Red Cross work valuable.¹⁰ Future chairman of ROKK, Zinovy Soloviev, delivered similar remarks in November 1918, claiming that because no war or conflict would exist in the communist future, there would be 'no need for institutions such as the Red Cross'. Therefore, ROKK's leader saw a role for the society in the revolutionary project, but only until utopia arrived. This underscored ROKK's radicalism and commitment to revolution, but it also meant that, for the meantime, official ICRC recognition was sought after, and especially in the context of an emerging civil war.¹¹ As Lenin made clear in March 1918, when the first challenges to Soviet power began to manifest, the work of foreign Red Cross organisations remained 'absolutely necessary' in Soviet Russia.¹²

While undergoing Bolshevik-led reorganisation in spring and summer 1918, a time when the so-called reorganisation committee became ROKK's *de facto* leadership, the ICRC lent its support in an uneasy arrangement. Still deeply unhappy about the violent dissolution of the former Russian Red Cross but intent on preserving humanitarian relief in Soviet Russia, on 7 May 1918 the ICRC gave a wide-ranging mandate to the Swiss national, Edouard Frick, to assist ROKK's reorganisation. Frick, who already lived in Russia and was a volunteer with the former Russian Red Cross, had been working with ROKK in a provisional capacity from the start of the year following his appointment by ICRC Vice-President, Edouard Odier, as Soviet Russia's Red Cross delegate.¹³ Initially sympathetic to the Allied Powers' efforts to overturn the revolutionary government, Frick wanted the ICRC to take a tough line with the Bolsheviks because of their illegal confiscation of Red Cross property and because ROKK, an unrecognised society, was using the Red Cross emblem in an unsanctioned manner.¹⁴ At the same time, however, and clearly to a higher degree, Frick worried about the total collapse of Red Cross activity in Soviet Russia and its unthinkable humanitarian consequences. One of his first actions in January 1918, therefore, had been to push the ROKK reorganisation committee to urge the Soviet government to make clear that ROKK, as an organisation, had not been abolished; that it remained a society within the Red Cross movement; and that it still abided by the Geneva convention (first ratified by the imperial Russian government in 1867). In doing so, Frick correctly grasped that the Bolsheviks could not risk being completely cut off from the Red Cross.

Rowing back, the Soviet government went on to publish two addendums to its incendiary decree of 6 January 1918. In the first, published 3 May, Lenin gave assurances that despite the change in ROKK's leadership, the society operated in line with the Geneva convention. In the second, published 31 May, Lenin claimed that not only ROKK, but also the Soviet government, recognised such international laws. He expressed willingness to work with the ICRC and other Red Cross societies which he called upon to give assistance to ROKK in turn.¹⁵ Neither

addendum, however, fully assuaged opinion in Geneva. On 6 May, and days after Lenin's first addendum, acting President of the ICRC, Édouard Naville, wrote to the Soviet Commissariat for War in Petrograd to make another complaint about the violent dissolution of the Russian Red Cross. He questioned why, if international conventions were said to be upheld in Soviet Russia as Lenin claimed, the pre-revolutionary Russian Red Cross could not operate, an organisation with decades of experience in administering aid.¹⁶ Still, even though the Soviet government refused outright to restore the former Russian Red Cross, Lenin's second addendum undoubtedly undid some of the damage created by the original 6 January decree. Some Russian Red Cross property was restored by late July and the All-Russian central executive committee officially prohibited the further requisition of ROKK's property.¹⁷ It is also important to note that nationalising Red Cross property as the Soviet government had done impulsively in January raised the risk of the expropriation of ROKK's own property overseas (this was already a problem and from December 1917, there was a long-running dispute between ROKK and the Finnish government after the latter seized the former's hospital flotillas ported in Helsingfors in response to outstanding Russian debts).¹⁸

In this way, although the Bolshevik Party repudiated international treaties signed by previous Russian governments on taking power in 1917, refusing to be bound by the principle of succession in international law, its relationship with the Red Cross movement required almost immediate compromise. The Bolsheviks could hardly ignore international humanitarian agreements like the Geneva and Hague conventions when 2,500,000 Russian POWs were held in camps overseas and in need of protection. Similar pragmatism from Lenin manifested in other places in early 1918, most famously when he signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers in March 1918 to stop the German Army advancing into Petrograd. However, a relationship with the Red Cross movement also held potential for enhancing the Soviet government's international prestige and legitimacy, something with obvious uses amid the civil war.

Recognising the significant challenges ahead in Soviet Russia, the ICRC made clear to ROKK in June 1918 that ensuring aid was delivered to Russian POWs in Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, and Turkey, and speeding up repatriations in both directions, were central priorities. And in all this, ROKK could count on ICRC support. But ROKK's unofficial status in the Red Cross movement and its incomplete reorganisation placed limits on what the society could achieve.¹⁹ To compensate for ROKK's weaknesses, by early summer 1918, Frick had created a stopgap measure in the form of a new commission: an international conference of the Red Cross. Operating from Petrograd, the international conference brought the ROKK reorganisation committee together with delegates from the Scandinavian Red Crosses (each had established presences in Russia prior to 1917).²⁰ The international conference operated until spring 1919 and assumed responsibility for ROKK's reorganisation; the protection of its assets and property overseas; and the safeguarding of foreign POWs in Russia and of Russian POWs abroad.²¹ The safety of POWs in now-contested territory of the former Russian empire was a rising issue as the civil war gathered pace from summer 1918. From June, for instance, German POWs in Siberia were in a precarious position because of fighting between the Red Army and the forces of the Czechoslovak legion. A sizeable military force once allied to the tsarist army and stranded in Soviet Russia after the revolution, the Czechoslovak legion had sought return to Europe in 1918 to continue fighting the Central Powers. However, following an unsuccessful attempt by the Red Army to disarm them, the legion's soldiers turned against the Bolsheviks and became a central actor – and significant threat to the Soviet government – in the early civil war. In June 1918, then, Frick pushed for ROKK to bring the German POWs in Siberia under its protection, using the flag of the Red Cross, and on the strength of Lenin's recent addendum decree reaffirming commitment to the Geneva convention as sources of legitimacy. A ROKK delegation would then negotiate with the leaders of the Czechoslovak Legion. This was clearly an improvised proposal, going beyond the bounds of what was possible. ROKK could not yet officially operate under the Red Cross flag and Lenin's

assurances about his government's alignment with the Geneva convention had to be taken purely on trust. In the end, given its strict subservience to the state, ROKK was unable to take these steps anyway, and especially conduct negotiations without prior agreement from the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs.²² Instead, a Danish-Swedish Red Cross mission, operating under the authority of the ICRC, departed for Siberia, accompanied by five ROKK officials as junior partners.²³ Shortly after, a similar case was focused on Ukraine where conditions for POWs were particularly desperate in summer 1918. Frick, however, now advised against sending ROKK officials on a fact-finding mission because they were not members of an official, recognised, Red Cross society. Once again, the already active and recognised Danish, Norwegian and Swedish Red Crosses would step into ROKK's place and examine conditions in the POW camps.²⁴

