

How stable was  
russia by the start of  
ww1



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

When Nicholas was 26 years old and still politically immature, Alexander III died suddenly of kidney disease on October 26, 1894. His father had kept him out of most affairs of state, but the ill-prepared Nicholas nevertheless became the czar. Acutely aware of his limitations, he was initially overwhelmed by the responsibility of ruling Russia.

However, his fatalistic attitude and his resolution to fulfill his duty helped him survive this initial crisis. His marriage to Alex of Hessen-Darmstadt, a German princess who changed her name to Alexandra after converting to the Russian Orthodox faith, also helped stabilize Nicholas in his new role as Tsar. In 1895, he publicly rejected the idea that “zemstvos,” or public assemblies, should participate in the process of social change. He called these democratic aspirations “senseless dreams,” a condemnation that shocked and angered many of his subjects. Furthermore, Nicholas seemed insensitive to the increasing hardships faced by the Russian people at this time.

Unrest was high as the largely agricultural country struggled to industrialize and urbanize. As economic hardship worsened for the Russian people, the Tsar seemed unconcerned with their needs. Nicholas’ choice to go to War had not considered the many Russian people and their positions and Russia proved to have less stability facing war because of the Tsar’s inexperience. Ten years after ascending the throne, Nicholas was faced with his first truly national crisis. In 1904, Russia’s Pacific Squadron, based in Port Arthur, was suddenly attacked by Japan, beginning the Russo-Japanese War. After a series of defeats at the hands of the small island nation, Russia finally reached a negotiated peace that ended the conflict.

However, the Russian people were left with little confidence in Nicholas' leadership. Just before the start of the world war Russia had never before seemed more vulnerable. The Russo-Japanese War, 1904-5 had embarrassed and dented Russia's pride, and now only triumph in the World War would help restore Russia's greatness and to provide stability for the Tsar amongst the Russian people. In addition, to the Russo-Japanese war which had put intense pressure on Russia's workers. In January 1905, St.

Petersburg was paralyzed by strikes. Workers and their families marched on Nicholas' palace to present their grievances, only to be fired upon by Russian soldiers. The date was thereafter referred to as "Bloody Sunday," and strikes, violence, and rioting continued throughout the country. With his authority and prestige severely diminished, Nicholas appointed Sergei Witte to control the government.

Nicholas in a state of panic, after the massacre was forced to change the Russian government from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, with an elected assembly known as the Duma. However, still believing that he was only responsible to God (rather than to the Russian people), Nicholas minimized the power and effectiveness of the Duma. These efforts to undermine the Duma caused many in Russia's middle and upper class to further question his ability to rule. Those who favored a continuance of Russia's autocratic government believed that he looked foolish for ever having agreed to the creation of the Duma, while those who advocated the establishment of a constitutional monarchy resented Nicholas' treachery in creating the Duma and then ensuring that it remained ineffective.

The 1905 revolution left Nicholas with no stability, leading up to the start of the World War many opposition groups were forming especially because of the new political assembly they were able to be in the foreground rather than just as underground opposition. The monarchy's prestige suffered further as the entire royal family was subjected to harsh criticism. Alexandra had never been popular with the Russian people. Her cold and austere manner had alienated even many aristocrats. Nicholas and Alexandra's four daughters and one son were held in higher regard, but they had little if any interaction with Russian society. The Tsarevich Alexis was also a hemophiliac, a condition that Nicholas and Alexandra carefully hid from all but their closest companions.

Between 1905 and 1917, the royal family came into further disrepute by their association with an alleged holy man and mystic known as Rasputin. On several occasions, Rasputin appeared to help heal Alexis when he was in real physical danger from his hemophilia. In gratitude, Alexandra made Rasputin the most influential member of her entourage, a move that infuriated much of the aristocracy and brought her scorn from the public. Although less impressed with Rasputin, Nicholas relied on his advice to some degree and defended him despite claims that he was a fraud and led a bizarre and debauched life. The monarchy's connection to Rasputin further alienated the Russian people.

the Tsar was now seen weaker and his position was jeopardised with rasputins controll over him, going into the World War the Tsar appeared as unstable as ever and rasputin was frowned upon by many aristocrats and peasants because of his position which made the Tsar very unpopular. When

World War I broke out in 1914, Russia was unprepared. It soon became clear that there were shortages of ammunition and officers, as well as immense difficulties in transporting food. In 1915, Nicholas assumed personal command of the army. The country subsequently blamed him for all military failures.

The public was also convinced that Rasputin controlled Russia's internal affairs in the czar's absence, a conviction that deepened resentment against the crown. Fears regarding Rasputin's power and influence ended on December 17, 1916, when a group of highly placed officials and royal family members assassinated him. Although there was a general sense of relief following Rasputin's death, public support for the Tsar, his family, and his government continued to wane. Nicholas put himself into the forefront and made himself accountable for all failures and his position was being less and less appreciated no longer was the Tsar a 'god send' or a 'little father'. As the war dragged on, Nicholas ignored pleas from advisers, relatives, and courtiers, and refused to address the concerns of his people.

He remained oblivious to the disorganized state of his government and the high public dissatisfaction with the war. On February 22, 1917, street demonstrations broke out in the capital, Petrograd. By the 25th, there was large-scale violence, and by February 27th, most of the local garrisons had mutinied. Nicholas finally recognized the severity of the situation, and in a desperate attempt to save the monarchy, he abdicated power to his brother, the Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich. The Grand Duke declined to serve, recognizing that the people of Petrograd were no longer willing to accept a

Tsar at all and that the monarchy had come to an end. Nicholas II was emperor of Russia from 1894 to 1917.

A symbol of the tremendous wealth of the Russian aristocracy and the source of the monarchy's autocratic rule in the country, Nicholas was plagued throughout much of his reign by social and political unrest. His determination to maintain the undiminished power of the throne convinced many Russians that much needed reforms could only come through revolution. With the Russian people in turmoil, he led the country into World War I his position had never been as unstable as it proved with the success of the war being make or brake for the Tsarist regime. which proved to be the case and to have his dynasty violently overthrown by the Russian Revolution.