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Why Did the Communists Win or Lose? A Comparative Analysis of the Revolutionary Civil Wars in Russia, Finland, Spain, and China

Pavel Osinsky[1] and Jari Eloranta[2]

According to classic interpretations of the communist revolutions, political mobilization of peasantry was critical for the success of the revolutionary forces. This article, which reexamines the experience of civil wars in Russia, Finland, Spain, and China, argues that peasants' contribution to the revolutions in Russia and later in China became possible under two historical conditions: breakdown of state authorities during the mass mobilization wars and existence of an unresolved agrarian problem in the countryside. Neither of these conditions alone, as the experience of other countries has shown, was sufficient for a success of the revolutionaries. The Spanish civil war of 1936–1939, for instance, was not preceded by a major international war. Because institutions of the traditional social order had not been undermined by war, Franco was able to defeat the Popular Front government, despite the peasants' support of the revolution. In the Finnish civil war of 1918, which broke out in the wake of World War I and the Russian Revolution, state institutions did not collapse completely and the peasantry was divided in their responses to the revolution; the rural smallholders, for example, aligned with the Mannerheim's White army, not with the urban revolutionaries.

KEY WORDS: civil wars; communist revolutions; peasantry; political institutions; social movements; the state.

INTRODUCTION

The dramatic experience of the communist modernization in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China has inspired generations of scholars. For years, social scientists tried to understand whether these momentous transformations were determined by long-term structural problems of these societies or came about due to unique combinations of contingent events. Sociological interpretations of communist revolutions pointed to a number of structural peculiarities of prerevolutionary development that directed Russia and China toward collectivism. Scholars argued that centralized semibureaucratic systems of authority combined with state-dependent gentry, weak bourgeoisie, century-old legacy of rural collectivism, and militant labor movement provided fertile grounds for the twentieth-century experiments in collectivist revolutions (e.g., Foran 2005; McDaniel 1988; Moore 1966; Skocpol 1979).

Recently, this argument has been challenged by a new set of ideas. A war-centered theory has contended that neither Russia nor China had been predestined

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to the communist path of revolution. Economic backwardness, disarticulated social structure, and weakness of democratic institutions were common problems among many underdeveloped societies, especially new democracies. Few of them, however, had experienced cataclysms that resulted in establishing collectivist forms of social organization. Economic and political developments in Russia and China before the revolutions showed encouraging signs.[3] It was the calamitous experience of wars against advanced industrial nations that destroyed the economies of these countries, paralyzed state authorities, and created opportunities for a takeover by the revolutionary state-builders. The processes of modernization in these countries became interrupted by the communist interlude (Mann 2012; Osinsky 2008, 2010).

A war-centered framework, employed in this research, is neither a general theory of social revolutions nor a model of a subset of the revolutions. It is rather a historically conditional theory (see Paige 1999), which seeks to explain a particular historical outcome: an onset of communist transition in Russia and China. Its argument does not apply to similar political transformations that occurred after World War II (e.g., the Cuban revolution). The emergence of the world socialist system dominated by two nuclear powers, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, changed the balance of forces between the world capitalism and the world socialism, and created prospects for the collectivist modernization in the countries, where such opportunities did not previously exist. Due to a path-dependent nature of the political change (see, e.g., Mahoney 2000), the interpretative accounts of these later revolutions are to be constructed within a new set of conditions.

By examining the experiences and the outcomes of four revolutionary civil wars—successful in Russia and China and unsuccessful in Finland and Spain—this article seeks to support three theoretical propositions. First, only the mass mobilization wars of the first half of the twentieth century could produce social dislocations so enormous and collapse of state authorities so complete that made the communist bid for power possible. Second, the revolutionary state-builders, who seized these opportunities for taking power, were able to defeat their political opponents only if they built the alliances with the largest part of the population, the peasantry. Finally, the peasants could not have been "coerced" into such alliances; they could be brought on the side of the revolutionaries only by the provision of such incentives as redistribution of land and removal of the oppressive power structures. If such benefits did not appeal to peasants, they, or some of them, allied with the forces of the counterrevolution.

EXISTING THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

A failure to explore the dynamic of the civil wars represents one of the glaring omissions in the traditional scholarship on the twentieth-century revolutions (Blattman and Miguel 2010; Kalyvas 2008; Wood 2008). The dominant

[3] For balanced accounts of these developments, see Bradley 2009; Denison and Nafziger 2013; Gregory 1994; Markevich and Harrison 2011; Mironov 2000; Nafziger 2010, 2012 on Russia, and Bian 2005; Kirby 2000; Strauss 1998; Thornton 2007; and Yeh 2007 on China.

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structural perspective in studying revolutions was concerned "primarily with origins, secondarily with outcomes, and relatively little with the dynamics of making revolutions" (Oberschall and Seidman 2005:373). Although scholars have made a great number of insightful observations about revolutions, they rarely specified the mechanism of the transformative social change. Many earlier studies argued, for instance, that communist revolutions of the twentieth century were essentially peasant revolutions, but how peasants' collective action became possible and successful on a nationwide scale has not been explained (see, e.g., Moore 1966; Wolf 1968).

The notion that peasant collective action was subordinate to the strategies of political actors represented a major step in the right direction. This argument has found its most systematic elaboration in Skocpol's state-centered analysis of revolutions, which included a study of peasant-based revolutions in Russia and China (as well as an earlier revolution in France). In the early twentieth century, she argued, external pressures generated by more advanced nations contributed to weakening and, ultimately, destroying administrative and military machineries of the Romanov and Qing empires. This, in turn, made possible widespread peasants' assaults on landed elites and bureaucratic structures from below. The revolutionary state-builders took advantage of the opportunities created by the class-based collective action, organized masses, seized state authority, and established centralized communist regimes (Skocpol 1979).

Although Skocpol's research stimulated a number of studies that successfully applied her structural framework to examining revolutions elsewhere (e.g., Foran 2005; Goldstone 1991; Goodwin 2001; Wickham-Crowley 1991), few theoretically driven studies ventured revisiting the cases that formed the basis for her original analysis. That was an unfortunate omission because Skocpol's research, we believe, has left ample space for further elaboration. Two considerations warrant such elaboration. First, although Skocpol emphasized that external pressures, such as wars, contributed to the outbreak of two revolutions, this observation did not induce her to elevate experience of war to the position of causal centrality in her account of processes in Russia and China. Given the scope of her research, that was understandable. Skocpol wished to develop a general explanation of three great revolutions (in France, Russia, and China) across a broad time span. Because the nature and intensity of external challenges in each case varied, using a notion of "international pressures" was appropriate. Now, as far as the communist revolutions in Russia and China are concerned, there is enough evidence to be more specific. In the twentieth century, these countries confronted far more calamitous events than externally induced military-fiscal crises. As Michael Mann (2012:190) has noted, "Russia in 1917 was not a case of a budget crisis induced by too much war. This is too bland to convey the catastrophe of total war, invasion, starving towns, and mobbing refugees." This description fully applies to China in the 1930s and 1940s as well.

