

Introduction

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Never overestimate Russia's weakness when she is troubled, nor her power when she is strong.

—Attributed to Otto von Bismarck

Like its companions in the *Russia's Great War and Revolution* series, this two-book volume on international relations seeks to capture the main themes and approaches that characterize current scholarship on the Russian Empire and its successors¹ during the years spanning the outbreak of World War I, through the period of revolution and civil war that began in 1917, and coming to a sort of conclusion with the emergence of the Soviet state by 1922, i.e., three years after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. This volume also resembles its fellows by offering translations of important new research by non-Anglophone historians in Russia and Europe. The editors hope that the information and perspectives presented by these studies serve as a supplement or corrective to ongoing debates over the Great War, largely dominated by the persisting question of the German Empire's "war guilt."² These accounts often relegate Russia to the margins, despite the war's immediate origins in an Austro-Russian dispute over Serbia.

However, unlike the rich historical literatures that form the basis for the topics addressed in other parts of the *Russia's Great War and Revolution* project, this volume's subject has suffered from chronic neglect among historians of the imperial state and its successors. Even a cursory glance at the shelves in a research library reveals the relative paucity of scholarship on Russian or

¹ For the reader's convenience, unless otherwise specified, the term *Russia* will refer to the three states that occupied roughly the geopolitical space associated with the Russian Empire before its demise.

² For comprehensive surveys of these debates, see S. Williamson and E. May, "An Identity of Opinion: Historians and July 1914," *Journal of Modern History* 79, 2 (2007): 335–87; and A. Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus* (London: Routledge, 2002).

pre-Cold War Soviet diplomacy, as compared, for example, with studies of intellectual, agrarian, labor, or institutional history. Several considerations, some unique to Russian history and others rooted in historians' practice, might explain the secondary status of international relations in historical study of the imperial period. It stems in part from a longstanding apathy toward international relations among the prerevolutionary *intelligentsia* and the scholarly community, as Petr Struve noted in his famous, or notorious, essay on "Great Russia" in 1908.³ Like those generations, modern historians have concentrated their attentions on the narratives that compelled Struve's contemporaries, who devoted their attention to what came to be called the "struggle against autocracy" or sought signs of the *zakonomernosti* that would guide Russia into a modernity resembling that of other European states and societies. More pragmatically, most scholars interested in the origins and the consequences of the Great War lacked the reading knowledge of Russian necessary for this line of research. Meanwhile, even those Western historians able to work in the language were effectively barred from access to the key archives during the Soviet period, especially the foreign ministry's own holdings, AVPRI [*Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii*].

Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet Union opened to more recent generations the questions raised by the succeeding turns—"linguistic," "imperial," "religious/confessional," "transnational" or gender/sexuality and intimacy—that have brought them into productive conversations among their colleagues who have themselves begun to transcend the traditional bounds of nation-state history. In addition, the prominence of social elites as traditional protagonists in diplomatic history has struck some as isolated from the messier lives of the societies that supported them and sacrificed for their seemingly abstract projects or definitions of national interests. Ironically this inattention to the diplomacy of the empire, the Provisional Government and the early Soviet state contrasts sharply with the vital importance accorded these issues by officials and educated society alike during these years of total war and revolutionary upheaval.

As the contents of this volume suggest, newer lenses through which to regard international history have incorporated one or more of these new historiographical waves of intense debate over questions of war peace, nation or empire, and Russia's place in the world or historical destiny. Indeed, whether under the autocracy, the Provisional Government, or the early Bolshevik republic, these questions of Russia's interests, strategic goals, and place in the world formed an abiding object of intense interest and debate. A recurrent motif in all of these very different settings was the problem of what Petr Stolypin

³ Petr Struve, "Velikaia Rossiia," *Russkaia mysl'*, no. 1 (1908): 143–57.

would have called Russian greatness, irrespective of its ideological garb. This concern reverberated throughout the period covered by this volume's authors, from the disastrous war with Japan and the revolution it helped precipitate in 1905, through the July Crisis of 1914, the Provisional Government's recommitment to the Entente war effort, and during the consolidation of Bolshevik power in the early 1920s. Even in the wake of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, Vladimir Lenin and his lieutenants sought a unique and global profile for the state they created as the vanguard for the global revolution they anticipated as a consequence of their own rupture of the "weak link" in global imperialism (for more on this, please see the volume *Global Impacts* in this series). Certainly, this preoccupation with Russian stature or global destiny persists to the present day as a defining element in Russian discussions of their country's place in the international system.