The Soviet government, through another decree from 7 August 1918, sought to bolster the impression that ROKK had freedom of action, underlining how the society possessed 'complete autonomy and independence' and that it was an uninterrupted form of the Russian Red Cross.²⁵ The ICRC, rightly, disagreed with both claims. Even the sympathetic Frick was doubtful of Lenin's position, given the reality of ROKK's subordination to the People's Commissariat of Health on the latter's formation in July 1918 (behind closed doors, senior Bolsheviks made clear that while ROKK possessed some autonomy it was ultimately controlled by the People's Commissariat of Health).²⁶ All this, for Frick, raised difficult questions about how ROKK could possibly administer aid to POWs overseas in countries which refused to recognise the Soviet government.²⁷ But the critical issue was that the ICRC saw ROKK as a new society, and not a continuation of the former Russian Red Cross. No single country could be permitted more than one Red Cross society and, technically speaking, there was already one in Russia: the former Russian Red Cross, whose dissolution was not recognised in Geneva. And the former society continued to operate as much as feasible after the Bolshevik takeover. Its members had fractured into two organisations, with bases in Omsk and Kyiv, territories controlled by the Bolsheviks' civil war enemies. Later in mid-1919, the two societies came together in Paris to form a General Council for Russian Red Cross Affairs and its relief work was increasingly focused among Russian POWs overseas. Still, the ICRC was faced with competing claims to official Red Cross status.²⁸ ROKK's counterargument was that the Soviet government had only abolished the former leadership, the old Red Cross central committee, and not the body of the society itself which remained firmly intact.²⁹

This did not convince the ICRC and deep distrust of the Bolsheviks, and anti-communism within the ICRC and Geneva more broadly, hardly helped ROKK's case. When a ROKK delegate to the ICRC, Sergei Bagetskii, arrived in Geneva in August 1918, for instance, he immediately drew suspicions in the Swiss government of being a subversive. As the Swiss Foreign Affairs Division put it to acting ICRC president, Édouard Naville, Bagetskii was someone 'more for the purpose of revolutionary propaganda than to study our charitable works here.'³⁰ What then made the chance of ROKK gaining recognition in the short term even worse was the departure of Frick, who had proved to be a patron, from Soviet Russia to Geneva in October 1918. Frick travelled to Geneva for a temporary visit to bolster support for ROKK but never returned. The ICRC tasked him instead with coordinating humanitarian relief among POWs across Eastern Europe. A replacement was not immediately appointed, and in 1919 the Bolsheviks refused to issue a visa for new delegate amid a downturn in relations following the expulsion of the unofficial Soviet mission from Switzerland in November 1918 amid accusations of spreading propaganda in the Swiss general strike.³¹

In an effort likely designed, in part, to bolster its legitimacy as relations worsened between Soviet Russia and Switzerland, ROKK sought to shape the evolution of humanitarian norms for the post-World War international order. In early November 1918, in messages relayed to all Red Cross societies and the ICRC, ROKK called for legal and technical amendments to the Geneva and Hague conventions, considering the changing nature of warfare since 1914. As materials drawn up for the initiative expressed, radical development in weapons and tactics of war – heavy

artillery, gas, bombing from the air – had made it far more difficult to protect its victims: ‘how can a hospital or infirmary be separated from the action of a 42-centimetre gun?’ In ROKK’s assessment, existing humanitarian conventions must consider the increasingly destructive nature of warfare, fuelled by larger state budgets, and the breakdown of division between war front and home front.³² ROKK also pushed for Red Cross representation at the post-war Peace Conference to present a unified line determined at an earlier Red Cross international conference. And more ambitiously, it saw the future of the movement as one of closer integration in the form of an International Red Cross Federation, a change which would transform the ICRC from a private society to something more closely resembling an international organisation.³³ By this time too, in late 1918, ROKK’s reorganisation was said to be complete. It had produced new statutes to be scrutinised in Geneva and claimed that reorganised ROKK now better aligned with the needs of working people.³⁴ Summing up its ambitions for the future, chairman Veniamin Sverdlov wrote to the ICRC noting that ROKK had moved far beyond its original status as ‘a humble assistant to the military-sanitary department’ concerned only with ‘charity work.’³⁵

In the wider Red Cross movement, it was not uncommon, in practice, for societies to be closely linked to home governments, to behave in partisan ways, and prioritise activities that assisted their home countries’ war efforts.³⁶ But ROKK faced a higher level of scrutiny from the ICRC, nevertheless. With no formal diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia, ROKK functioned as a quasi-diplomatic body with Switzerland, doing little to bolster the image of its autonomy.³⁷ And as Paul des Gouttes, secretary of the ICRC, underlined to Bagetskii in January 1919, the ICRC could only recognise a Red Cross society if the Swiss Federal Government also recognised its home government (though as we shall see, formal Swiss-Soviet relations did not, in the end, stand in the way of ICRC recognition of ROKK in 1921).³⁸ Furthermore, because the Bolsheviks’ agenda was openly revolutionary, sparking panic across the capitals of Europe, ROKK could easily be tarred as a propaganda organ. In late 1918, for instance, when the German government expelled the Soviet diplomatic mission amid accusations of Bolshevik propaganda and ROKK officials were expelled on the same grounds, Sverdlov made defences of ROKK’s autonomy without success.³⁹ The Soviet government certainly circumscribed ROKK’s freedom of action in a threatening civil war in obvious ways. Most starkly and despite provoking controversy, the Commissariat of War drafted ROKK’s doctors into the Red Army, leaving insufficient numbers to administer aid to POWs.⁴⁰ Even for ROKK’s ambition to simply convene a Red Cross conference to reexamine the Geneva and Hague conventions, given the Bolsheviks’ sensitivities about the outside world chief Soviet diplomat, Georgy Chicherin, demanded all materials for his personal scrutiny.⁴¹ State control then only tightened further in July 1919 when Zinovy Soloviev, chief of the military and nursing department of the People’s Commissariat of Health, succeeded Sverdlov as ROKK’s chairman, resulting in greater subservience to the commissariat.⁴²

Despite this, the ICRC had begun to send stronger signals to ROKK about working together. In January 1919, in another message to Bagetskii, des Gouttes noted how the ICRC was willing to maintain relations with ROKK if it fulfilled the humanitarian duties incumbent upon it.⁴³ The Russian civil war threatened to create an unmanageable POW crisis and assistance was being sought from all quarters. In January 1919, Naville called for support from other Red Cross societies and foreign governments to help save the 2,000,000 POWs in Soviet Russia from ‘death and despair.’ ROKK, as he described it, was ‘virtually dissolute and incapable of acting.’⁴⁴ In Ukraine especially, where power was fiercely contested between the Bolsheviks and Ukrainian nationalists, and where Red Cross work of any kind was near impossible, Frick reported on appalling conditions for POWs in March 1919. Prisoners were without shoes; rations were inadequate; violence and disease, including the rising problem of typhus, were commonplace.⁴⁵ Improving humanitarian aid in Soviet Russia was a key issue in pushing the ICRC towards giving ROKK full recognition in 1921. By agreeing to work with ROKK on some level in 1919, the ICRC was starting to travel down this road.