Second, Skocpol came up with two different interpretations of why revolutionary forces were able to consolidate their authority. In Russia, the Bolshevik party-state survived the civil war by using organized coercion deployed by such

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institutions as the Cheka, the Red Army, and the party. In China, Mao Zedong and his comrades won the civil war because they were able to mobilize the large groups of the population by the power of persuasion. These explanations overstated differences between two revolutions but neglected more fundamental commonalities. The contemporary historiography of the Russian revolution advanced far beyond the older representation of the Bolshevik regime as a dictatorial party-state, which had achieved its victory through centralized coercion. Scholars, who have reconstructed the social history of the revolution, demonstrated that the large segments of the society—urban workers, poor and middle peasants, ethnic minorities, and a part of the educated class—supported or chose to side with the Bolsheviks (e.g., Figes 1996; Figes and Kolonitskii 1999; Holquist 2002; Lincoln 1999; Raleigh 2002; Wade 2000). The question one needs to address is why did large segments of the Russian society accept the Soviet rule?

A CIVIL WAR IN A WAR-CENTERED FRAMEWORK

A war-centered approach in contemporary social science views warfare as the primary driving force of state formation (e.g., Downing 1992; Ferguson 1999; Glete 2001; Kolko 1994; Porter 1994; Tilly 1990). As Charles Tilly (1975:42) had famously stated, "war made the state, and the state made war." From such viewpoint, existing interpretations of communist revolutions share one common limitation: they fail to place these events in the context of the mass mobilization wars that erupted in the first half of the twentieth century. Surely, most accounts of the communist revolution in Russia and quite a few studies of the Chinese revolution duly stress the role of war in undermining the old regimes, along, however, with numerous other factors. Our argument goes beyond just highlighting the impact of war or the military power. It suggests that war was a primary cause, condition, and context of the paradigmatic communist revolutions. To put simply, no mass mobilization war, no communist revolution, especially in a large country.

In the early twentieth century, dramatically enhanced effectiveness of industrialized killing combined with prevalence of defense over offense turned warfare into mechanized mutual annihilation of huge immobilized armies (Ferguson 1999; Förster 2000; Van Creveld 2000). To fight year after year in a war of attrition, like World War I, rulers had to draft millions of recruits and organize their societies to serve the purposes of total war (Broadberry and Harrison 2005). A draft removed millions of men from their local environments and mundane routines. Authorities had to accommodate, supply, train, and arm millions of recruits assembled in large imperatively coordinated organizations. Such unprecedented mobilization of manpower ended a century-old monopoly of the ruling class on the means of violence; the "have-nots" were called up, given arms, and trained to act as a collective force. The balance of power favoring the ruling elite was weakened. If war, like World War I, went on for years, losses multiplied, and there was no end in sight, the likelihood of protests among soldiers and civilians increased. If such protests occurred and converged into a large-scale uprising, the state machinery would experience

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serious problems and in some cases collapse. In a vacuum of power, there emerged new actors that advanced their claims for legitimate authority.[4]

In most countries that experienced a breakdown, the process of transition to a new regime involved two phases: (1) an overthrow of the old regime by a coalitional alliance of the oppositional parties and (2) a transition to the constitutional government accompanied by political competition among the parties of the former opposition. Typically, a trajectory of a transition was affected by a variety of contingencies and the outcome of it was highly uncertain. In most post-imperial states, the moderates, such as socialist parties and groups, enjoyed greater popularity than the radicals and formed the first governments after the old regimes had collapsed. In several countries, however, a political contest turned into a military conflict, a third stage of the contestation (3). It is the third stage, a civil war, which interests us most; the processes of the old regime's collapse and the (failed) constitutional transition will not be discussed at length in this article.

THE PEASANTRY AS A POLITICAL FACTOR

What are the structural conditions that allow the revolutionaries to win a civil war? As stated above, disintegration of state machinery due to defeat in an international war is the key factor but not the only condition. To identify other factors, we need to explore several observations about civil wars. First, civil wars differ from interstate wars: these are the conflicts waged within state sovereignty rather than between sovereign states, the combatants often share the same (or similar) culture, the front lines are blurred, and the fighting involves civilians along with professional soldiers (Kalyvas 2008). Second, only small minorities—typically less than 5% of the population—actively participate in civil wars (Lichbach 1995:18). Under such conditions, support of the larger population becomes a critical factor and the outcome of a civil war depends on how many resources (soldiers, weapons, munitions, supplies, and provision) the contenders are able to extract from a society and deploy in the battlefield. Finally, the resource mobilization capacities of political actors involved in an internal war depend on the environmental and societal parameters of a conflict. Specifically, the amount of resources available to the actors may vary depending on whether an armed conflict takes place in large cities or spreads from the cities to the countryside and involves large-scale participation of the rural population. Normally, the material resources and organizational capacities available to urban-based propertied classes are greater than the resources and capacities of rebels. Therefore, if an uprising is limited to one or a few urban centers, revolutionary forces are likely to be defeated.[5] If, however, civic unrest erupts in a predominantly agrarian country, some segments of the rural population may turn to the side of urban-based revolutionaries and provide them with necessary manpower and provisions. Such support materializes if the revolutionary party and the

[4] Of course, not all states defeated in mass mobilization war collapsed due to the mass uprisings. Some totalitarian states, such as Germany and Japan during World War II, were able to prevent internal unrest and fight until their ultimate defeat and unconditional surrender (see Chapter 14 in Mann 2012 for an explanation).

[5] Scholars argue that cities are typically hostile to rebels (e.g., Kalyvas 2008; Kocher 2004).

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peasants establish an exchange relationship in which the political organization provides peasants with material benefits and political patronage, whereas the peasants provide the revolutionary party with recruits and logistical support (Skocpol 1982; Wickham-Crowley 1991).

What are the benefits that urban-based revolutionaries may offer peasants? In most agrarian economies, land is the primary asset of a peasant household. If land distribution in a certain area ensures peasants' livelihood and is generally perceived as more or less fair, farmers are likely to be satisfied with the status quo and remain indifferent to any subversive claims. If, on the contrary, land distribution is perceived by most cultivators as grossly inequitable, such pattern of land tenure fuels discontent and renders peasants more attentive to the demands for land redistribution. Historically, an unresolved agrarian problem in countryside manifested itself as a combination of several features: (1) economic and political preeminence of the nonpeasant landlords (gentry), who owned a disproportionally large share of land and were socially and culturally separated from the rest of the rural community; (2) reproduction of the gentry's domination through the structures of the state; (3) subsistence-oriented, labor-intensive agriculture that provided most farmers with little or no surplus; and (4) peasant culture of opposition and resistance, associated with a long-standing record of rural unrest, rebellions, banditry, and other forms of collective violence (see Foran 2005).

