

Tsar nicholas ii of russia and the start of the 1904-1905 russo- japanese war



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To What Extent was Tsar Nicholas II of Russia Responsible for the Start of the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War?

Section 1 - Identification and Evaluation of Sources

This investigation will answer the question, to what extent was Tsar Nicholas II of Russia responsible for the start of the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War?

This question is important because this failure of the Russian government added additional turmoil to the growing rebellion that culminated in the Russian Revolution of 1917. This socialist revolution initiated the threat of communism that dominated international politics throughout the mid-to-late 20th century, and thus it is important to learn about any event that may have helped cause this revolution. The scope of this investigation will be 1900-1905 Russia, analyzing Tsar Nicholas' policies and relations towards the Japanese, as well as a brief analysis of the Japanese relations towards Russia.

Rotem Kowner, *Historical Dictionary of the Russo-Japanese War*^[1]

The purpose of this source is to bring increased public attention to the Russo-Japanese War and its lasting impacts because Kowner believes it is a crucial part of history. This purpose somewhat limits the book as Kowner may attempt to make the war more interesting by changing details of conflicts or causes in efforts to garner public awareness, but it is still valuable as Kowner wishes to tell the public as many of the details of the war as possible. This dictionary consists of many entries for events and people that significantly influenced the war, providing value as it has descriptive accounts from various perspectives to help form an investigation on the <https://assignbuster.com/tsar-nicholas-ii-of-russia-and-the-start-of-the-1904-1905-russo-japanese-war/>

origin of the war. Nevertheless, the purpose somewhat limits the book as Kowner may attempt to make the war more interesting by changing details in efforts to garner public awareness. The origin of this source is that it was written by an Israeli historian who has written many books on various aspects of the Russo-Japanese War, as well as majored in East Asian studies. While Kowner is clearly well-educated in this matter — adding value to the source — the source is limited in that he can not provide an insider view of either empire as successfully as a Japanese or Russian historian who lived through the conflict could.

Sidney B. Fay, *The Kaiser's Secret Negotiations with the Tsar, 1904-1905* ^[2]

The purpose of this source is to bring increased attention to the secret telegrams sent between Nicholas II and Wilhelm II and the incredible impact these communications had on Nicholas' policy. This source consists of numerous telegrams sent between the two men and the author's analysis of how each correspondent thought of the telegrams. The origin of this source is that it was written by an accredited U. S. historian of the 20th century who taught history courses at Harvard and Yale, adding value to our source as he is clearly intelligent. However, the source is limited as the typical focus of Fay's studies is World War 1, and he may not be as familiar with the Russo-Japanese War. The purpose adds value to the source since it shows us the personal opinions of Nicholas II in the relevant time period, but the source is limited since Nicholas II could occasionally lie to Wilhelm II in attempt to garner German support. This source was only published in 1918, relatively

close to the war, so it would be difficult for the author to decipher what is sincere of Nicholas II telegrams.

Section 2: Investigation

Most historians agree that the Russo-Japanese War was not solely caused by Tsar Nicholas II, but instead was a combination of numerous factors present in the late 19th and early 20th century. During this time, Japan was in the process of rapidly modernizing due to the 1868 Meiji Restoration, leading to Japan wishing to hold the same reputation as Western nations. Just before the start of this war, Japan formed an alliance with Britain in 1902, signifying the belief in Britain that Japan would become the dominant power of Asia. The Japanese citizens believed that they had a duty to conquer Korea, perceived as an inferior civilization, in order to avoid the Koreans being taken advantage of by the West. To Nicholas II, the early 20th century represented a time of low Russian patriotism and support, and he wished to lead Russia to become a more prosperous country. Britain was the dominant world power, but both Russia and Germany desired to hold this role.

