

History essay

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The Russian Empire

The Russian Empire was one of the most extensive empires in the history of the world. The Empire encompassed three continents and was only exceeded by the Mongol and the British empires. Prior to the 1905 revolution that led to Russia becoming a constitutional monarchy, the Empire was an absolute monarch. It was an elitist state and remained as such prior to the World War I. The leaders often paid no attention to the public opinion regarding foreign policy. Policies were made on the basis of the evaluation of the leaders. As such, the Russian government operated in accordance with the ideologies of realpolitik hence had little concern for public opinion.

Following the assassination of Italy's King Humbert in July 1900, the Russian regime started stifling diplomatic organs and pursuing agreements regarding how to strengthen anti-anarchist measures that had been sanctioned by every European nation except Britain. These measures had been approved in 1898 in a conference held in Rome, Italy. The Russian government was concerned that the states had not implemented the anti-anarchist measures as envisaged. Russia observed that the direct relations between higher authorities that parties to the agreements had established relating to the surveillance of the well-known anarchists and their movements was not enough to thwart assassination attempts. In collaboration with Germany, Russia presented further proposals to other European states in 1901. The proposals were aimed at providing effective anti-anarchist measures. Ideally, Russia proposed the formation of central bureaus in different countries to ensure rigorous surveillance of the anarchists. The bureaus would then exchange information regarding anarchists. The proposals also

sought to have the anarchists from countries where they were not citizens and penal measures against the subversive press and the anarchists. They also presented the proposals to the United States. The U. S. Congress did not pass the anti-anarchist law but passed legislation in 1903 and in 1907 prohibiting people who held anarchist views from entering the U. S. However, the Russians felt that the legislation did not address important issues regarding international cooperation regarding anarchist crimes. As such, the Russian ambassador presented more detailed proposals to the American government but the Congress and the president rejected the Russian proposals. The U. S. rejection was more because of the apprehension and tension that had been in existence between the U. S. with Russia since 1898. This tension was exacerbated by the Russian cruel treatment of the Jews and Russia's increased desire to expand its territories into Asia as well as the indignation against the despotic Russian government. Additionally, the Russian ambassador to the U. S. during the time was seen as arrogant and overbearing.

Russia's Balkan Policy

Although much of the empire's interests remained in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Asia, it harbored ambitions to expand its Asian territories. Russia wanted to spread its influence in the Balkans in a bid to gain a continuous ice-free port. Russia was funding the Balkan League with a view of overthrowing the Habsburg Empire. The Russian ambitious plan to expand its empire into Asia and the Japanese desire to expand its influence into Korea and Manchuria clashed (Martel, 2008, p. 105). The negotiations between Russia and Japan in 1903 did not succeed. During the negotiations,

Japan was willing to recognize the presence of Russia in Manchuria but only if Russia would acknowledge Japan's influence over Korea. Russia rejected this proposal. Japan decided to wage war against Russia for the perceived Russian aggression in Asia. Due to the overbearing nature of the Russian foreign policy, the U. S. aligned itself with Japan during the resultant Russo-Japanese War that lasted from 8 February 1904 to September 1905. Japan's victory over Russia was a surprise to many nations. Both nations signed the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905. Under the treaty, Russia relinquished Port Arthur that was the symbol of her influence in Manchuria. Because Russia was no longer in charge of the warm pacific port the British-Russian tension eased. Consequently, in 1907, Russia and Britain signed the Anglo-Russian Entente where Afghanistan was affirmed as the buffer state, in which Persia was split into three: Russian zone, British zone, and a neutral zone.

The consequence of the Russo-Japanese war was the emergence of Japan as a formidable naval force. After the war, there was disgruntlement in Russia that fueled the simmering revolution in 1905 (p. 113). The defeat by Japan in 1905 prompted major reforms within then Russian army, which allowed Russia to face Germany during the World War I. It is noteworthy that Russia entered World War I with the largest army of about 1, 400, 000 soldiers. Russia was the main instigator in the establishment of the Balkan League that comprised Albania, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria, among other nations. The Russian government saw the League as an essential establishment in the event of future conflict against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russia's main rival. The Russian influence over Bulgaria and Serbia enabled the two states to settle their differences. In 1912, Russia

encouraged Serbia and Bulgaria to sign an alliance that was directed against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The alliance had a hidden chapter that redirected the efforts of the alliance against the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, Serbia signed a joint pact with Montenegro while Bulgaria also signed a mutual alliance with Greece. This alliance defeated the Ottoman Empire and took over the control of Ottoman's territories in majority parts of Europe during the first Balkan war that took part in 1912. After their triumph, former differences between the allies arose due to disagreements over the way to share the territories they had taken over from the Ottoman Empire. Bulgaria attacked her Greece and Serbia in 1913 hoping to obtain a quick victory but this led to a second Balkan war in which Bulgaria was defeated. The alliance between Russia and Bulgaria was damaged following the war. However, Russia's unwavering support for Serbia encouraged the latter to continue her aspirations for Bosnia, which was under the Austro-Hungarian Empire (p. 123). Serbia's target of Bosnia ignited the 1914 July crisis. This crisis led to uncompromising attitudes that aroused the existing alliances throughout Europe and ultimately led to the outbreak of the World War I.

Reference List

Martel, G. 2008. The origins of the First World War, 3rd Ed. London: Routledge. Print.