In the rest of the article we will analyze four episodes of internal warfare: the Russian civil war (1917–1921), the Finnish civil war (1918), the Spanish civil war (1936–1939), and the civil war in China (1945–1949). All these conflicts occurred during the same period, the first half of the twentieth century when mass mobilization war was the dominant pattern of warfare. Before the outbreak of the civil wars, Russia, and China were directly involved in the mass mobilization wars, Finland only indirectly, and Spain was not involved. A potentially explosive social conflict in the countryside, generated and reproduced by the archaic institutions of the rural society, represented a serious problem in Russia, Spain, and China, but less so in Finland where the interests of the peasantry were fragmented. These two conditions, we would argue, were the most important factors in shaping the outcomes of the revolutionary processes in these countries.

We assume, further, that political processes in Russia, Spain, and China depended primarily (albeit not exclusively) on configurations of forces inside these countries, although the world wars set the stage for the revolutions.[6] The military-political conflict in Finland, the first of Europe's revolutionary civil wars of the twentieth century, represents a more difficult case. Being a part of the Russian empire until declaration of independence in December 1917, Finland was involved in a whirlpool of the events, initiated by the Russian revolution. Inspired by the Bolsheviks' victory in Petrograd, the local revolutionaries seized control of Helsinki and most of the industrially developed south of Finland. Nonetheless, in 3 months of intense fighting the Finnish White Army defeated the Red Finns. The fact that

[6] In the Spanish civil war, the foreign aid that Francisco Franco received from Germany, Italy, and Portugal definitely helped the insurgents. However, foreign assistance was more a contributing factor, rather than a decisive one (see Beevor 2006; Casanova 2010). How the aid was used depended on effectiveness of the receiving side, as Michael Seidman (2011:7) has aptly noted.

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the outcome of the Finnish civil war turned out to be the opposite of what happened in Russia at almost the same time makes this case even more interesting and, with due reservations, acceptable to the present comparative analysis.[7]

FORGING ALLIANCE WITH PEASANT RADICALISM: RUSSIA

The Russian revolution of 1917 cannot be understood outside the context of Russia's experience in World War I. Not only did World War I cause major economic and social dislocations, but it also shook the core institutions of the Russian state, including the army. To fight the enemy troops, the government drafted about 15 million men, more than any other nation in war. However, due to poor organization, inadequate equipment, and incompetent commanders, the Russian armies suffered defeats. To replace the battlefield losses (about 2 million dead and 5 million prisoners of war), the government had to mobilize new cohorts of recruits and reservists. Petrograd, Moscow, and other large cities had been turned into large military training facilities. In the meantime, due to disorganization of transportation and ineffective food supply policies, the urban population began to experience shortages of provision and other living necessities. In the third winter in war (1916–1917), hundreds of thousands of people came out with protests against the war and the monarchy.[8]

It is true that the revolutionary events in Petrograd in February 1917 began with the strikes and rallies of the working class. These protests, however, did not bring about the fall of the government until the mutiny of soldiers of the Petrograd garrison on February 27. When guard regiments, one after the other, turned to the side of the workers, the government resigned, and power was transferred to the leaders of the State Duma and the Petrograd Soviet. The Romanov monarchy, which had lost support of the army, expired a few days later. An impromptu alliance of the labor movement and the insurgent soldiers laid the foundation of the plebeian-praetorian coalition (the "revolutionary democracy," in the language of the streets) that was to play a key role in the subsequent events (Kolonitskii 2004).

In the following months, the main forces of the "revolutionary democracy"—the Kronstadt sailors, the Red Guards, and the Petrograd garrison—remained in the background of events, but every time the political situation turned serious, they appeared in the streets of Petrograd. The Provisional Government became a *de facto* hostage of the Petrograd garrison and the Red Guards. When the government decided to send a large part of the unruly garrison to the front in October, the soldiers decided to overthrow the Provisional Government. On October 24–25, the military units loyal to the Bolsheviks took control over Petrograd. In the next few

[7] This study does not cover the German revolution of 1918–1919, which falls short of being a full-scale civil war (see Broué 2005; Carsten 1972; Ryder 1967). The transfer of state power to the provisional government in November 1918 took place peacefully. A standoff between the government and the radicals in 1919 was accompanied by violence but never turned into a sustained engagement of large military formations (Payne 2011:73–74).

[8] For contrasting views on the state of Russia's war economy, see Gatrell 2005 and Markevich and Harrison 2011.

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days, the Soviet authority spread to other cities of Russia, where the outcome of the conflict was determined, in most cases, by the action of the soldiers garrisoned in these cities (Frenkin 1982).

Thus, in a broad historical context of war and revolution, the statement that the Bolsheviks seized power in October is only partially accurate. A larger political force behind the Bolsheviks was the urban-based coalition of the radicalized workers and soldiers, which would not emerge under conditions other than an unsuccessful experience in a mass mobilization war and would not take over the state authority unless faced with the total demoralization and defeat of the army. Thus, a breakdown of state authority due to defeat in a mass mobilization war was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the success of the revolutionaries in Russia.

The October military coup did not resolve the problem of authority. The Bolsheviks, who seized power by riding the tide of the popular antiwar movement, did not have a legitimate mandate to rule. Their social constituency outside the main cities remained narrow (Pipes 1990). Unless the radicals found powerful allies, their stay in power remained precarious. In these conditions, the position of the majority of the population, the peasantry, became crucial.

Before the revolution, Russia was an overwhelmingly rural country in which peasants made up about 80% of the population. Although it made some advances toward industrialization, modern institutions had little impact on the realities of a rural world culturally separated from the urban society and governed by its own customs and traditions. The islands of nobility estates coexisted with a sea of peasant smallholdings managed through traditional communal arrangements that allowed adaptation to the changing natural and social conditions (Nafziger 2010). Most squires were absentee landlords who did not reside in their own estates. Because land was the primary factor of agricultural production, the property of gentry and well-to-do peasants (*kulaks*) represented the most desired possessions for less prosperous cultivators. The Russian countryside was in a state of recurrent rural unrest (e.g., Smith 2011).

