

IMPERIAL RUSSIAN STATE COUNCIL, 1902 BACKGROUND GUIDE

This paper aims to give you some background into the issues that face this Council. It will begin with a brief history of the Romanov family, beginning in the 19th Century. After a short discussion of the tenures and temperaments of the previous two Tsars, there will be a pithy review of Russian foreign policy in Europe, the Near East, and the Far East. This will then attempt to track the changes in protectorates and annexations, as well as European alliances. Finally, this paper will conclude with a briefing on the domestic affairs. The briefing will discuss various rebellions, in addition to investigating the urbanization and industrialization of Russian society. This paper is meant to give you a general idea of what issues you should further research and not be your only source of information before our first meeting. The Tsar urges you to prepare well for your first reception with him, lest he be disappointed with your performance and the advice you give during these important times that plague our great and glorious nation.

Romanov Family History

For the purposes of this paper, I will start the history of the Romanov family with Alexander II's coronation upon the death of his father, Nicholas I, and the conclusion of the Crimean War. Alexander II became Tsar in 1855, as per Russian tradition he was not coronated until a year after his father's death and was therefore coronated in August 1856, inheriting a sad state of affairs. The Crimean War ended at Sevastopol in August, showing weakness in the foundation of Russian society. The pedestal that the Russian Empire had been placed on after the Napoleonic Wars came crashing down. Upon signing the Treaty of Paris in 1856 that ended the Crimean War, Alexander II had to acknowledge the shift in the European power hierarchy. The

Congress System that had come about at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars was no longer useful and France was becoming a power on the European continent once again.

Alexander II did not only inherit international troubles. Before his death Nicholas I warned his son about attempts being made on his life. There was a movement afoot in Russia to liberalize the government and society. Alexander II saw the need to liberalize in order to perpetuate the government. In December 1855, he loosened censorship controls, abolishing the Supreme Censorship Committee. Upon his coronation, Alexander II also eliminated controls over universities that had been instituted in 1848. Furthermore, Alexander II encouraged international travel and foreign trade, issuing passports and encouraging the creation of joint-stock companies. Lastly, Alexander II granted amnesty for political prisoners. Nine thousand men were released from police surveillance.ⁱ

Tsar Alexander II is known best for his most liberal reform: the emancipation of the serfs; it is this groundbreaking reform that earned him the honorary title Tsar-Liberator. There is evidence that the Tsar considered this as early as his coronation, in 1856 he appointed the Secret Committee on Peasant Affairs, to evaluate the consequences of liberating the serfs. The legislation that would emancipate the serfs took five years to complete.ⁱⁱ Tsar Alexander II signed the Emancipation Manifesto February 19, 1861.ⁱⁱⁱ The manifesto liberated the serfs requiring them to buy land from their former masters. The serfs rejoiced at this measure, not realizing they were now obligated to pay poll tax and lost use of the manor forests and meadows they previously had access to. Meanwhile landowners complained they lost one third of their lands to serfs as well as their labor force.^{iv} Alexander II was not principally committed to the cause of emancipation of the serfs, rather he believed that their emancipation would help him

achieve his goal of elevating Russia to its pre-Crimean War greatness. His aim was never to improve the daily life of his subjects, but to expand and strengthen his empire.

Alexander II believed strongly in the autocracy of the Russian Tsar. Faced with a constitution issued to him by nobles attempting to regain strength and power after the Emancipation Manifesto, he refused to acknowledge the very possibility of a constitution for twenty-five years. In general, Alexander II was not as liberal as he first seemed. He brutally suppressed the Polish uprising in 1863 after refusing the Poles a constitution. He arrested liberal thinkers and fired liberal statesman and ministers. After 1866 the activities of the Third Section, the Russian secret police, vastly increased as its head, Chief of Police Shuvalov gained greater influence over the Tsar.