Civil war violence

Civil war erupted in Soviet Russia in early summer 1918, with fighting first escalating between the Bolsheviks' Red Army and the forces of the rival Socialist Revolutionary Party, then spreading further east following the rebellion of the Czechoslovak legion (which seized control of cities in Siberia and in the eastern parts of the former Russian empire). Adding to these dangers, by autumn, Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak had unified the anti-Bolshevik White movement, setting the stage for an extended period of fierce and complex fighting with severe humanitarian consequences. Although Lenin declared in 1918 that the Geneva convention was a guiding precept not just for ROKK but also for the Soviet government, upholding its principles in a chaotic and bloody civil war proved almost impossible. As shown below, both warring parties routinely flouted the Geneva and Hague conventions. A further complication was determining how international humanitarian law applied to civil wars. The Ninth International Conference of the Red Cross discussed the question in 1912, but no vote was held amid a fractious dispute, with the Russian delegate most hostile to the proposal of humanitarian intervention in civil wars, should this risk giving aid to 'rebels or revolutionaries'.⁴⁶

The core civil war problem for ROKK's ambition for ICRC recognition was the Bolsheviks' widespread use of political violence. The Red Terror, the state-sponsored campaign of political violence against opponents of the regime that Lenin ordered in September 1918 following attempts on his life, is the prime example. As the executions of 'counterrevolutionaries' mounted up, Red Cross societies were among those lodging protests to senior Soviet officials. The head of the American Red Cross mission working in Soviet Russia, for instance, complained directly to Chicherin about the gratuitous violence.⁴⁷ Unfazed, Chicherin accused the American Red Cross of selective outrage: it not only ignored the murders carried out by the Bolsheviks' enemies, some supported by western powers – allies of the United States, he added – but it also ignored how the Bolsheviks and the working class were, above all, striking back against a murderous capitalist system. This was a 'terrible and merciless struggle of one world against another' and violence was to be expected.⁴⁸ Such a defence of summary executions would hardly ease ROKK's passage into the Red Cross movement or demonstrate the Soviet government's claimed adherence to international legal norms.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, ROKK's own personnel were at risk of serious harm in this dangerous environment. The Bolsheviks' rivals subjected ROKK officials, doctors, and nurses to regular violence on the front lines, through combat or incendiary weapons dropped from the air. Indicative of the chaos and loss of state control in these years, ROKK's property, vehicles, and ships were also seized, attacked or destroyed, and in some cases this left dangerously ill patients without medical aid.⁴⁹ How all this infringed the Geneva convention was ROKK's common response and its leaders, Sverdlov and later Soloviev, were quick to appeal to the ICRC about the atrocities carried out by the Bolsheviks' enemies, calling on the committee to use all its power to stop such 'bloody orgies'.⁵⁰ Yet while ROKK personnel were vulnerable to attacks from the Bolsheviks' enemies, they also faced similar threats from their own side. It was not uncommon for members of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage (Cheka) or Red Army soldiers to detain ROKK members on spurious charges, sometimes expropriating their supplies and funds (and in some cases murdering them).⁵¹ As one member of the Danish Red Cross put it in mid-1919, there was 'difficulty in defending ROKK's interests internationally when in its own state the [Red] Cross does not enjoy authority and protection'.⁵²

Despite the risks from their own side, however, ROKK assumed the role of vociferous defender of Red Army behaviour when the latter faced accusations of infringing humanitarian norms; something sitting uneasily with ROKK's own declaration, formulated in late 1919, on the importance of observing international law in civil war conditions.⁵³ By this time, moreover, the Swiss Federal Government had recognised, in July 1919, that Soviet Russia remained a signatory of the Geneva convention, in continuation from the Imperial Russian government, raising the potency of its infringement.⁵⁴ Much of ROKK's tendency to defend the Red Army in any circumstances

played out in 1920, a year that witnessed a dramatic escalation in fighting between the Red and Polish armies in the Soviet-Polish war, one of the final conflicts of the wider civil war. In early 1920, then, as fighting between both sides was picking up pace, Bagetskii presented the ICRC with accounts, he said, of Polish bombardments of hospitals on the front lines; of torture of Russian POWs in Poland; and the mistreatment of the civilian population, and violence against Jews, in Polish occupied territory.⁵⁵ Soloviev followed up in early March with a complaint that ROKK hospital no. 4 in Polatsk had been subjected to 'systematic bombardment' since October.⁵⁶ In response, vice president of the Polish Red Cross, Helene de Bisping, acknowledged that Polatsk had been in the line of fire for months and deplored the damage caused to the hospital – where both Soviet and Polish soldiers were treated. She argued, however, that it was impossible to always control the direction of artillery fire with precision.⁵⁷

As part of long-running back and forth exchange, the Polish Red Cross made complaints of its own about Red Army atrocities. In June 1920, the influential Polish humanitarian, Helena Paderewska, wrote to the ICRC, describing piles of corpses left behind as the Red Army exited Berdyczów, Zytomyr and Kyiv. Doctors, nurses and even some patients had apparently been murdered in hospitals and POWs tortured to gain intelligence of military operations.⁵⁸ In a case, one month later, and drawing on an account from the French military mission, de Bisping described how Semen Budennyi's First Cavalry Army derailed a train travelling from Płoskirów and attacked the passengers. The dead were left in a potato field with their genitals hacked off.⁵⁹ The ICRC also received similar reports of Soviet atrocities from other parties. Head of the former Russian Red Cross, Georges Lodygenskii, for instance, regularly catalogued Soviet atrocities, and as he wrote to the ICRC in February 1920 about the Soviet occupation of Kyiv: 'the scenes of violence, horror and bloodshed depicted below have no parallel in the history of the civilised world.'⁶⁰

None of this made ROKK's efforts to gain ICRC recognition any easier, something its leadership continued to pursue regardless of the frequent reports of Red Army atrocities and using the same arguments about the society's independence and conformity with the Geneva convention (ROKK's argument about Soviet alignment with the Geneva convention was a key reason why the ICRC sought to carefully investigate Red Army violations).⁶¹ The ICRC position on the issue was unchanged in 1920: as it reported to Soloviev in May, without seeing ROKK's statutes first hand, and without further confirmation of its precise status vis-à-vis the Soviet government, and without allowing a Red Cross mission to enter Soviet Russia (twice refused by mid-1920), the path to recognition would remain closed.⁶²