For the Bolsheviks, who came to power in October, the peasants and their problems were of secondary importance. However, once political conflict turned to a critical phase, ignoring the concerns of the majority of the Russian people would have been a political mistake. One of the first documents adopted by Lenin's government was the Decree on Land, which announced the abolition of private property on land (meaning squires' estates). It stipulated that all land was to be placed at the disposition of the district land committees and would be distributed equally among the peasants. This move made by the Bolsheviks provided a basis for an alliance between the new government and the peasants who played a critical role in the course of the civil war.

The first act of the Russian civil war opened with the mutiny of the Czechoslovak corps on the Trans-Siberian railroad in May 1918. By banishing the Bolshevik authorities from the major cities on the Volga and along the Trans-Siberian railroad, the Czechoslovaks created a political vacuum soon to be filled by the anti-Bolshevik socialist opposition, which formed a new authority, the Committee of the Members of the Constituent Assembly, or the Komuch. This government presented itself as the legitimate successor of the Russian parliament. However, outside the

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circles of provincial intelligentsia, students, and the cadets, the social constituency of this government remained small. Neither workers nor bourgeoisie trusted this middle-of-the-road authority. Most importantly, the Komuch failed to appeal to the rural population. The Volga peasants saw no reason to fight the Bolsheviks. The revolution gave them land and freedom and that was all that peasants really wanted. As a result, a draft campaign for a "People's Army" failed to produce enough soldiers. In autumn 1918, the Komuch troops were defeated by the Bolshevik forces whereas the Komuch politicians were driven to the Urals and Siberia (Kondrashin 2009; Mawdsley 2005).

Next year became the critical period of the civil war. The Bolsheviks had to fight three White armies in succession: the forces of Admiral Alexander Kolchak that advanced from Siberia, the army of General Anton Denikin moving toward Moscow from southern Russia, and General Nikolai Yudenich's troops that were threatening Petrograd from the west. It would be misleading to characterize the relations between the peasants and the authorities as idyllic. The Bolshevik government used massive coercion to mobilize rural population and necessary resources. In many provinces, peasants rebelled against the draft and requisitions (Brovkin 1994; Osipova 2001; Raleigh 2002; Retish 2008). Nevertheless, a thesis of organized coercion as the key factor in the Bolshevik victory neglects too many circumstances to be accepted as a sufficient explanation. First, the Bolsheviks used coercion, yet so did the Whites. Each side practiced forced recruitment of the rural population and ruthless punishments of deserters including burning villages, taking hostages, and shooting evaders (Litvin 2004). Second, despite the draconian measures, neither side was effective in their recruitment campaigns. Initially, the Reds did not do any better than the Whites (Mawdsley 2005). On some fronts up to 80% of the enlisted soldiers became deserters (Figes 1989, 1990). Finally, many reluctant recruits, once they were enlisted and delivered to the battlefield, avoided fighting in order to survive. The recruits could be forced to join the troops, but they could not be forced to be good soldiers (Kondrashin 2009).

In the context of these circumstances, the observation that most peasants disliked both protagonists ("a plague on both your houses") and preferred to keep away of the "war between brothers" (e.g., Pipes 1995:272) is generally correct. Yet, it glosses over an important difference. However much the peasants hated the Reds, their hatred of the Whites, who promised to restore land to the landlords, ran far deeper (Kara-Murza 2003; Suny 1998). Even in areas where land was not the crucial issue, the Whites emblematized the old regime, oppressive and odious (Lonergan 2008). True to their old habits, most White Guards treated persons of the "lower estates" with suspicion and contempt. The White troops assisted the former landlords in reclaiming their estates and punishing the peasants who seized their property (Figes 1996).

That explains a curious pattern in the Red Army recruitment. Through most of the civil war, the local recruitment committees enlisted peasants in large numbers, but the majority of recruits deserted. When, however, Kolchak's troops launched an offensive against the Bolsheviks in the east, many deserters began returning to the Red Army. As a result, starting with 800,000 soldiers in January, the Red Army doubled in size by the end of April, the height of Kolchak's offensive in the east.

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Table I. Growth of the Red Army in 1919

Month	Total size of the army in the beginning of the month	Month	Total size of the army in the beginning of the month
January	800,000	July	2,100,000
February	1,000,000	August	2,300,000
March	1,400,000	September	2,400,000
April	1,500,000	October	2,500,000
May	1,700,000	November	2,600,000
June	1,900,000	December	2,800,000

Source: Figes 1990:183.

Most recruits came from the Volga region, where the peasants had made substantial land gains and had most to fear from a White victory (Figes 1996).

The same change occurred a few months later, during Denikin's advance to Moscow from the south in autumn 1919 (Mawdsley 2005). The provinces in which peasants gained most from the land reform provided the largest number of recruits. For example, about 40% of the returning deserters (about 230,000) came from two districts, Moscow and Orel, where the amount of land in peasant use had increased by 35% and 28%, respectively. The threat of a White victory made the peasants fear for the loss of their newly acquired land and therefore they chose to return to the army (Figes 1990, 1996). Table I shows the growth of the Red Army during the decisive year of the civil war. By January 1920, the Red Army had 3 million men under arms and by the end of the year 5 million, whereas the combat effectiveness of the White armies never exceeded 250,000–300,000 and the number of all enlisted recruits 1 million (Galin 2006; Pipes 1993).

STABILIZING EFFECT OF PEASANT TRADITIONALISM: FINLAND

Being a semiautonomous province of the Russian Empire, Finland was not able to escape the experiences of World War I. As result of the war, the Czarist government increased the number of Russian troops quartered in Finland to 50,000 and Helsinki became the main operational base of the Baltic fleet. As the war dragged on, the economic conditions and the living standards of most of the urban population, particularly industrial workers, worsened, leading to riots and strikes. Nonetheless, if one would inquire whether a broad-based opposition to the existing authorities emerged in Finland, as it did in Russia, the answer would be negative. The Duchy of Finland was not a war zone; it was neither invaded nor occupied by enemy troops. A draft was not conducted in Finland and the population did not suffer losses of human life. The effect of war on the economy, infrastructure, and the urban society in Finland was not as disastrous as in Russia. Apart from the Russian military presence, Finland had many characteristics of a neutral country (Upton 1980).

The February revolution of 1917 in Russia invigorated the national independence movement and emboldened labor activists but did not disrupt the economic

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and political life of Finland. The main political institutions (parliament, government, political parties, local administration) and the civil society remained largely intact. In contrast to the post-February Russia, where war politics moved to the central stage and where soldiers and civilians participated in large antiwar rallies, most conflicts in Finland at the time revolved around local economic and social issues. The most visible change was the disappearance of the old police and emergence of the numerous local militias, such as the Red Guard, formed by industrial workers, and the Civil Guard, organized by middle-class individuals. As a result of military buildup, the Finnish society became increasingly polarized into two power blocs: the Social Democrats with the Red Guards, on the one side, and the conservative government, supported by the Civil Guards, on the other side.