This tension between the realistic and therefore liberal side of the Tsar and his autocratic traditional tendencies continued until his murder in 1881. The Tsar was leaning towards allowing a basic constitution in the weeks before his death. The plan instituted a General Commission with a subcommission for finance and one for administration under the State Council that had representatives from towns. The Tsar planned to make the project public after a meeting with his Council of Ministers on March 4.^v That meeting never took place; on March 1st a group of rebels murdered the Tsar. The first bomb exploded next to the carriage, not hurting the Tsar. The Tsar immediately exited the carriage to look after his wounded guards, only for another bomb to be thrown. The second did not miss its target. The Tsar died that afternoon at the Winter Palace from blood loss.

Alexander III, was not the eldest of Alexander II's sons, his older brother died of meningitis in 1865. Because Alexander III was never expected to be made Tsar, his education and training was not satisfactory for that of a Tsarevich. Alexander III's immediate duties lay in

his father's funeral, his coronation ceremonies, and the prosecution and execution of his father's murderers. He showed no mercy with his father's murderers, ordering that they be hanged. The Tsar was even less liberal than his father, believing that the liberal reforms of his father were unsuccessful in satisfying the people and staving off his murder. Alexander III was a passionate autocrat, thinking that the purpose of the State Council was to endorse the projects he and his ministers conceived of. Needless to say the Tsar abandoned his father's General Commission plan. Staunchly opposed to a constitution, he reevaluated all of his father's reforms, repealing those that were even developed by constitutionalists.

Alexander III shared his father's ardent patriotism. The Tsar ordered that the Russian language was mandatory in schools. Speaking German was disallowed in the court. His policies were designed to promote peace and prosperity throughout Russia. Alexander III often grew impatient with the slow pace with which they were enacted. Alexander III reshuffled cabinet ministers and statesman, promoting men he saw as "real Russians". Alexander III's desires at achieving Russianness did not cease with language and ministers, but included religion. His reign marked an especially dark and dangerous time for Jews. Brutality against Jews became respectable. Jews were the victims of revolutionary agitation who targeted them for their supposed financial acumen. Furthermore, Jews were blamed for a conspiracy that led to the Russian loss in the Russo-Turkish War. The Procurator of the Holy Synod declared that one third of all the Jews must die, another third must emigrate and the last third should be converted and assimilated^{vi}.

Nonetheless Alexander III continued some of his father's reforms. He began the elimination of the poll tax, implemented laws on peasant migration and instituted state mortgage banks. Alexander III also controversially limited the spending habits of the royal family. While

this occurred to much chagrin amongst the Grand Dukes and Duchesses, none opposed the Tsar in his measures. This edict was much lauded by the nobility in St. Petersburg. Some of Tsar Alexander III's reforms ended in failure; his attempts at changing the system of promotion in the Russian army and navy were unsuccessful. His most trusted advisor stoked his reactionary tendencies: the Procurator of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev.

Alexander III was an impressive man. He was thirty-six years old at his coronation and towered at six foot three inches tall.^{vii} His strength is that of myths, stories tell of him tearing whole decks of cards in half and bending iron poker or silver plates.^{viii} He bore resemblance to a Russian peasant, an appearance he encouraged by wearing simple trousers and tunics. His daily routine was rigorous, insisting upon meals of Russian food, cold water showers and firm cots for his children. The Tsar enjoyed sessions of manual labor, felling trees and shoveling snows. He died young at age fifty in 1894, the result of the worsening of his nephritis. As he grew sicker, he suddenly became emaciated and forgetful, a far cry from the powerful decisive emperor he had been. He left his empire to his eldest son, Nicholas II, who no one, not even Nicholas II himself, thought was fit or ready to rule.

Upon the death of his father, Nicholas II famously cried to his brother-in-law Grand Duke Alexander, "What is going to happen to me... to all of Russia? I am not prepared to be a Tsar. I never wanted to be one. I know nothing of the business of ruling."^{ix} Nicholas II was young, aged twenty-six when he was coronated.^x Not yet married, his parents had only recently approved of his engagement to Princess Alix of Hesse-Darmstadt. His four uncles the Grand Dukes took immediate control over the state of affairs, advising Nicholas II. They urged him to move up the date of his wedding which was planned for the following spring and refused to allow him and his

bride a small wedding at the family compound in Livadia in the Crimea. Nicholas II often differed in opinion from his uncles but was too afraid to oppose them.