ROKK delivered on some of these stipulations one month later and in June Soloviev sent statutes, texts of government decrees, and details about ROKK's activities to the ICRC.⁶³ Nevertheless, deep uncertainty about ROKK as a reliable partner persisted in Geneva at a time when there was a rising need to investigate civil war atrocities. Some in the ICRC, moreover, saw ROKK's senior officials as evasive and inclined to dissemble in any investigation. As des Gouttes advised the ICRC on the question of how to present the accusations against the Red Army to ROKK: 'I fear that if we do not ask precise questions we will be answered again with phrases.' des Gouttes wanted ROKK to make clear to the Soviet government that the Red Army must respect international conventions, and that Soloviev relay any subsequent orders to the ICRC for scrutiny. Yet suggesting a lack of confidence in ROKK's ability to influence the Bolsheviks, des Gouttes considered taking the issue directly to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, to Chicherin.⁶⁴ Shortly after, he wrote again to Soloviev and Bagetskii about the Polish reports of Soviet atrocities, pushing for an investigation and stressing once more that it was in the Soviet government's power to order its commanders to behave differently, should these prove true.⁶⁵ He also followed through with a direct message to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, though to Maksim Litvinov, Chicherin's deputy, to insist the Soviet government take action against violations of the Geneva convention.⁶⁶

des Gouttes was right to expect evasive and defensive responses from ROKK. On 2 August 1920, Soloviev wrote to the ICRC, addressing the Polish Red Cross's accusations. He claimed ROKK had no information about any 'excesses', reports of which were apparently 'entirely contradicted by the high

level of humanitarian sentiment' of the 'heroic' Red Army. Soloviev stressed how the Soviet government, through successive decrees, had informed the Red Army about the nature of humanitarian rights in modern warfare. Furthermore, if such atrocities had really occurred he argued, these were likely on the orders of Ukrainian nationalists. Deflecting responsibility again, Soloviev focused on the behaviour of the Polish Army, citing the bombardments of Kyiv, Minsk and Borisov, which flouted 'elementary principles of humanitarianism'. He pointed to the pillaging of villages; the murders of POWs and peasants; the poisoning of wells.⁶⁷ A week later Bagetskii followed up with a similar message. For him, Polish atrocities – the massacres of prisoners, pogroms, the destruction of entire villages – recalled 'the darkest times of the Middle Ages'. The ICRC should do all it could, he wrote, to ensure that the Polish government acted in strict observance with the Geneva convention. He noted that ROKK stood ready to facilitate the humanitarian work of the Polish Red Cross.⁶⁸

Further reports of Soviet atrocities, however, continued to filter through from mid-1920. Helene de Bisping, of the Polish Red Cross, wrote to the ICRC again in August 1920 with additional witness accounts of Red Army units attacking ambulance trains, of soldiers executing nurses on the spot and murdering Polish POWs. Some reports contained horrific details. In one ugly episode a Bolshevik Cossack detachment was said to have massacred 50 Polish POWs in June and horrifically tortured one victim, scoring the outlines of a military uniform – stripes, belt, buttons, epaulets – directly into his flesh. Another POW was apparently nailed to a tree before being shot. de Bisping described severed arms and legs, hundreds of bodies, thrown into wagons and set alight. 'Their way of finishing off the injured and the prisoners is simply bestial.'⁶⁹

One case that became highly controversial in these months was the brutal rape and murder of a Polish Red Cross nurse in September 1920 for which Red Army soldiers were immediately blamed. A post-mortem documented extensive stab wounds covering the nurse's face and body with some fingers severed, suggesting a particularly violent assault.⁷⁰ ROKK, as before, was the first line of response. After some delay, Bagetskii wrote to the ICRC on 18 October detailing that ROKK would launch an investigation into the murder and if Red Army soldiers were responsible, the punishments would be severe. Still, Bagetskii attempted some damage control at the same time. Downplaying the severity of the attack, he argued that the ICRC, in 'focusing on a few regrettable cases', now falsely believed the Soviet government could not enforce the Geneva convention. In another deflection, Bagetskii pointed out how French soldiers in recent years had committed acts of terrible violence against women in the Rhenish provinces. Did this mean, he countered, that the ICRC would make a similar judgement about the French government: that it was incapable of respecting humanitarian principles? The deflections continued when Bagetskii claimed that crimes Red Army soldiers might have committed paled in comparison with those of the Polish Army, which routinely launched pogroms and destroyed entire villages.⁷¹ (ROKK, all the while, continued to collect accounts of Polish atrocities, such as a reported massacre of Jews in autumn 1920, whose bodies were found dismembered and floating in the Niemen River).⁷² Still, Bagetskii was clearly affected by the pressure coming from Geneva and the accounts of Soviet atrocities. As he wrote to ROKK's central committee, he believed the ICRC was deliberately coming up with reasons to refuse recognition to ROKK and was leaning on the argument that the Soviet government could not keep the Red Army in line. With a deeper conspiratorial hint, he added that the Black Hundreds – the ultra-nationalist and antisemitic movement loyal to tsar Nicholas II before 1917 – had 'raised their heads' in Switzerland and begun 'feverish activity'.⁷³ This was characteristic of a Bolshevik Party driven by a sense of civil war siege mentality. Months earlier, senior Bolsheviks like Iosif Stalin, had pushed for the arrests of European Red Cross officials working in Soviet Russia, having claimed these were working for the Polish military and carrying out espionage.⁷⁴

Recognition achieved

When the Soviet-Polish war ended in October 1920, ROKK's unconvincing defences of Red Army atrocities had further damaged its image in the ICRC's eyes. As des Gouttes wrote to Bagetskii

later on 7 January 1921, the volume of Polish accusations about Soviet atrocities suggested to him that the Soviet government was still unable to make the Red Army 'observe and respect even elementary principles of the 1906 convention.'⁷⁵ While Bagetskii advised ROKK to send even more reports of Polish contraventions of international law to Geneva – seemingly as part of the same effort to balance out the reports about the Red Army – in late February 1921 Soloviev accused the ICRC of creating obstacles to ROKK's recognition that no other Red Cross society faced.⁷⁶ The back-and-forth argument about violence rolled on.

The ICRC's position on refusing ROKK's recognition was unchanged not only because of Soviet violence but because the former Russian Red Cross managed to remain active in some form outside Soviet territory, despite ROKK's efforts to circumscribe its activities.⁷⁷ And relations between ROKK and the ICRC worsened from summer 1920 on this basis too, when a fresh controversy erupted around the former Russian Red Cross, dovetailing with the ICRC's efforts to reinstall Frick as delegate in Soviet Russia. Even though there was hostility in Geneva towards permanent representation given the *de facto* diplomatic recognition this would bestow on the Bolshevik regime, for the ICRC, the absence of a delegate in Soviet Russia made humanitarian relief more challenging and there was a change in mood in summer and autumn 1920.⁷⁸ This was not capitalised upon, however, as ROKK chose this same moment to protest to the ICRC about its ongoing contacts with former Russian Red Cross officials. Indeed, in response to the ICRC's effort to return Frick to Soviet Russia in summer 1920, Soloviev dragged up his interactions with the former Russian Red Cross in Kyiv from two years earlier, when he had apparently promised to seek its official recognition. ROKK threw out other accusations, namely, that when Frick was responsible for coordinating ICRC relief operations among Russian POWs overseas, he purposely or through negligence allowed repatriated Russian soldiers to be forcibly conscripted into the White armies (there was a grain of truth in this and the ICRC later established that some 'abuses' had occurred in the process).⁷⁹ In August 1920, however, the ICRC pointed out, rightly, that Frick had been a consistent supporter of ROKK and wanted to see the society officially recognised in the Red Cross movement. It was partly through Frick's efforts that ROKK and the ICRC had any relationship at all, for which he had suffered suspicions in Geneva of being pro-Bolshevik. Gustave Ador, ICRC president, was clear, furthermore, that there was no legal reason for Frick not to deal with both the former Russian Red Cross and ROKK, especially if the result was more extensive humanitarian relief.⁸⁰