The uprising of the Red Guards in January 1918, the first act of the Finnish civil war, began when the momentum created by the Bolshevik uprising in Russia had been lost. By that time the bourgeois government of Pehr Evind Svinhufvud had declared Finnish independence and consolidated its power. Until the end of January, the Civil Guards, formed for defending the middle class and their property, functioned as a self-governed citizens' militia. On January 25, however, they were officially declared the troops of the government. In response, on the night of January 28, the Red Guards took control of Helsinki. Government offices, telegraph, telephone, railway stations, banks, and other strategic points were occupied. The commander of the Red Guards, Eero Haapalainen, issued a manifesto proclaiming the Socialist Workers' Republic of Finland. The new revolutionary government—the People's Delegation—was formed, whereas the parliament and the old cabinet were dissolved (Alapuro 1988).

In the initial phase of the civil war, the Red Guards were able to keep the initiative. The Nationalist army, organized by General Carl Gustaf Mannerheim to fight the insurgents, was small and short on munitions. The presence of well-trained Russian troops, who helped the Red Finns with weapons and (occasionally) with direct military assistance, was still a major factor. In mid-March, however, the White troops were able to overtake the initiative. Since the Great War was over, the Russian troops began to withdraw from Finland. Mannerheim, on the other side, initiated conscription and ordered to "shoot on sight" people who resisted the White forces or engaged in sabotage. The battle for Tampere, the major industrial center of Finland, was the turning point of the war. In this battle, the Reds suffered a defeat from which they would never be able to recover (Ylikangas 1993). The White army, supported by the German expeditionary troops that landed in early April, methodically expanded the territory under its control. In mid-April, Helsinki fell to the counterrevolutionary forces without a fight. By early May, all of Finland was cleared of the Red Guards (Kronlund 1989).

Why did the revolutionary government in Finland suffer defeat? First of all, Finland's participation in the war and the scope of the political disorganization it experienced were rather limited. In contrast to the Russian revolution, which erupted in a country devastated by war and was driven by large units of war-weary soldiers and sailors, the revolutionary process in Finland began when the national conscripted army did not exist, whereas most political institutions in Finland remained largely intact, albeit divided by the competing factions. Parliament, the

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central government, the local administration, public organizations, and the courts continued to operate. Many Finns abstained from participating in the conflict altogether. The insurgency was sustained almost exclusively by the working-class militias, which lacked a centralized structure, possessed few military skills, and displayed low discipline (Manninen 1992).

Weak support of the Finnish urban-based revolution in the countryside was another cause of the radicals' defeat. As stated above, the key factor of the Red Army's success in Russia was effective Bolshevik recruitment of millions of peasants. In the critical months of the civil war, Russian farmers rose to defend their land and freedom, shifting the balance of military power to the side of the revolution. In Finland, however, the opposing armies turned out to be roughly comparable in size; at the peak of the conflict each side deployed about 70,000–80,000 troops. For the Reds, who advocated people's interests, it was poor performance. Why had the Red Finns failed to mobilize the rural masses in a way the Bolsheviks have done so in Russia?

To explain why most peasants remained indifferent or hostile to the urban revolution, we need to look at the class structure of Finland's rural population. Risto Alapuro (1988) identified three major groups of the Finnish agrarian population: the agricultural laborers, the crofters, and the freeholders. The first group was composed of the landless agricultural laborers who made up to 48% of all rural households in the early twentieth century. These laborers were poor but did not experience really acute economic distress in the early twentieth century. The rural commercial economy expanded, and wages increased (Ojala and Nummela 2006). Before the war, the living standards of the rural laborers improved substantially. The crofters, who made up about 17% of the rural households, were the small leaseholders who paid rent to the landowners by working a certain number of days for the owner or making payments in cash or in kind. Some of the crofters joined the revolution, whereas others did not. Why? Many tenants hoped to rise to the status of the landowners, and were in favor of land redistribution or at least recognition of their rights to land they had rented for generations. For some, the revolution represented an avenue toward this goal, whereas others wished to cultivate good relations with the major landowners and hoped for a legislative solution. Finally, the independent peasant landowners, who made up about 35% of all households, represented the most conservative part of the rural population. In the prewar period, landowners benefited from rapid commercialization of agriculture, particularly in such market-oriented industries as forestry and dairy husbandry. The peasant land possessions expanded. Many freeholders hired laborers for the harvest seasons or leased their land to tenants. Between 1870 and 1910, the net property of the peasants increased seven times (Arosalo 1998:151).

How did these processes affect the military-political mobilization in the countryside in early 1918? Although both sides made efforts to mobilize supporters in the rural areas, the composition of their troops turned out to be quite different. The Red Guards consisted mostly of urban and rural workers (Rasila 1969). Of the more than 3,500 Reds killed at the front, 63% were industrial workers, 16% farmworkers, 13% tenants, 5% farmers, 1% civil servants, and 2% others. The White Army, on the other side, consisted mainly of recruits from the independent

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peasantry as well as the upper and the middle classes. Among the victims of the Reds, the farmers made up 45%, civil servants 17%, industrial workers 14%, tenants 11%, farmworkers 9%, and others 4% (Manninen 1978:233–239). Thus, the more affluent peasants and the middle classes formed the backbone of Mannerheim's troops.

COUNTERREVOLUTION WINS, PEASANT RADICALISM NOTWITHSTANDING: SPAIN

The Spanish civil war (1936–1939) was a dramatic collision of the forces of a radical change and a traditionalist social order. The victory of the Popular Front in the parliamentary elections in February 1936 released social tensions that had brewed in the society for years and that the new government was unable to control. In spring and summer 1936, Spanish society rapidly polarized into two hostile camps: the upper and middle classes, on the one hand, and the broad coalition of the urban and rural poor, on the other. Some observers opined that the political process in Spain unfolded along the same scenario as the Russian revolution.[9] However, after 2.5 years of fighting, the Popular Front government was defeated by the nationalist forces. The right-wing authoritarian dictatorship, which was to last until the mid-1970s, was installed.

Why did the Popular Front suffer defeat? Did the republican forces fail due to the weakness of their positions in the countryside, like what happened in Finland? We argue that the republican forces did not lack support among the rural cultivators. Large segments of the rural poor benefited from the republican agrarian policies and joined the ranks of the republican forces during the civil war. The key difference compared to the similar crises in Russia and Finland was that in Spain the armed class conflict began in the absence of a major external war and social dislocations associated with it. The core institution of the state, the army, had not been weakened by war, whereas the revolutionary forces had not been strengthened by war. Under such conditions, the ruling elite was able to suppress the revolutionary forces.