Nicholas II planned to continue in the mode of his father who he greatly idolized. His stated aim was to approve projects that his father would have consented to. Like his father and grandfather, Nicholas II believed that he was ordained by God to be Tsar of all Russians. He was conservative not only his staunch absolutism, but in his family relations as well. He believed that his uncles and siblings should put the family ahead of personal happiness and greatly frowned upon the scandals that plagued his family, such as divorce and marriage with commoners. Nicholas II suffered personally from such scars upon the Romanov name. Despite his injury in such circumstances family politics and the influence of his mother and uncles always prevented him from out right ostracizing family members.

Upon his coronation Nicholas II had no formal domestic policy. In addition to the Grand Dukes his father's advisor Pobedonostsev, the Minister of Finance Sergei Witte and the the Minister of Internal Affairs Goremykin held the Tsar's ear. Minister Witte's modernization plans were implemented in the late 1890's.^{xi} They included the introduction of the gold standard, opening the economy to foreign investment, mobilizing domestic resources through indirect taxation and exploitation of government monopolies, and protective tariffs. Furthermore Witte and the Tsar attempted to find new markets in the Far and Middle East to sell their new industrial products.

Foreign Policy of the Tsars

The foreign policy of Russia remained consistent throughout the history of the Tsar's. Legend states that Peter the Great's dying words urged his heirs and successors to achieve world domination, or more simply annex Constantinople and India.^{xii} The Russians long desired a

warm water port in the Balkans. These two principles dictated a Russian foreign policy that otherwise fluctuated with the status of alliances in Europe.

Alexander II's entry into foreign affairs was made immediately upon his coronation. He inherited the Crimean War, which by the time of his father's death was practically over, after the Russian disaster at Sevastopol. Russia was forced to accept the Vienna Four Points. They included the full demilitarization and neutralization of the Black Sea, as well as the return of southern Bessarabia to Moldavia, a cession that removed Russia from the shores of the Danube. The straits of Dardanelles and Bosphorus Strait remained closed to all warships. The stimulus of the war, the status of Christians in the Balkans, was solved by giving all of the European powers responsibility to protect them. The Crimean War upset the balance of power in Europe that had persisted since the Napoleonic Wars. The myth of Russia as the strong military imperial power came crumbling down. The Russian army that had liberated Paris from Napoleon fell to the British and French. The next fifteen years would be dictated by this new Europe.

Furthering the new state of affairs in Europe was the formation of several nation-states. While Italy and Poland also unified the most important of these formations is that of Germany. Alexander III failed to foresee the ramifications of the unification of Germany and the boundaries created by the Treaty of Frankfurt. The Russian government continually allowed the Prussians to enlarge their power and territory. During the Franco-Prussian War, the Russians even applied pressure to the southern German states to persuade them to cooperate with Prussia. Alexander II then used his alliance with the Prussians to re-negotiate the Black Sea clauses of the Treaty of Paris; the new clauses allowed both Russia and Turkey to build fleets on the Black Sea and stripped Britain of her advantage gained at the conclusion of the war. After Germany was

united under Prussian leadership, the Three Emperor's League was formed between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia in October 1873.^{xiii}

Alexander II in Central Asia

The 1860's marked an expansion in Russian foreign policy in the Middle and Far East. The Russians sold Alaska to the Americans in 1867, deciding to further consolidate their interests in Asia. They signed the Treaty of Shimoda with Japan, gaining commercial access to three Japanese ports. Annexation occurred even more rapidly in Central Asia; in 1865 Mikhail Cherniaev took Tashkent, in 1868 General Kaufmann annexed Samarkand, in 1869 Bokhara and Kokand became Russian protectorates, in 1873 Khiva too became a protectorate, and in 1876 Kokand was formally annexed.^{xiv} Alexander II's imperial ambitions were great, attempting to remedy Russia's tarnished reputation after the Crimean War.