As will become clear throughout this collection, these views found reflection in official and public reactions to such events as the Bosnian annexation of 1908–9, the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, and finally Russia's entry into the Great War in 1914. They loomed large in the contemporary press and the seemingly endless series of ministerial meetings, special conferences, and later, sessions of the Politburo and Party congresses, as well as in the public demonstrations that accompanied the Balkan Wars and the onset of war in 1914: all highlighted a preoccupation with Russia's great power status. This volume's chapters offer interesting insights into both the continuities and changes that occurred in response to the changing international circumstances in the Russian polity across war, revolution, and civil war, ending with Moscow's final, if grudging, accommodation with the post-Versailles order when it signed the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the contents of this volume represent a mix of familiar and newer currents in the historiography of Russia's international relations. Thus, readers will find new or more detailed treatments of such familiar problems as Russia's entry into the war, as well as the Provisional Government's diplomacy. They will also learn interesting details about the ephemeral bodies that emerged in the White governments of the Civil War and the organizations of ancien régime diplomats stranded in Europe by the Bolshevik seizure of power. Here one could point to the essays in the first section, which deal with the prewar period, in addition to the chapters by Jennifer Siegel, Ronald Bobroff, Thomas Otte, Wim Coudenys, Anatol Shmelev, and Dinah Jansen, to name several. These draw on Foreign Ministry memoranda, dispatches, correspondence, and meeting minutes as well as analogous records from other governments. But in addition to what outsiders would deem traditional diplomatic history, they also incorporate two attributes absent from the work of predecessors before 1991.

First and foremost, they make abundant use of the archival collections that were largely closed before 1991, including the Foreign Policy Archive of Imperial Russia (AVPRI) and the Russian State Archive for Military History (RGVIA). The availability of these materials has permitted our authors to review the conjectures and conclusions that their predecessors had been obliged to draw from alternative sources, in archives formally dedicated to domestic policy. At the same time, reflecting the methodological innovations associated with the new “international history,”⁴ these chapters provide a more nuanced appreciation of the domestic, international, financial, and cultural contexts that framed the thought of decision makers about Russia’s interests and security. The same sources also permit authors to present a much clearer and more granular perspective on how state officials interacted with those groups, individuals, writers, and commentators whom we commonly group under the broad rubric of *obshchestvo*, a term somewhat akin to what Anglophone academics call civil society.

Conversely, the reader will also find abundant evidence of new perspectives on Russia’s relations with the rest of the world and their sources in other contributions that incorporate interests and methods introduced by the new international history. These include, for example, coverage of international actors not traditionally associated with foreign policy formation, such as Alexander Polunov’s contribution on the Orthodox Church’s religious and strategic aspirations for Constantinople. In the same vein, the chapters in the final section that deal with Allied intervention or White and Red diplomacy during the Civil War show the overlap of the military and political realms in the ultimate crisis of what remained of the Russian Empire. Meanwhile, contrary to traditional views about the autocratic nature of imperial Russia, Konstantin Solov’ev and Sean Gillen examine surprisingly important social and intellectual links between public opinion and policy.