When the civil war broke out, Spain was a predominantly agrarian country, which had not advanced much with the commercialization of agriculture. The landed nobility, supported by the urban bourgeoisie and the Catholic Church, dominated national and local politics (Preston 2006). In most provinces, the problem of land ownership remained acute well into the twentieth century (Seidman 2002). In the north and the center of the country, dwarf farmers' holdings and tenants' allotments could not provide cultivators with adequate living (Seidman 2011). In the south, the large estates (*latifundias*) employed thousands of landless day laborers (*braceros*), who represented the most volatile segment of the Spanish rural society. For decades, the Mediterranean provinces of Spain served a seat of rural radicalism congenial to anarchist and socialist ideas (Brenan 1990). In the 1930s, the

[9] The Comintern official, Arthur Stepanov, wrote, "There is no doubt that Spain is undergoing the same historical process begun in Russia in February 1917. The Party must learn to apply the tactic of the Bolsheviks; a brief transitory phase and then the soviets!" (cited in Payne 1970:193).

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unemployment rate among farmworkers soared to 40%. Thousands of *braceros* were involved in strikes, the number of strikes increased year after year. When the Republic was declared in 1931, the conditions in the southern countryside were extremely agitated, and there was fear of an outright peasant revolt (Payne 1970).

After Francisco Franco's mutiny in July 1936, the rural class conflict turned into a social revolution. The Decree of October 1936 gave peasants the right to farm land confiscated from those who supported the uprising. More than 300,000 Spanish peasants acquired land in this period. Rents were abolished and property records burned. By mid-1938, total confiscations amounted to more than one-third of the arable land in the provinces affected, which, incidentally, was more than the share of the redistributed land in the Russian civil war (about 25%). Spanish peasants and laborers joined the Communist Party, which became the largest party on the Left. By June 1937, agricultural workers and peasant proprietors made up about 56% of all party members (Payne 1970:240, 280).

Of course, acquisition of land had not placed most of the rural population automatically on the Republican side. Like in Russia, most Spanish agriculturalists preferred to keep away from fighting. Some rural proletarians were content to stay on their land and not fight for the Republic. Still, the situation in the Spanish countryside was quite different from Finland. Although the rural conditions varied across the country, in many provinces the distribution of land represented a serious problem. In the 1930s, millions of the rural poor welcomed the agrarian reform and, when the civil war had begun, joined the local militias to defend their gains.[10] But if a class configuration in the countryside was generally conducive to the revolutionary process, why did the Republicans suffer defeat?

The outcome of the Spanish civil war points, once again, to the crucial role of an external war in shaping the dynamic of the conflict. Let us return, for a moment, to the Russian revolution. By the end of 1917, Russia's dominant class was completely discredited and disorganized. Most of the bureaucratic institutions, including the army, were incapacitated. In 1936 Spain, the international and internal conditions were different. The civil war broke out in the time when there was no external war and a large part of the professional army remained fully operational. Although civilian institutions of the state fragmented and malfunctioned, the officer corps was neither decimated nor demoralized, retaining full control over the rank-and-file servicemen. In consequence, the army command was able to assume the role of an arbiter in the crisis. Franco's mutiny in July 1936 was carefully planned and skillfully executed. The army of almost 80,000 troops, directed by the professional and experienced officer corps, received material support from the Spanish middle class whose financial resources, largely untapped by the Republicans, allowed the procuring of vast supplies of food, supplies, weapons, and munitions (Seidman 2011).

Of course, the outcome of the struggle might have been different had the revolutionaries created an effective and well-coordinated army themselves. In fact, in the beginning of the conflict, prospects seemed good for the Republicans. Nominally,

[10] The republicans did not enjoy the universal support in the countryside. Most smallholders in Galicia, Old Castile, and Navarre, for example, joined the Nationalist side (Beevor 2006:124).

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their forces (almost 90,000 strong) outnumbered the Nationalist troops. The Republican government controlled 60% of the country's population, the main cities (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia), and the nation's industrial base concentrated in Catalonia, the Basque country, and Asturias. During the civil war, the Republicans spent as much finance as the Nationalists (Martin-Aceña, Martinez-Ruiz, and Pons 2012). However, the Popular Front government, dominated by civilian politicians and intellectuals, was slow in organizing resistance to Franco's offensive (Graham 2002). All military effort of the Republic in the early period of the civil war was based on local militias (mostly formed by trade unions) that typically were poorly organized, untrained, and undisciplined (Beevor 2006). In October 1936, the government began transforming militias into a regular, centrally controlled army. The corps of foreign volunteers known as the International Brigades arrived to defend the Republic. However, the process of forming the Popular Army lasted well into mid-1937. The anarchists' militias resisted centralization and refused to obey orders. Some local detachments were never incorporated into the Popular Army, thereby remaining under autonomous command. Most importantly, the critical moment was lost.

Another important implication of the fact that the civil war in Spain began in a time of peace was the opportunity of the Nationalist forces to receive massive international support. During the Russian civil war, European nations and the United States were unable to provide the Whites with substantial military and logistical aid until the fighting in Europe was over. In 1919, England and France shipped weapons, supplies, and provision to Kolchak and Denikin, but most of these resources arrived too late (Somin 1996). In Spain, Franco's troops benefited from military aid provided by Germany and Italy from the beginning. This help was important both in the first period of war (particularly the German airlift of Franco's troops from Africa to Spain) and during the decisive battles of 1937 and 1938. The Republicans received military assistance from the Soviet Union, which probably helped to prolong resistance but was unlikely to change the balance of the military forces favoring the Nationalist side. In short, the Popular Front was defeated due to the military superiority of the Nationalist side, not because of lack of support among the lower classes (Casanova 2010; Cordona 2006).

MOBILIZING PEASANTS: CHINA

After the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the Chinese society entered a period of interregnum, which involved a struggle for power among various political factions and provincial warlords, confounded by the encroachments of the imperialist powers. The pro-Republican political parties, the Kuomintang (KMT, formed in 1912) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, formed in 1921) called for national unity, economic progress, and social reform. Until 1927, the nationalists and the communists cooperated within the framework of the anti-imperialist United Front. In 1927, a leader of the KMT, Chiang Kai-shek, concerned with the growing influence of the CCP and their Russian advisers, turned against the partners in the coalition and organized a massacre of the communists and labor activists in Shanghai.

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This event marked the beginning of the bitter struggle for power between the KMT and the CCP, which lasted for more than 3 decades.