ROKK, nevertheless, sought to further denigrate the former Russian Red Cross into 1921, and in another episode it made repeated protests to the ICRC about a member of the former Russian Red Cross making use of the old Russian diplomatic mission building in Vienna, something implying recognition (the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in fact, did recognise both ROKK and the former society).⁸¹ Summarising the issue later in June 1921, des Gouttes underlined its complexity: the former Russian Red Cross continued to benefit from official recognition not yet annulled, but without fixed territory to operate in and without recognition from a government in power, there were questions about whether it could be considered a Red Cross society at all. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks' dissolution of the former Russian Red Cross was never officially communicated to, or sanctioned by, the ICRC. And even in reduced form, the former society could still operate outside Soviet Russia with permission, as Austrian case showed. The whole affair, in des Goutte's view, was a 'legal anomaly'.⁸² It is also worth stressing, however, that the former Russian Red Cross's difficult experiences in the civil war went beyond legal arguments and there were sometimes serious consequences. In late 1920, for instance, as Baron Petr Wrangel's White Army finally evacuated from Crimea, the local Cheka arrested former Russian Red Cross personnel and executed a group of doctors and nurses.⁸³

With ROKK and the ICRC still at an impasse in early 1921, it was the Soviet government that now changed the dynamic when, in February, and in the context of the emerging famine of that year, it agreed to the entry into Soviet Russia of Wolemar Wehrlin, a representative of the Save the Children Fund International Union and of Fridtjof Nansen's humanitarian mission to assist

German, Austrian and Hungarian POWs in Soviet Russia. Wehrlin, importantly, also maintained close contact with the ICRC. While Frick had too many blackmarks against his name, at least in ROKK's eyes, the Soviet government evidently saw Wehrlin as an acceptable mediator, even though his mandate included assisting, where possible, detained foreign nationals and Russian citizens charged with political crimes.⁸⁴ On arrival to Moscow in March 1921, Wehrlin met with Soloviev and Evgenii Korovin and described how the ICRC was not in principle against the recognition of ROKK; the problem was its behaviour, which the recent argument about Frick demonstrated clearly. Extending an olive branch, Wehrlin told both men that the ICRC was looking for a resolution. Soloviev claimed that the furore over Frick no longer had relevance for ROKK, even if he still disagreed with Geneva's version of events, while Korovin pushed the familiar line that the ICRC was refusing recognition for political reasons. For his part, Wehrlin made clear that he saw ROKK not as autonomous but a section of the People's Commissariat of Health, however the crucial point was that he saw value in ICRC recognition because this would improve the extent of humanitarian aid across Soviet Russia, something desperately needed in the final year of the civil war. As Wehrlin later recorded in his notes to the ICRC in July, at the end of his visit, by 1921 there were 35,000 POWs from the First World War still in Soviet Russia – including a 'tragic' situation for the officer class – but the fallout from the civil war, and the growing famine of that year, underlined the necessity for more aid.⁸⁵

Wehrlin, then, tended towards compromise, but the Soviet leadership managed to damage relations with the ICRC once again at this very moment. Coinciding with Wehrlin's visit to Soviet Russia in March 1921, domestic tensions in the country had been whipped up when Bolshevik sailors at the Kronstadt port city outside Petrograd rose in rebellion. The proximity to Petrograd and the strategic significance of Kronstadt were not the only problems in the crisis. The sailors had been some of the regime's staunchest supporters during the revolution and the rebellion threw into sharp relief popular discontent with the Bolsheviks' failure to deliver upon their utopian promises, something exacerbated by three years of an intense and draining civil war. But the Red Cross movement fitted into the picture in several ways, some entirely imagined and conspiratorial. The Bolsheviks' coalescing narrative of the Kronstadt rebellion was a complex conspiracy, with participants and supporters said to include agents of the White armies and rival political parties, but also the Red Cross movement, portrayed as favourable to the rebels, with the American and Finnish Red Crosses presented as front organisations.

As ever in the Bolsheviks' conspiracies, while much was divorced from reality, there were some grains of truth. A self-proclaimed Red Cross society operating in Paris, which had aligned itself to the counterrevolutionary White armies earlier in the civil war, had declared its intention to send supplies to the Kronstadt rebels.⁸⁶ The former Russian Red Cross, which had good reason to be hostile to the Bolsheviks, also worked with the anti-Bolshevik groups in France to send aid.⁸⁷ And one Colonel Edward Ryan, the Baltic Commissioner of the American Red Cross, tried to support these efforts. None of this would swing the dial in the rebels' favour, but it provided some tangible evidence for the narrative of dangerous international conspiracy that the Bolsheviks were constructing around Kronstadt.⁸⁸ Indeed, as the uprising was unfolding, chief diplomat Chicherin wrote to Soloviev on 11 March, noting, correctly, that Colonel Ryan was planning into assist the rebels, but also, incorrectly, that the ICRC – a 'counter-revolutionary organisation' – was taking the same steps. As he put it to Leonid Krasin, another member of the Soviet diplomatic apparatus, the ICRC had to be exposed.⁸⁹ Soloviev, soon enough, sent complaints to Geneva and the American Red Cross about their 'flagrant intervention' in Soviet internal affairs.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, Iakov Agranov, a senior Cheka official charged with investigating the Kronstadt rebellion, urgently sought information about the role of the ICRC in assisting the rebels and pushed for implicated Red Cross personnel to be expelled from Soviet Russia.⁹¹ It is striking that none of this created reason to delay the push for ROKK's official recognition. Just days after the rebellion was crushed, ROKK's central committee turned to Wehrlin on 21 March to stress once more how ROKK fulfilled all criteria for recognition.⁹²