The Panslavic movement in the Balkans precipitated the Russo-Turkish War. Peasants in Hercegovina opened the eastern question when they began rebelling in 1875.^{xv} The Russian government was compelled to come to the aid of its Slavic brothers. Britain, who had the largest stake in the continuation of the Ottoman Empire, was a constant threat to the Russians. Their final march on Constantinople, after the signing of the armistice on January 31, 1878, was halted because of the movement of the British fleet.^{xvi} The Congress of Berlin, the agreement that ended the war, largely perpetuated the status quo in the Near East. Much of the conquered Turkish lands during the war were returned and Bessarbia, Kars, Ardahan, and Batum were given to Russia. Bulgaria was split into three parts. Montenegro, Serbia and Romania were all enlarged; Romania doubling in size.^{xvii} The treaty was a gross failure for Russian diplomacy, practically stripping Russia of its victory. Even as a victor the Russo-Turkish War, like the Crimean, demonstrated Russian military weakness and mismanagement, matched in the Russo-Turkish

War by the grosser military weakness and mismanagement of the Ottoman Empire. Most of the resentment at the closure of the war lay not with Russian generals or diplomats, but Otto von Bismarck and the Germans, who the Russians felt had not sufficiently supported them at the Congress.

This Germanophobic attitude was embraced by Alexander III. With Alexander III, the Three Emperor's Alliance began to fall apart. Alexander III forged a new alliance, this time with an old foe, France. The Franco-Russian Alliance was forged mainly out of necessity; they both faced the same political enemies and were both diplomatically isolated from the rest of Europe. Alexander III desired an alliance with France because they acknowledged the need for French aid in realizing a Pan-Slavic nation, while France recognized they could only achieve supremacy on the European continent with the destruction of Germany, a project which required Russian aid. Formalization of the new alliance was slow to occur, beginning in letters in 1891 and not attaining the status of a military pact until 1892.^{xviii}

After the Second Afghan War concluded in 1879, Afghanistan was intended as a neutral buffer state but in actuality was a British protectorate. For the first time Russia and Britain now shared a border. The two nations agreed to submit to a boundary commission. Both powers agreed to submit to arbitration and in September 1885 an agreement was made.^{xix} Most of the territory was granted to Russia but the Russians agreed to recognize British dominance in Afghanistan. Ten years later in 1895 a final settlement was agreed upon that created a strip of Afghan territory to function as a buffer between Russia and India.^{xx}

Meanwhile the Russians were beginning to have new troubles in the Balkans. Their greatest strategic advantage from the Congress of Berlin was the creation of the Russian satellite, Bulgaria. The Bulgarians it seemed, did not want to trade one master for another and were

reluctant to allow the Russians to obtain control over all their affairs. In 1886 Bulgarian nationalists and the Bulgarian prince unified Bulgarian territory.^{xxi} Russian agents in turn stimulated a mutiny among the Bulgarian army and were able to kidnap the Bulgarian prince. Unfortunately, the Tsar's plan was unsuccessful because the new regime was equally resistant to Russian pressure. Russian army officers were forced to withdraw from Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Crisis further heightened tensions with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which objected to Russia's continuous interference in the region. Alexander III paid little attention to the complaints of the Austrian ministers, famously knotting a silver fork with his bare hands and throwing it at the ministers, declaring that is what he would do to their army corps, should they enter Bulgaria.^{xxii}

Nicholas II inherited the French alliance, an alliance so secret he had no knowledge of it until his accession to the throne. Nicholas II perpetuated the alliance and even strengthened it; in 1896 he visited France, only to have the visit reciprocated by the French president a year later.^{xxiii} The alliance was further strengthened when the agreement was enlarged to state that it was of an indefinite duration and included the aim of preserving the equilibrium of power, rather than the previous goal of preserving peace. Nicholas did not allow the French alliance to hinder his relations with other European powers. He felt a kinship to his cousin Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany and they kept a close correspondence and often discussed politics in their letters. The last great international attempt of Nicholas's career to date has been the attempt at a disarmament conference in 1899.^{xxiv} Nicholas II knew Russia could not compete with the weapons technology of her neighbors and so attempted to limit their production, he was able to convince governments to attend the conference at The Hague, but no agreement was signed.