One of the more significant elements of *Russia’s Great War and Revolution* is its commitment to truly international collaboration and dialogue, particularly between Russian historians and their colleagues in Europe and North America. During the Cold War, which spurred the proliferation of Russian history in the Western academy, Soviet and non-Soviet, primarily Western, historians constituted two discrete communities, interacting largely through the aus-

⁴ The integration of “traditional” diplomatic history, based on studying official memoranda, correspondence, and other documents written by senior decision makers to understand official relations between states, with newer historiographical methodologies and approaches, including “linguistic,” “imperial,” “religious/confessional,” “transnational,” or gender/sexuality and intimacy, as well as social and cultural history, among others. For one explanation, although now somewhat dated, see Donald Cameron Watt, “Foreword: The New International History,” *The International History Review* 9, 4 (1987): 518–20.

pices of state-sponsored exchanges. Since that time, less formal interactions and true exchange via shared theoretical interests and open discussion have effaced many older institutional or political boundaries, to the benefit of all.

This volume features the benefits of this mutual engagement, not least in the topical and methodological affinities represented by contributions from Russian and non-Russian scholars. During the Cold War, these communities constituted what a novelist once termed “two solitudes”⁵ (albeit alluding to very different circumstances); each acknowledged the other’s existence, yet could not or did not engage one another’s scholarship to any great extent. Readers will find in this volume many examples of shared interests, particularly in the contributions dealing with previously neglected aspects of Russian wartime experiences. For example, Russian scholars have adapted the methods of cultural history to the setting of the late empire as seen in the chapters from Tatiana Filippova or Aleksandr Golubov with Ol’ga Porshneva, discussing the depiction of Allied and enemy nations in the imperial press. Elsewhere, readers learn of long-overlooked or archivally infeasible topics in the chapters on war crimes and espionage, from Alexandre Sumpf, Evgenii Sergeev, and Taline Ter Minassian respectively. Likewise, this collection features treatments of subjects that have begun to attract broad interest among Great War scholars. These include such issues as the fate of Russian POWs in Europe, as examined by Thomas Bürgisser, or Marina Soroka’s and Thomas Otte’s chapters documenting the wartime contacts maintained among various dynastic and aristocratic clans who now found themselves in warring states, an interesting instance in which official and familial relations required the reconciliation of conflicting imperatives.

Even this partial survey clearly demonstrates the ways in which the treatment of Russian international history has changed from its older “diplomatic” or institutional perspective in the last 30-odd years. As already stated, this change stems in no small measure from the “archival revolution” that followed 1991, but it also reflects the impact of the broader historiographical shift in Russia and the West to a more methodologically inclusive international history, as noted above. Indeed, this shift in scholarship on the international history of the Russian Empire and its successors has both fostered and gained strength from the increasing integration of Russian and non-Russian historical communities not only with one another but also into the larger community of historians of modern Europe or the international state system.

Interestingly, the debates over October 1917 as a decisive rupture in the history of this period do not figure as prominently here as in other volumes in Russia’s Great War and Revolution series, although other issues of peri-

⁵ Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1945).

odization do. Thus, the years beginning in late 1915 and early 1916—starting with the dissent expressed by the Council of Ministers to Nicholas II’s assumption of supreme military command of the war effort as self-designated commander in chief—suggest a gradual drift among foreign policy officials away from loyalty to the autocracy toward a more explicit concern for the state or national interests more broadly conceived. Arguably this shift represented the beginnings of a roughly continuous period extending through the February Revolution to the diplomacy of the Provisional Government. Certainly, Jennifer Siegel’s chapter on Russia’s financial relations with the Allies or Ronald Bobroff’s on the “question of the Turkish Straits” show how these issues persisted in much the same key before and after February 1917. Indeed, Dinah Jansen’s and Anatol Shmelev’s chapters on the activity of former imperial diplomats on the fringes of the Paris Peace Conferences document their strikingly tenacious adherence to territorial and political aspirations, many of which dated to the midst of the Great War.

For their part, the Bolsheviks left no doubt as to their revolutionary approach to diplomacy and international relations, whether at Brest-Litovsk (John Steinberg), in the formation of the Communist International (Oleksa Drachewycz), or in the new regime’s repudiation of tsarist debts (Siegel). This volume also offers new insights into the challenges of coordinating and conducting the interventions in the civil war staged by the Entente powers and the United States, in the chapters from Charlotte Alston and Shusuke Takahara. For its part, Anthony Heywood’s discussion of Soviet trade points toward one of many forces that saw the Bolsheviks obliged relatively quickly to adopt the conventional usages, institutions and rules of international relations, as they sought and gained recognition, usually grudging, from former allies and enemies, beginning with the surprising Rapallo agreement with Weimar Germany, their fellow pariah state.