As the Tsar, Nicholas II aggressively pursued the view that Russia must expand into the Orient, and seemed relentless in his ambition to accomplish this. However, he did not believe that the Japanese was a major contender for this territory, and he looked to remain at peace with Japan. When Japan offered Manchuria to Russia so that the Japanese could have Korea, Nicholas II quickly rejected this as he did not want to contend with Japan. [3]

Paradoxically, he believed that peace with Japan meant minimal communication despite the Japanese efforts of diplomacy, which clearly

aggravated the Japanese. This can best be seen by Komura, the Japanese minister of foreign affairs, sending an aggressive telegram to the minister of Russia in which he complained that negotiations had been going on for “ no less than four months ... and had not yet reached a stage where the final issue can with certainty be predicted. ^[4] ” Furthermore, the Tsar’s construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad was another clear message to the Japanese that he did not realize he was sending: Russia has claims in the Orient and is attempting to expand upon these claims. After the 1900 Boxer Rebellion was put down, Russia left troops in Port Arthur: a key naval port in Manchuria. When Japan requested the removal of these troops, the Tsar promised they would be removed by mid-1903 but instead by this deadline he had actually strengthened his position at the port. The slow and ineffective negotiations by the Tsar combined with his advances in the Liaodong Peninsula forced Japan to invade if they wished to avoid becoming another Asian nation that was being taken advantage of by a Western power.

Nevertheless, in the long term, this war was likely inevitable. Russia’s expansionist policies seemed to coexist with the legacy of the Tsars, with the desire to reach the Pacific being traced back all the way to Peter the Great.

^[5] The weakened state of China in the early 20th century posed an opportunistic time for Russia to further expand into Manchuria and Korea. ^[6]

On the other hand, Japan had much more recently grown to a world power that necessitated Japanese expansion to get more resources. The most appealing target to Japan was the weak Korea, and after defeating China in the first Sino-Japanese war, confidence in Japan was exceptionally high.

These two empires wishing to expand had claims for the same area, causing friction that manifested itself into the Russo-Japanese War. ^[7]

Contrarily, Russia's archaic form of government made this war occur much quicker than other forms of government would. Nicholas II was an absolute ruler: shown by article I of the Fundamental State Laws, "The emperor is an autocratic and unlimited monarch." ^[8] This outdated system of government had detrimental effects on Russia's foreign policy, often being seen as spasmodic. ^[9] There were times in negotiations when it appeared that Russia was making major concessions to the Japanese, but soon after would stop this trend. ^[10] The advisers Nicholas II did have were often made weak and incapable of truly supporting Nicholas II with major decisions; the Russian diplomat Eugene de Schelking wrote, "[none of the advisers] could boast that they really knew his mind." ^[11] This system gave too much power to the young and unprepared Tsar when he ascended to Tsardom after the early death of his father, Alexander III.

Nevertheless, the Japanese also had a major influence to the outbreak of the war. In 1891, during a diplomatic mission to Japan, a deranged Japanese police officer attempted to assassinate the young Tsarevich Nicholas II. This incident, known as the Otsu Incident, is often cited as a reason for Nicholas II's hatred towards the Japanese. ^[12] However, a large amount of evidence suggests that this assassination attempt was not supported by the general public of Japan: more than 10, 000 telegrams of apologies were sent to the

Tsarevich and a Japanese civilian, Yuko Hatakeyama, slit her own throat in front of the Kyoto Prefecture as a form of public apology to Nicholas II. ^[13]

Another factor influencing Nicholas II was his cousin, the German Kaiser Wilhelm II. Their close relationship was detailed in the intimate telegrams sent to each other, titled the “ Willy-Nicky Correspondence.” ^[14] Throughout these telegrams, we see the more experienced Kaiser almost treat the Tsar as a puppet to accomplish his own goals. Recall that at this time, Germany and Russia were both weaker than Britain, and Russia held a strong alliance with France. Understanding the French disapproval of Russian imperialism into Asia, ^[15] the Kaiser hoped to break the Franco-Russian alliance by convincing Nicholas II to become dominant in Asia. Then, Germany and Russia would become major allies, and with German domination of the Atlantic and Russian domination of the Pacific, they could challenge British naval and economic power. ^[16] To accomplish this, Wilhelm II consistently told Nicholas II that Russia had a Christian duty to defend the white race from the “ Yellow Peril” threat, and implicit lied that Germany would assist if Russia engaged in war against Japan. ^[17] Even neutral America criticized Germany for this manipulation, with American president Theodore Roosevelt accusing Wilhelm of partially causing the war as Wilhelm II “ has done all he could to bring it about.” ^[18] Thus, Wilhelm II used his experience and manipulation to externally influence Russia’s actions.