Internal Struggles in Russia

This section will start slightly earlier than the others had, first discussing the Decembrist Revolt in 1825. The Decembrist Uprising occurred because of a confusion about who would be the next Tsar after the death of Alexander I. When Alexander I died childless in 1825 of a strange illness, the next oldest son of Paul I, Constantine, was called upon to accede the throne. However, Constantine renounced his rights to the throne and recommended his younger brother Nicholas. Meanwhile a group of conspirators that had been planning to overthrow the government and present the Senate with a constitution took advantage of the interregnum. On December 14, 1825, the day the Senate, Synod and Russian army took the oath of allegiance to their new Tsar, the uprising took place.^{xxv} A few troops were convinced not to take the oath of allegiance and during the attempts at intervening in the oath, a number of casualties occurred. Nicholas I decidedly and definitively put down the rebellion, surrounding them in Senate Square and shooting salvo at them, using a canister shot.^{xxvi} At the sound of the cannons, the rebels panicked and fled.

During the reign of Alexander II, a different group of revolutionaries emerged at universities in Russia. These students rejected the traditional values and authority structures and were therefore named nihilists. Alexander II attempted to halt these student uprisings with conservative measures that only incited the nihilists more. After riots at the Kazan University in 1861, Alexander II replaced his Minister of Education with the conservative Putiatin, only to remove Putiatin after more violent demonstrations resulted in several severely wounded administrators.^{xxvii} Like the Decembrists, the nihilists desired a constitution for Russia, the one thing it seemed Alexander II would never give them.

Nicholas I had folded Poland into the Russian Empire, ceasing its existence as an independent state. Alexander II was under the impression that the Poles caused greater problems

than benefits and so in the spirit of his reforms, granted reforms in Poland. Alexander II allowed the Poles greater self-governance allowing them the ability to elect their provincial and local assemblies. Unfortunately, these early attempts at restoring autonomy in Poland were unsuccessful in staving off revolts. By 1863 the Polish uprising had spread into the northwest provinces of Russia. In 1864, Alexander II made agrarian reforms, giving peasants land in exchange for a payment.^{xxviii} This was successful in removing the peasant support of the uprising that had been occurring in Poland since 1860. Despite the liberality of his reforms Alexander refused to give the Poles a constitution or national assembly.

The nihilists that plagued Alexander II's domestic troubles earlier in his reign evolved into a more radical and dangerous group, the Will of the People. The Will of the People wanted democracy, freedom of speech, and a classless society. The Will of the People was formed by an unusual duo, a daughter of an aristocratic family, Sophia Perovskaya, and a man of peasant origin, Andrew Zelyabov. They believed that if Alexander II was murdered, he could be replaced with a more liberal leader who would enact the reforms they believed Russia needed. In August 1880 the Executive Committee of the People's Will announced the death sentence for Alexander II. Thereafter, several attempts were made on the Tsar's life. The first occurred in late 1879 when Zelyabov and Perovskaya attempted to blow up the Imperial Train, they accidentally targeted the train following the Imperial Train with its luggage.^{xxix} In 1880 the People's Will blew up the dining room in the Winter Palace, injuring fifty-six and killing eleven; much to the disappointment of the rebels, the Tsar was late for dinner and not in the dining room at the time of the blast.^{xxx} In the end the Will of the People were successful in murdering Alexander II, what they did not realize was that his son, largely disgusted with the Will of the People, would be much more reactionary than Alexander II was.