Another parallel event in spring 1921 with some significance was the Tenth International Red Cross Conference, which opened in Geneva in early March as the Kronstadt rebellion was unfolding. ROKK was not invited because of its unofficial status (and Soloviev regarded an invitation extended to him to attend in a personal capacity as an affront).⁹³ Still, in a move that bolstered the case for officially recognising ROKK, the conference affirmed that all victims of civil wars, on whichever sides, had the same rights as POWs and wounded and sick soldiers in international wars. After three years of the civil war, the degree of destruction and loss of life across Soviet territory was plain to see, and by spring 1921 famine conditions were adding increasing weight to recognising ROKK as the most direct and effective means of administering much needed humanitarian aid. While representatives of the former Russian Red Cross pushed the conference to empower the ICRC with the ability to initiate humanitarian interventions in civil wars independently, which, in effect, could give cover to its own activities in Soviet Russia, the final conference resolution struck a less radical note and included the important caveat that permission from the government embroiled in civil war was necessary.⁹⁴ Less positive for ROKK's path to recognition, however, was confirmation at the conference that national Red Cross societies should be independent from governments.⁹⁵ Yet Frick, who owed nothing to ROKK given its treatment of him, was quick to provide a solution. As he put it to Gustave Ador in July, because the Soviet government was in the process of normalising international relations – chiefly reestablishing bilateral foreign ties (the *de jure* recognition inherent in the March 1921 Anglo-Soviet trade agreement was most consequential) – it was no longer necessary for ROKK to operate as quasi-diplomatic, propaganda organ. This risk of closely working with ROKK was beginning falling away.⁹⁶

Three months later following Wehrlin's departure from Soviet Russia and the receipt of his report which recommended official recognition of ROKK, the ICRC wrote to Chicherin and Soloviev on 6 July notifying them that it believed ROKK should be officially recognised. 'Truly active relations' were to be established and Wehrlin should be permitted to enter Moscow as ICRC delegate, solidifying an ongoing relationship.⁹⁷ ROKK, unsurprisingly, assented and the agreement was confirmed on 15 August 1921. As Fayet points out, this was the very day that a conference in Geneva got underway on humanitarian aid for the Soviet famine, which by this time had developed into a human catastrophe. But this was also an issue in which the ICRC was keen to adopt a central role. Given the challenge to the ICRC's authority by the League of Red Cross Societies, formed in 1919, the famine presented an opportunity to demonstrate leadership of the wider Red Cross movement; but this then required stable relations with ROKK to enable effective humanitarian aid.⁹⁸ Wehrlin later arrived in Moscow in October as ICRC delegate, closing a three-year gap from Frick's departure in 1918.

The losing party in 1921 was, of course, the former Russian Red Cross. Recognition of ROKK, its head Georges Lodygenskii stressed in September 1921, would 'shake absolute confidence' in the ICRC.⁹⁹ Still, the ICRC maintained a relationship with the former Russian Red Cross due to its work with Russian refugees overseas (to ROKK's ongoing and vocal displeasure).¹⁰⁰ But the former Russian Red Cross was now ever more circumscribed and not only by the Bolsheviks. The ICRC communicated in February 1922 that it should stop using the name and emblem of the Red Cross and become an independent relief organisation or a foreign section of ROKK, operating abroad, but only with the permission of Moscow.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

On 19 April 1922, in a message to the ICRC, Soloviev described how with the civil war over and Soviet Russia now entering a period of reconstruction, there were future opportunities for the abolition of extraordinary wartime institutions; the drawing down of repressive methods; and the introduction of a new judicial regime.¹⁰² Soloviev, in this way, openly acknowledged that what Bolsheviks euphemistically termed 'excesses' had characterised much of the civil war; as this

article shows, it is striking that the ICRC possessed full knowledge of this same fact and nevertheless awarded ROKK official recognition in 1921. As detailed above, regular accounts of appalling violence committed by Red Army soldiers against military opponents, civilians and Red Cross personnel were sent to Geneva in these years – unambiguous violations of the Geneva convention. Soviet civil war atrocities sparked controversy in the ICRC and for a while created another compelling reason to refuse official status to ROKK, but ultimately, the latter was accepted into the Red Cross movement in late 1921. As pointed out by other historians, pragmatism inside the ICRC was a central driver of this concession, driven by a rising need to respond robustly to the post-civil war famine. Better utilising ROKK was essential to effective humanitarian relief. It is also likely that the ICRC's wider ambitions played into the decision. From 1919 the League of Red Cross Societies was a new, and potentially competing, body to the ICRC; in a world of new international organisations like the League of Nations, the ICRC sought a leading role in the professionalisation of humanitarian relief for the post-World War environment.¹⁰³ The 1921 Soviet famine was both a humanitarian emergency and an opportunity for the ICRC to position itself as a leading actor. ROKK's official recognition was an important early step.

This article has shown, however, that the above arguments centred on pragmatism do not fully capture the contradictions in the ICRC's position in recognising ROKK and the degree to which it compromised its principles. These underplay how much of the ICRC's knowledge of Soviet civil war violence was ultimately put aside, and the unconvincing defences and deflections coming from ROKK's leadership. As the experience of the First World War demonstrated, enforcing the Geneva convention was a challenge across the board and perhaps impossible in the Russian civil war when the Red Cross movement had no agreed position on internal conflicts until its tenth international conference in 1921. Still, the Geneva convention was a chief source of the Red Cross's moral authority and adherence to it a central criterion for entry to the movement. Although the Bolsheviks claimed to be in alignment, the reality on the ground in the Russian civil war presented a different – and extremely violent – picture, about which the ICRC was well-informed. In this way, the ICRC's efforts to professionalise humanitarian relief for the twentieth century and the aim to bolster its position as a leading international actor, went hand-in-hand with ignoring evidence of atrocities.

Another stark compromise highlighted above is the ICRC's acceptance of a Red Cross society controlled by a revolutionary government, committed to overturning the international order. For all that ROKK pursued recognition after 1918, its senior figures made clear that there would be no place for the Red Cross, as a wider movement, in a future communist society, apparently devoid of conflict. Furthermore, the ICRC distrusted ROKK's officials not only because they were inclined to dissemble and deny (the Polish Red Cross likewise defended the Polish military with unconvincing explanations), but because it saw some, like Bagetskii stationed in Geneva, as revolutionary subversives. As shown above, at the same moment that a positive path to recognition started to open up in spring 1921 with Wehrlin's arrival in Soviet Russia, the Bolsheviks accused the ICRC of interfering in their internal affairs and conspiring with powerful capitalist forces to foment the Kronstadt rebellion. For a body that worried about being perceived as pro-Bolshevik and one that, like much of the Swiss elite, was hostile to communism the ICRC's recognition of ROKK after the furore of Kronstadt was a significant turnaround.¹⁰⁴ It gave a further boost of legitimacy to Lenin's government.

In the final analysis, this article's conclusions dovetail with critiques of the Red Cross as beacon of 'neutral' humanitarianism and adds support to understanding the movement as a 'dysfunctional family'.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, the dynamic between humanitarianism and twentieth-century authoritarianism is an area needing further scholarly exploration. The multiple compromises made by the ICRC to broaden the scale of humanitarianism relief in Soviet territory were steeper than commonly understood. This undoubtedly shaped the nature of the evolving Red Cross movement but also extended further legitimacy to the Soviet state, which from 1921 could now play a role, equal to other powers, in humanitarian aid.