The contributions of this volume’s authors thus show a renewed appreciation for understanding international relations as a central element in the larger history of the imperial and Soviet state orders. However, there still exist “white spots,” many of them very important, that future historians could usefully address. The two areas that stand out most clearly could be understood as institutional, on the one hand, and postimperial, on the other. And, in large part, the two overlap. By institutional, we mean the creation and staffing, as well as the development of ministerial procedures, budgeting, and expertise (a very incomplete list) in the embryonic NKID, which inherited only one ambassador from the imperial service. If we know something about policy debates and the political backgrounds of such early Soviet diplomats as Georgii Chicherin, Maksim Litvinov, or Leonid Krasin—and the preponderance of Mensheviks and other non-Bolshevik *intelligenty* in the NKID’s ranks, we

know much less about such details as the commissariat's methods of gathering information or making decisions. We still require a great deal of information on these mundane operational and staffing issues to be able to reflect concretely on questions of continuity and change or to assess concretely the impact of such structural forces as Alfred Rieber's "persistent factors" in Russian foreign policy.⁶ Such research would also allow us to explain more clearly how the Soviet Union adapted to the protocols of international diplomatic practice, even while it presented itself as a revolutionary state, or conducted seemingly contradictory policies through such agencies as the Comintern or the intelligence agencies.

Perhaps even more perplexing, at least in terms of this collection, is historians' apparent inattention to the processes driving institution building among the newborn states that emerged from the old Russian Empire, including the new Polish, Finnish, and Baltic republics, as well as the shorter-lived Ukrainian and Transcaucasian states. How did agencies for deliberating or conducting foreign relations take shape? Did the leaders of the new states seek the expertise of former diplomats or chancellery workers now living in the new republics or did they deliberately try to distance themselves and their policies from those of the ancien régime? While Alexandre Sumpf examines the Krivtsov Commission's attempts to codify the laws of war and peace, and Yulia Khmelevskaya writes on the work of the American Relief Agency, this volume could also have benefitted from even broader coverage of NGOs, including such important organizations as the Red Cross, the international Jewish support agencies, or the International Postal Union. Again, these all need much broader attention, as does the birth of the Nansen passport, itself a response in large part to the conundrums of statehood and citizenship presented by the émigrés and expulsees from revolutionary Russia who now found themselves stateless persons with no hope of repatriation.

Whatever the challenges confronting the history of Russian and Soviet international relations during these years of systemic collapse and reintegration, the editors of this volume believe that the materials assembled here offer a vital *entrée* to many productive avenues of research. They also collectively signal the abiding centrality of international relations to the survival, growth, and self-representation of a state whose successive instantiations have directly and indirectly shaped the evolving international and strategic consequences of the war that ended in stages a century ago. For these historians' efforts and for their boundless patience, the editors express their deep gratitude. Also deserving of thanks are the anonymous readers whose critiques helped refine and clarify many of these chapters. Most of all, though, the editors wish

⁶ Alfred Rieber, "Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy," in *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Hugh Ragsdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 315–53.

to thank and applaud the support of George Fowler, Director of Slavica Publishers, and the heroic efforts of Vicki Polansky, the managing editor, who provided guidance and quality control, while demonstrating that the herding of metaphorical—and sometimes grouchy—cats is an actual art, rather than a cliché.

As we stated at the outset, this series and in particular this volume address two related challenges: first, to provide a snapshot of the current status of a field that we have argued has suffered from neglect; and second, to suggest areas in need of further research, or indeed of any research. In closing, we can only remark that this inattention stands in curious contrast to the prominent position that versions of the “Russian threat” have long occupied in Western thought about the global political order. This inattention is all the more baffling as we find ourselves in a time in which Russia’s leaders and much of Russian public opinion seek to restore a lost Russian greatness.