Meanwhile Russia was becoming an industrial nation. With the rise of industry, urbanization was also afoot. Furthermore, the large expanse of Russia required a complex and competent railway system. In 1891, construction began on the Trans-Siberian railroad, it would begin in the eastern suburbs of Moscow and venture more than four thousand miles to the Pacific Ocean.^{xxxix} During this period railroads were being constructed faster in Russia than in any other European country. The railways changed more than just the appearance of the landscape; travelers could now board a train in St. Petersburg and be in Moscow just a day later.^{xxxix} In addition to its rapid railway growth, Russia was quickly industrializing. Russia's industry grew faster than industry in Britain and France, but its per capita industrial production was still far behind. Unfortunately, Russia's food supply was tenuous. Much of the food supply was provided by the peasant farmers. When droughts and bad weather plagued the Russian countryside, the peasants starved, sustaining themselves on thatch from their roofs and the charity of the nobles in their area. Government education of the peasants on better agricultural and cultivation methods was limited. In 1891 such a famine occurred after a poor harvest and an especially bad distribution of the harvest by the government.^{xxxix} Bad weather could compound other agricultural issues such as poor farming technique and distribution of the harvest, leading to disaster.

Conclusion

I hope these discussions have been illuminating¹. For more information please reference the joint background guide. The Tsar looks forward to his first meeting with you and hopes together we can continue the reign of this great nation. Long live Tsar Nicholas II, Father of the Russian people!

¹ Note from your friendly Undersecretary General: Please make fun of your chair, Ms Kate Berner for using this absurd line.

Endnotes

- ⁱ Raleigh, Donald J. The Emperors and Empresses of Russia. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996. Page 307.
- ⁱⁱ Van der Kiste, John. The Romanovs 1818-1959. Glouchertshire: Sutton Publishing, 1998. Page 27.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. Page 28.
- ^{iv} Ibid. Page 32.
- ^v Raleigh, Donald J. The Emperors and Empresses of Russia. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996. Page 330.
- ^{vi} Van der Kiste, John. The Romanovs 1818-1959. Glouchertshire: Sutton Publishing, 1998. Page 105.
- ^{vii} Ibid. Page 101.
- ^{viii} Massie, Robert K. Nicholas and Alexandra. New York: A Dell Book, 1967. Page 9.
- ^{ix} Ibid. Page 43.
- ^x Ibid. Page 43.
- ^{xi} Raleigh, Donald J. The Emperors and Empresses of Russia. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996. Page 378.
- ^{xii} Hopkirk, Peter. The Great Game. New York: Kodhansha International, 1994. Page 20.
- ^{xiii} Jelavich, Barbara. A Century of Russian Foreign Policy: 1814-1914. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1964. Page 159.
- ^{xiv} Ibid. Page 169.
- ^{xv} Ibid. Page 175.
- ^{xvi} Ibid. Page 181.
- ^{xvii} Ibid. Page 184.
- ^{xviii} Ibid. Page 219.
- ^{xix} Ibid. Page 200.
- ^{xx} Ibid. Page 200.
- ^{xxi} Van der Kiste, John. The Romanovs 1818-1959. Glouchertshire: Sutton Publishing, 1998. Page 131.
- ^{xxii} Ibid. Page 132.
- ^{xxiii} Jelavich, Barbara. A Century of Russian Foreign Policy: 1814-1914. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1964. Page 223.
- ^{xxiv} Ibid. Page 223.
- ^{xxv} Raleigh, Donald J. The Emperors and Empresses of Russia. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996. Page 267.
- ^{xxvi} Ibid. Page 269.
- ^{xxvii} Van der Kiste, John. The Romanovs 1818-1959. Glouchertshire: Sutton Publishing, 1998. Page 32.
- ^{xxviii} Raleigh, Donald J. The Emperors and Empresses of Russia. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996. Page 315.

^{xxix} Van der Kiste, John. The Romanovs 1818-1959. Glouchertshire: Sutton Publishing, 1998. Page 79.

^{xxx} Ibid. Page 80.

^{xxxi} Massie, Robert K. Nicholas and Alexandra. New York: A Dell Book, 1967. Page 4.

^{xxxii} Ibid. Page 4.

^{xxxiii} Raleigh, Donald J. The Emperors and Empresses of Russia. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996. Page 365.