In the first phase of the conflict (1927–1937), the nationalists' reprisals forced the communists to leave cities and relocate to the rural areas where Mao Zedong and his followers attempted to win support among the rural poor. In 1934, the nationalist troops encircled the central CCP base in Jiangxi and forced the bulk of the communist forces to abandon it. A part of the CCP forces began its legendary retreat (the "Long March"), which ended 1 year later in the northern province of Shaanxi. In the mid-1930s, the strength of the CCP was at a low point. Chiang Kai-shek was about to launch a final "bandit extermination campaign." The Japanese invasion interfered with his plans. The War of Resistance (1937–1945), the second period of the KMT–CCP relations, became a turning point in the struggle for power in China. Chiang Kai-shek was forced to stop operations against the communists and form an anti-Japanese alliance with them. With the creation of the (second) United Front, the CCP was given a unique opportunity to reorganize and expand its ranks. During the war, the communist troops increased almost tenfold and the party membership more than tenfold. The party had become a major national force with large, effective, and battle-hardened armies. Despite the fact that the defeat of Japan opened a chance for political reconciliation, it was not achieved. Instead, the KMT–ÇCP competition entered the third stage, a civil war (1945–1949). At the beginning, the nationalists, who had reconquered most of the territories occupied by the Japanese, seemed to be winning. In 1947, however, the situation began to reverse. The communists were able to rely on military equipment and logistical assistance received from the Soviet Union and social support in the countryside. In 1947, the communist armies routed the KMT troops in Manchuria and began to advance in the mainland. In 1949, the KMT regime was defeated, Chiang Kai-shek and his entourage fled to Taiwan, and Mao Zedong declared the People's Republic of China.

As this brief recount suggests, the political contest between the KMT and the CCP was "nested" in and affected by international conflicts (Paine 2012). First, its dynamic was decisively changed by the regional conflict, the Sino-Japanese war. Had the Japanese not begun a full-scale invasion to China in 1937, the fate of the Communist Party might have been different. Second, the entry to the war by the United States and later the Soviet Union placed the internal conflict in China in the context of the global war. Had the Nationalist regime been able to survive the war without U.S. assistance and diversion of a large part of the Japanese troops for fighting the war in the Pacific—it is difficult to speculate. It is also far from clear whether the communists would have been able to fight effectively during the civil war if the Soviets had not established initial control over Manchuria and left large stockpiles of weapons to them.[11]

Although it is generally accepted that the mobilization of peasants during and after the second Sino-Japanese war helped the communists win (Bianco 2001), scholarly interpretations of the exact peasants' role in the revolution vary (see

[11] Russia supplied the communists with 1,436 artillery pieces, 8,989 machine guns, 11,052 grenade launchers, 3,078 trucks, 14,777 horses, 21,084 supply vehicles, and 287 command cars (Paine 2012:245).

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reviews in Feng and Goodman 2000; Hartford and Goldstein 1992). Some researchers view the entire transformation as a genuine peasant revolution. The only thing that the peasants needed, according to this argument, was effective political leadership, which was provided by the CCP (e.g., Thaxton 1983). Other studies have examined the peasants–communists alliance in the framework of social exchange, in which communists provided the rural population with protection and the public goods, whereas peasants supplied the party with recruits and resources (e.g., Levine 1987, 1989). Still other analyses have highlighted the mass mobilization policies of the CCP and the peasants' compliance with these policies (e.g., Chen 1986; Wou 1994). Meantime, as Kathleen Hartford (1980) suggested, the party's ability to obtain compliance from the peasants rested on all three bases: support of a limited number of rural activists; *ad hoc* support of particular groups or individuals of particular policies that they deemed beneficial to their interests (i.e., an exchange); and mobilization work involving direct or indirect coercion to those who would not comply on other grounds.

Such an interpretation, if placed in a temporal context, is consistent with historical evidence (Bianco 2001). In the post-imperial China, despite persistence of rural protests against taxes and exorbitant rents, there were relatively few incidents of spontaneous land occupations and other forms of autonomous redistributive action (Eastman 1984). The division of the rural population into landed nobility and peasantry was less clear cut than in Russia. Many gentry lived in the villages; the boundaries between minor gentry and rich peasants were blurred. Rural elites were connected with the rest of the population by patron–client relations, kinship ties, and sectarian associations producing cohesive, hierarchically integrated communities largely impervious to external influences. Until the rural authority structures were weakened, the social base of the communists remained limited (Wou 1994).

It was the war with Japan that changed the situation in the countryside (Gatu 2008). The outbreak of war had shattered the parochial world of the Chinese village. Millions of peasants were drafted to the KMT armies. In the provinces occupied by the invaders, the Japanese destroyed the KMT's bureaucratic structures, undermined the power of the traditional elites, and created a power vacuum underneath their major administrative outposts. These social dislocations provided a unique opportunity for communist penetration. It was not easy to win peasants' compliance because the party had to compete with other authority structures (the KMT, the pro-Japanese "puppet" government, local bullies, etc.). The fact that the CCP was able to operate at the intra-village level and meet the local needs of assisting in protection, rent and tax reduction, education, and women's empowerment provided advantage to its cadres (Benton 1999; Chen 1986; Keating 1997; Wou 1994). From 1937 to 1945, the CCP army expanded from 40,000 to over 1 million and the party itself grew from 40,000 to 2.7 million (Wu 1992:79).

In 1945, the KMT–CCP military contest recommenced, yet the underlying political and economic conditions had changed (see Lew 2011, Lynch 2010, Pepper 1999, and Westad 2003 for detailed accounts). The KMT still remained the dominant force in China, but the CCP had returned from the margins to the center of national politics. The northeast region of Manchuria became the initial

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battleground between KMT and CCP forces. Neither side had a strong position in the region previously controlled by the Japanese, although the fact that the Soviet army occupied Manchuria for several months and left a vast amount of weapons and munitions to the communists definitely helped the latter. More importantly, as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) ensconced in the region, the party deployed its time-tested strategy of securing local support through rent and tax reduction campaigns and cooperation with the rural population (Levine 1987, 1989). Furthermore, according to the 1947 Agrarian Law, the land of landlords and rich peasants was to be transferred to village peasants' associations to be distributed equally among all peasants. In the course of the civil war in the northeast, the communists recruited about a million men into their military forces. Families of the recruits received preferential treatment with respect to the distribution of land, tools, priority access to agricultural loans, free school tuition, and provision of substitute labor by the local authorities (Levine 1987). By the end of 1947, at least 60% of the peasants were pro-communist (Chassin 1965:162). Of course, cooperation with the local population did not automatically render strategic advantage to the PLA, but it definitely helped to sustain effectiveness and morale of the communist troops.