In conclusion, the Russo-Japanese is clearly not a black-and-white where all of the blame can be put on one factor. The evidence shows Nicholas was an inexperienced ruler with too much power. To seem degree, the war had to <https://assignbuster.com/tsar-nicholas-ii-of-russia-and-the-start-of-the-1904-1905-russo-japanese-war/>

occur due to the expansive nature of both empires; however, the Japanese attempted to negotiate with the Russians. Despite their efforts, the Tsar delayed any negotiations, further putting blame on himself. However, Wilhelm II and his “ Yellow Peril” speeches portrayed Russia as a defender to Western Christianity, somewhat forcing the Russians into war. All in all, we can conclude that Tsar Nicholas II played a moderate role in causing the war, but there were many other factors that similarly led to the start of the Russo-Japanese War.

Section 3: Reflection

Throughout the process, I used a variety of research methods for the investigation, allowing me to easily see the challenges facing historians. Many primary sources regarding the Russo-Japanese War were written in Russian or Japanese; for Western readers such as myself who cannot speak those languages, they are forced to rely on the possibly inaccurate translations of these sources, assuming such translations exist at all. Thus, historians are limited to only working with the accuracy of the translations, which could easily be altered by the translator based on their biases. For example, any quote from Tsar Nicholas II had to be translated to English in order for me to analyze, but the translator could likely have a pro-Russian bias as he spoke their language. Thus, it is debatable as to how reliable that quote can be as a true representation of the Tsar’s policies. Furthermore, not all Russian sources will be translated, leading to less available evidence and leaving out a potentially different view of the matter. Additionally, primary sources are not always beneficial to historical research. Many historians analyzing Tsar Nicholas’ diaries have called these sources “ the despair of <https://assignbuster.com/tsar-nicholas-ii-of-russia-and-the-start-of-the-1904-1905-russo-japanese-war/>

his biographers;" the few entries that he did write were often completely unrelated to the major events going on during this time and rather focused less important things, such as many entries about the weather. This can be infuriating to historians who are trying to piece together the views held by the Tsar.

Analyzing secondary sources can prove to hold just as many challenges as primary sources. As each historian holds different biases, many have different views of an event or person, such as Tsar Nicholas II, and thus there is much less objectivity in history compared to mathematics or the sciences. Moreover, most attempts to make a book more objective often lead to incredibly long sources that may be too inconvenient to analyze. For example, while the *Historical Dictionary of the Russo-Japanese War* contains many various viewpoints that depict a more complete picture of the war, it is an 899 page book. Analysis of this entire source would take an exceptionally long amount of time, and thus a historian using this would be limited as to how much they can use this book.

In the end, my investigation showed me the hardships faced by historians attempting to select and analyze sources, and I have a deeper understanding of how historical research works through my analysis of the primary sources and the works done by university professors.

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[1] Rotem Kowner, *Historical Dictionary of the Russo-Japanese War* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), P. 1

[2] Sidney B. Fay, *The Kaiser’s Secret Negotiations with the Tsar, 1904-1905* (England: Oxford University Press, 1918)

[3] *Correspondence regarding the negotiations between Japan and Russia* (1903-1904) Presented to the Imperial diet. March 1904.

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[7] Rotem Kowner, *Historical Dictionary of the Russo-Japanese War* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), P. 219

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[9] Dietrich Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860-1914* (Leamington Spa, UK: Berg, 1987), P. 67

[10] Yōko Katō, *What Caused the Russo-Japanese War: Korea or Manchuria?* (Japan: Social Science Japan Journal, 2007), P. 95-103.

[11] Rotem Kowner, *Nicholas II and the Japanese Body: Images and Decision-Making on the Eve of the Russo-Japanese War* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1998), P. 218

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