Notes

1. See David P. Forsythe, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29–33; Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 82–94; Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Elisabeth Piller and Neville Wylie (eds), *Humanitarianism and the Greater War, 1914–1924* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023); Johannes Paulmann, 'Conjunctures in the History of International Humanitarian Aid during the Twentieth Century', *Humanity* iv, 224–5.
2. François Bugnion, *The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Protection of War Victims* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2003), 83.
3. On conflict in the region after 1918, see Robert Gerwarth, 'The Continuum of Violence' in Jay Winter (ed), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 638–70. On Red Cross priorities, see Forsythe, *Humanitarians*, 32.
4. For work on famine relief, see Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921–1923* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1974); Bertrand M. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Douglas Smith, *The Russian Job: The Forgotten Story of How American Saved the Soviet Union from Ruin* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).
5. Kimberly A. Lowe, 'The Red Cross and the Laws of War, 1863–1949' in Jean Quataert and Lora Wildenthal (eds) *The Routledge History of Human Rights* (London: Routledge, 2019), 83; Cabanes, *Great War*, 13.
6. André Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Durant Institute; International Committee of the Red Cross, 1984), 107; Kimberley A. Lowe, 'Humanitarianism and National Sovereignty: Red Cross Intervention on behalf of Political Prisoners in Soviet Russia, 1921–3', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xlix (2014), 672; Jean-François Fayet, 'The Russian Red Cross in the Civil War', *Quaestio Rossica*, ix (2021), 197.
7. Francesca Piana, 'L'humanitaire d'après-guerre: prisonniers de guerre et réfugiés russes dans la politique du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge et de la Société des Nations', *Relations Internationales* cli (2012/3), 64, 73–4.
8. Jean-François Fayet, 'Le CICR et la Russie: un peu plus que de l'humanitaire', *Connexe*, 1 (2015), 57; Lowe, 'Humanitarianism', 660fn.31.
9. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [hereafter GARF] f. R3341, op. 5, d. 2, l.16.
10. Evgeny Korovin 'Krasnyi Krest v sovremennom gosudarstvom', Jan. 1920. GARF f. R3341, op. 1, d. 117, ll. 123–6.
11. I.A. Aseev and R.R. Karimov 'Reorganizatsiia Rossiiskogo obshchestva Krasnogo Kresta posle Oktiabria 1917 goda (istoriko-pravovoi aspekt)', *Vestnik Ufimskogo iuridicheskogo instituta MVD Rossii*, iv (2019), 15.
12. Message from Lenin to Raymond Robins, head of the American Red Cross mission, Mar. 1918. V.V. Aldoshin et al. (eds), *Sovetso-amerikanskie otnosheniia. Gody nepriznaniia. 1918–1926* (Mezhdunarodnyi Fond 'Demokratiia': Moscow 2002), 15–16.
13. Jacques Moreillon, 'The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Protection of Political Detainees', *International Review of the Red Cross*, xv (1975), 586–7.
14. Jiří Toman, 'Rossiia i Krasnyi Krest (1917–1945)' (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi komitet Krasnogo Krest, 2002) [Russian translation of 'La Russie et la Croix-Rouge (1917–1945)'], Ph.D. dissertation, Institut Henry-Dunant, 1997], 23–4; Kimberley A. Lowe, 'The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Reconstruction of New Europe, 1918–1923' in Bartosz Dziewanowski-Stefańczyk and Jay Winter (eds), *A New Europe, 1918–1923. Instability, Innovation, Recovery* (London: Routledge, 2022), 163.
15. *Dekrety Sovetskoj vlasti*. tom. II. 17 marta – 10 iulia 1918 g. (Moscow: Politizdat, 1959), 224, 355–7; Fayet, 'Russian Red Cross', 191; Bugnion, *International Committee*, 254.
16. Édouard Naville to Soviet Commissariat for War, 6 May 1918. *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge* (July 1918), 447–9.
17. Toman, 'Rossiia i Krasnyi Krest', 29; *Dekrety Sovetskoj vlasti*. tom. II, 624–5.
18. Letter from I. Strakhovich, ROKK official and manager of hospital flotilla, to ROKK's main administration, 4 Nov. 1919; letter from I. Strakhovich and G. Khentunen, legal consultant to ROKK's hospital flotillas, to the International Red Cross Conference, 28 May 1919. GARF, f. R3341, op. 6, d. 404, ll. 9, 39–40; report by Evgeny Korovin, Sept. 1920. Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross [hereafter AICRC] CR00/50c 175, 69.
19. Letter from ICRC representative in Moscow (likely Frick) to the Soviet government, Jun. 1918. GARF, f. R130, op. 2, d. 144, l. 48.
20. Durand, *Sarajevo*, 102.
21. Fayet, 'CICR', 59.
22. Letter from M.R. Zubkov, member of ROKK's central collegium, to the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, 20 Jun. 1918. GARF, f. R3341, op. 1, d. 42, l. 5.
23. Record of meeting of ROKK's central collegium, 22 Jul. 1918. GARF, f. R3341, op. 1, d. 42, l. 6.
24. Record of meeting of International Conference of the Red Cross, 8 Jul. 1918. GARF, f. R3341, op. 6, d. 404, l. 121.
25. *Dekrety Sovetskoj vlasti*. tom III. 11 iulia – 9 noiabria 1918 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1964), 185–7.
26. Emel'ian Iaroslavskii telegram to Sverdlov, 27 Dec. 1918. GARF, f. R3341, op. 1, d. 43, l. 44.
27. Frick memorandum, 20 August 1918. AICRC CR00/50c 174, 0.
28. Bugnion, *International Committee*, 256; Fayet, 'CICR', 60.
29. Durand, *Sarajevo*, 106.