The KMT armies, on the other side, were not able to draw on local sources of manpower, provision, and materiel and had to be supplied from elsewhere. That circumstance would not have represented a fatal problem had the KMT secured a solid economic base and broad social support in the mainland China. In this respect, however, Chiang Kai-shek confronted serious problems. Industrial production had virtually stopped. The rural economy, undermined by recruitment campaigns, unbearable taxes, and natural disasters, experienced a deep crisis. Peasants evaded the KMT's exactions depriving the national government of grain, money, and men. In 1947, for example, the government was able to collect only 57% of the amount of grain collected in 1942, which was far below its needs (Eastman 1984). Lacking a strong base in the Manchurian countryside, the KMT had chosen a strategy of capturing and controlling big cities. That allowed the PLA to keep control over the rural areas, interrupt railroad transportation, and encircle KMT garrisons in the cities. The nationalist troops suffered from shortages of provision, supplies, and munitions. Their discipline and morale declined. From June 1946 to January 1949, the nationalists lost 5 million soldiers, three-quarters of whom defected to the communist side (Paine 2012:258).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of four civil wars (in Russia, Finland, Spain, and China) presented in this article was not intended to consider all the innumerable factors that may have affected the outcomes of these conflicts. We wished to move beyond particularities—sometimes very important ones—that either did not stand the test of comparative inquiry or could be traced down to more general factors. Some researchers of the Russian civil war, for instance, highlighted the fact that the Bolsheviks controlled the geographic heartland of the country with its superior human and military resources (e.g., Mawdsley 2005:274; Pipes 1995: 274), but we should keep in

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mind that political control of the central locations had not prevented the defeats of the Finnish Reds, the Spanish Republicans, and the Chinese KMT. Some scholars viewed the internal strife within the Popular Front in Spain as a major factor of its ultimate demise (e.g., Bolloten 1991), but the revolutionary movement in 1917 Russia also represented a very heterogeneous and internally fragmented political alliance until Russia's continuing participation in World War I discredited the moderates and made the Bolsheviks the sole champions of the people's cause. One may wonder to what extent factionalism and divisiveness of the Spanish Left may be attributed to absence of a polarizing and centralizing impact of total war, as it was in Russia and China. Some writings suggested that strategic errors made by Chiang Kai-shek had determined the outcome of the Chinese civil war (e.g., Westad 2003), but other accounts indicated that most of the time the Nationalists followed strategies that were appropriate to the conditions they had faced (e.g., Van de Ven 2003).

In this research we sought to identify those causal configurations that could have been consistently important (if not decisive) across several paradigmatic cases. We argued that two conditions (a state breakdown in a mass mobilization war and an unresolved agrarian problems, as shown in Table II) were the primary mechanisms that led to the revolutionaries' victories. A protracted mass mobilization war undermined national economies, created massive social dislocations, increased class polarization, and generated mass protests from below. A defeat in such a war delegitimized the existing state authorities and other institutions of the dominant class. In some cases, such as Russia (1914–1917) and China (1937–1945), war resulted in either disintegration or serious weakening of the core institution of the state, the army. In such situations, the radical socialist parties, the marginal political groups in the beginning of war, were able to gain massive support among the poor classes and rise to the position of the primary contenders for authority. In their bid for state power, the revolutionary actors relied, in a most direct and immediate way, on

Table II. Conditions and outcomes of the civil wars in Russia, Finland, Spain, and China

	Russia	Finland	Spain	China
State breakdown	Full-scale involvement in mass mobilization war; total state breakdown	Limited involvement in war; no mass mobilization; persistence of local institutions	Absence of mass mobilization war; mutiny in the military forces; state authority fragmentation	Full-scale involvement in mass mobilization war; nearly total state breakdown
Unresolved rural problem in the countryside	Preeminence of gentry socially separated from peasantry; disproportionate distribution of land; widespread rural unrest	Absence of noble landownership problem; predominance of small holdings; some rural unrest among tenants and laborers	Predominance of larger landlords and polarization among rural population in the south; widespread rural unrest in the south	Preeminence of gentry and rich peasants mitigated by local hierarchical ties; rural unrest concerning taxes and rent payments
Civil war outcome	Victory of the revolutionaries	Defeat of the revolutionaries	Defeat of the revolutionaries	Victory of the revolutionaries

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thousands of the rank-and-file soldiers who had been mobilized for combat. The experience in war provided them with the indispensable skills of coordinated action, strict discipline, endurance, and knowledge of how to use arms. In Russia and China, large revolutionary armies, integrated by the centralized command, military discipline, and political guidance, were able to defeat the counterrevolutionary forces.

In the absence of prior world war and social dislocations caused by it, the dominant class was able to suppress the popular radical movements. The Spanish civil war provided a vivid example of successful counterrevolutionary mobilization led by General Franco. Despite the fact that the Popular Front government enjoyed popular support, both in the cities and the countryside, it was not able to create a military force that could match the nationalist troops. Politically, the Popular Front remained fragmented into a number of political parties and trade union confederations, each with its own armed militia. The Republican forces fought heroically but had been weakened by low centralization, poor discipline, and lack of military experience.

Fragmentation of armed forces due to defeat in war was a necessary but not sufficient condition. Even in the most extreme cases of the military–political disorganization, such as Russia's breakdown in 1917, the ruling class was able to gather and deploy troops to combat the radical challengers. Most of the urban middle classes.

Socially and politically associated with the old order, supported the counterrevolutionary forces. If the revolutionaries failed to forge a major military force, they would have been defeated. The only social class that could help radicals in this critical moment was the peasantry.

The possession of land was a life-and-death issue in many peasant societies. If distribution of land was manifestly inequitable, there would be a strong potential for redistribution of land and peasants' support for a revolution. If, on the contrary, a land issue was not *the* major social problem, the smallholders would either stay neutral or lend their support to the counterrevolutionary forces. In Finland, the urban-based radicals had nothing to offer to the farmers as whole, because a third of them already owned their land, and the more affluent farmers did not see any reason to support the radicals. Although many agricultural workers and crofters did join the revolutionaries, the massive social support for radical policies has failed to materialize in the Finnish countryside.

Neither the Russian revolution nor the Chinese revolution may be understood properly outside the context of the mass mobilization wars of the first half of the twentieth century. In either country, war and a subsequent revolution should be viewed as one continuum of crisis (Holquist 2002). The fact that the communist organizations operated in predominantly rural societies turned to their advantage and provided them with a unique social ally. Politically and ideologically, these transformations were far from being peasant revolutions. The struggle was directed by the political actors whose ultimate goals were alien to most peasants. But the peasants were not bystanders either. Once they benefited from the revolutionary policies, such as redistribution of land and liberation from their old oppressors, the farmers would defend their gains and support their benefactors. In this way, the

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peasantry became the political force whose aggregate choice tipped the power balance in favor of the revolutionary contenders.

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