30. Letter from Swiss Political Department, Foreign Affairs division, to Édouard Naville, 21 Aug. 1918. AICRC CR00/50c 174, 0.
31. Bugnion, *International Committee*, 256.
32. *Materialy po sozyvu Mezhdunarodnoi Konferentsii Krasnogo Kresta*. vypusk II (Moscow, 1919). GARF, f. R3341, op. 1, d. 209, l. 1.
33. Durand, *Sarajevo*, 144.
34. ROKK's statutes, 20 Nov. 1918. AICRC CR00/50c 186.
35. Veniamin Sverdlov message to the ICRC, 1919 [sent after February]. GARF, f. R3341, op. 1, d. 209, l. 1.
36. Heather Jones 'International or Transnational? Humanitarian Action during the First World War', *European Review of History*, xvi (2009), 697–713; Gerald H. Davis, 'National Red Cross Societies and Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914–18', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxviii (1993), 31–52.
37. On diplomatic activity as still central to ROKK's work, see report by Evgeny Korovin, 1 Nov. 1919. AICRC CROO/50c 174, 69.
38. des Gouttes letter to Bagetskii, 13 Jan. 1919. *Ibid.*, 20.
39. Sverdlov's protest note to German foreign ministry, 26 Dec. 1918. I.N. Zemskov et al (eds), *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* [hereafter DVP], tom I (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1959), 634–5.
40. Reports of drafted ROKK doctors in Gomel, May 1919. GARF, f. R3341, op. 1, d. 163, ll. 109, 123, 130, 173.
41. Evgeny Korovin telegram to A.I Zhivnerev, 27 Mar. 1919. GARF, f. R3341, op. 1, d. 117, l. 75.
42. Fayet, 'Russian Red Cross', 195.
43. des Gouttes letter to Bagetskii, 25 Feb. 1919. AICRC CR00/50c 174, 22.
44. Statement from Édouard Naville, 14 Jan. 1919. AICRC A CS-019.
45. Frick report, 20 Mar. 1919, in *Documents publiés à l'occasion de la guerre (1914–1919). Rapports de divers délégués en Allemagne, Russie, Pologne, Bohême, Hongrie et Roumanie. Décembre 1918–Juin 1919* (Geneva, 1919), 141–5 [AICRC]. On the increasing rate of typhus in 1919, see telegram from ROKK's medical-sanitary department to its central collegium, 28 Mar. 1919. GARF f. R3341, op. 1, d. 193, ll. 21–2.
46. Fayet, 'Russian Red Cross', 189. For Russian delegate's comments, see *Neuvième Conférence internationale de la Croix-Rouge tenue à Washington du 7 au 17 mai 1912, Compte rendu*, The American Red Cross Washington, 1912 (Washington, D.C.: Judd & Detweiler, inc. 1913), 45.
47. V.V. Aldoshin et al (eds), *Sovetsko-amerikanskie otnosheniia. Gody nepriznaniia. 1918–1926* (Moscow: MFD, 2002), 58–9.
48. *Ibid.*, 60–1.
49. See Sverdlov's correspondence with Latvian Bolshevik Pēteris Stučka about a murdered ROKK official in Latvia in May 1919, which had become a risky place for ROKK to operate. GARF f. R3341, op. 1, d. 115, ll. 6–10. For reports of White army attacks on Red Cross sisters of mercy and ROKK personnel, also in May 1919, see l. 9. For reports of airplane attacks on ROKK stations in May 1919, see M. Sabourova telegram to Sverdlov; in November 1919, there was another airplane attack near Pskov, see report 10 Nov. 1919: both AICRC A CS 062. For attacks in July 1919 in Petropavlovsk, see ROKK foreign department telegram to All-Russian general staff. GARF f. R3341, op. 1. d. 115, l. 19; while stealing ROKK's supplies in May 1919, Estonian forces threatened a doctor with execution, see Dr Lenskii report to N.A. D'lachkova, *ibid.*, l. 30.
50. G.K. Deev et al (eds), DVP, tom II (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1958), 147–8.
51. For the case of a ROKK official killed by a Red Army soldier in September 1918, see GARF, f. R3341, op. 1, d. 38, l. 7.
52. Sverdlov letter to People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, May 1919. GARF f. R3341, op. 1, d. 193, l. 56.
53. Korovin report, 1 Nov. 1919. AICRC CR00/50c 69.
54. Unnamed ICRC committee member to Swiss head of foreign affairs, Paul Dinichert, 27 Jan. 1922. AICRC CR00/50c 178, 203.
55. Bagetskii letters to the ICRC, 10 Feb. and 27 Feb. 1920. AICRC A CS 062.
56. Soloviev letter to the ICRC, 4 Mar. 1920. AICRC CR00/50c, 174 40.
57. Helene de Bisping letter to Paul des Gouttes, 29 Mar. 1920. AICRC A CS 062.
58. Helena Paderewska letter to the ICRC, 19 Jun. 1920. AICRC A CS 061.
59. Helene de Bisping letter to the ICRC, 15 Jul. 1920. *Ibid.*
60. Georges Lodygenskii report to the ICRC, 14 Feb. 1920. AICRC CROO/50c, 175 81.
61. Bagetskii letter to the ICRC, 16 May 1920. AICRC CR00/50c, 174 42.
62. See exchange between Soloviev and Frick, 22 May 1920. AICRC CR00/50c 186.
63. Toman, 'Rossiia i Krasnyi Krest', 38.
64. des Gouttes letter to the ICRC, 25 Jun. 1920. AICRC A CS 061.
65. des Gouttes letter to Soloviev and Bagetskii, 28 Jun. 1920. *Ibid.*
66. des Gouttes letter to Maksim Litvinov, 22 Jul. 1920. *Ibid.*
67. Soloviev letter to the ICRC, 2 Aug. 1920. *Ibid.*
68. Bagetskii letter to the ICRC, 13 Aug. 1920. *Ibid.*
69. Helene de Bisping to the ICRC, 23 Aug. 1920. *Ibid.*
70. For the post-mortem, see 9 Sept. 1920 report in *ibid.*
71. Bagetskii to the ICRC, 18 Oct. 1920. *Ibid.*
72. Account of Wladimir Polet, 28 Oct. 1920. AICRC CR00/50c, 176 101.
73. Bagetskii message to ROKK central committee, 18 Oct. 1920. GARF, f. R9501, op. 6, d. 22, l. 9.
74. Iosif Stalin telegram to Kristian Rakovskii, 16 Jun. 1920. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii [hereafter RGASPI], f. 558, op. 1, d. 4693, ll. 2ob. Stalin letter to the Revolutionary Military Council of the First Cavalry Army, 17 Jun. 1920. *Ibid.*, d. 1737, ll. 1–2.

75. des Gouttes letter to Bagetskii, 7 Jan. 1921. AICRC CR00/50c, 175 100.
76. Bagetskii to Geneva, 10 Feb. 1921. AICRC CR00/50c, 176 101; DVP, tom 3, Soloviev message to Ador, 24 Feb. 1921 in G.A. Belov et al (eds), DVP, tom. III (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1959), 534–5.
77. des Gouttes letter to K. de Watterville, 28 Oct. 1920. AICRC CR00/50c 176, 89.
78. Peter W. Huber and Jean-François Fayet, 'Une puissance protectrice inédite: la « mission » Wehrlin du CICR à Moscou (1920-1938)', *Relations Internationales*, 3:143 (2010), 92.
79. Ibid., 61.
80. Gustave Ador letter to Soloviev, 25 Aug. 1920. AICRC CR00/50c, 174 65.
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93. Soloviev letter to Ador, 3 Mar. 1921. Ibid., 104.
94. Fayet, 'CICR', 62.
95. Bugnion, *International Committee*, 259.
96. Frick letter to Ador, 4 Jul. 1921. AICRC CR00/50c, 176 127.
97. ICRC to Chicherin and Soloviev, 6 Jul. 1921. AICRC CR00/50c, 177 130.
98. Fayet, 'Russian Red Cross', 197.
99. Lodygenskii letter to ICRC, 7 Sept. 1921. AICRC CR00/50c, 186.
100. Toman, 'Rossiia i Krasnyi Krest', 30, 39.
101. Ador letter to Ivanitskii, 7 Feb. 1922. AICRC CR00/50c, 188 128.
102. Soloviev letter to ICRC, 19 Apr. 1922. AICRC CR 110-1 38.
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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by a British Academy Small Research Grant (SG2122/210117)