

Orienting the Empire: Russian Identity and East Asian Imperialism in the Conservative Press,
1894-1905

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores how the Russian Empire's expansion into East Asia in the 1890s and 1900s sparked public discussions about its national identity and status as a global imperial power. It shows that segments of Russian society saw military conflicts in this region, such as the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), Boxer Uprising (1900), and Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), as opportunities to demonstrate their country's supposed moral superiority as a civilizing power in contrast to its European imperial rivals. By 1900, East Asia had become a meeting point for nearly every major global empire. The region, thus, offered a stage for Russia to prove itself in full view of its detractors. Its highest-selling conservative newspaper, publishing magnate Aleksei Suvorin's *Novoe vremia* [*The New Times*], served as a principal venue for this identity-crafting. At the turn of the twentieth century, the paper offered a point of contact for journalists and readers from among both government circles and the general population where they could exchange ideas. This type of discursive space was largely lacking in the Russian autocracy. This dissertation employs *Novoe vremia*'s content together with archival caches of unpublished letters to the editor and memoranda between the Russian Foreign Ministry and censorship bureau to explore how ideas of nation and empire circulated among these various levels of Russian society during this period.

As I argue, the flow of opinions between these audiences and the newspaper resulted in a distinct narrative of Russian identity in the conservative press. As the only moral actor among the great powers, *Novoe vremia* argued Russia offered an alternative to European imperialism in its supposedly benevolent relations with the weakened Qing Dynasty. Using national stereotypes

and hyperbolic language, the newspaper denigrated its imperial rivals and built an image of Russia as upright force in Northeast Asia. Furthermore, in conversation with its various readerships, the newspaper presented Russia's expansion into Manchuria, war with Japan, and eventually even the Revolution in 1905, as part of the same national and imperial narrative. It portrayed Russian actions in the region and war with Japan as a way to redress damage to Russian prestige in the Crimean (1853-56) and Russo-Turkish (1877-78) Wars. When the Russo-Japanese War exposed the inefficiencies and volatilities of the Russian homeland this internal conflict became part of the national project as well. Faced with military defeat and revolution at home, the usually loyal newspaper criticized governmental ineptitude in the name of national honor.

Novoe vremia's reportage and opinions on events in Northeast Asia, and the foreign ministry's repeated attempts to censor them, show both the public sphere's ability to affect foreign policy and how the regime had come to alienate many staunch nationalists by 1905. Reader engagement with *Novoe vremia's* ideas elucidates the nature of popular enthusiasm for the Russo-Japanese War effort and demonstrates a heretofore-understudied awareness and engagement with imperialism among the Russian public.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Note on Transliteration and Dating.....	v
List of Illustrations from <i>Novoe vremia</i>	vi
Map of Northeast Asia, c. 1900.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One. The Sino-Japanese War and Russian Images of East and West.....	22
Chapter Two. Boxers and Bureaucrats at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.....	65
Chapter Three. An Imperial Mouthpiece?: <i>Novoe Vremia</i> and the Outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War.....	113
Chapter Four. The Empire Has No Clothes: <i>Novoe vremia</i> and the Military Failures of 1904.....	152
Chapter Five. “Now is Not the Time to Sleep, When All of Russia is a Pillar of Fire”: Revolt, Defeat, and Peace.....	199
Epilogue and Conclusion.	264
Bibliography.....	278

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Charlottesville, VA
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Note on Transliteration and Dating

Russian words and names are transliterated according to the United States Library of Congress system of Romanization. Given names and surnames are written in the original Russian spelling (e.g., Aleksandr, instead of Alexander) except in the case of Sergei Iul'evich Vitte, whose German surname is commonly rendered in English as "Witte." I have also chosen to use Latinized names when referring to members of the Romanov dynasty (e.g., Nicholas II, instead of Nikolai II).

Dates in this dissertation are given according to the Julian calendar used in Russia prior to 1918. The Julian date was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar in the 1800s and thirteen days behind in the 1900s. In a few instances document titles in citations give the Gregorian date with the Julian date listed in parentheses.

List of Illustrations from *Novoe vremia*

Figure 1. “Kitaiskaia armia [The Chinese Army].” August 6, 1894.

Figure 2. “Iaponskaia armia [The Japanese Army].” July 30, 1894.

Figure 3. “Buria v stakane vody. Stolknovenie mezhdru Iaponiei i Kitaem [Tempest in a Teacup. The Conflict Between Japan and China].” July 16, 1894.

Figure 4. “Fiziognomii kakuiu Afrika poluchaet malo po malu po novym traktatam [The physiognomy Africa acquires little by little from new treaties].” August 27, 1894.

Figure 5. Stepan Fedorovich Sokolovskii. “K Transvaalskim sobytiakh. David i Goliat [On the Transvaal Events. David and Goliath].” October 2, 1899.

Figure 6. Sokolovskii. “Britanskii lev v Africa. –Prestizha ne vernut!.. [The British Lion in Africa. –They won’t give my prestige back!..]” December 30, 1899.

Figure 7. Sokolovskii. “Kitaiiskii drakon [The Chinese Dragon].” May 1, 1899.

Figure 8. Sokolovskii. “Pomogite! [Help!]” July 24, 1899.

Figure 9. Sokolovskii. “Osteregis’! Ne podkhodi blizko!.. [Beware! Don't get close!..]” June 6, 1900.

Figure 10. Sokolovskii. “A Bas La Civilization! [Down with Civilization!]” May 26, 1900.

Figure 11. Sokolovskii. “Zloveshchii misioner [A sinister missionary].” *Novoe vremia*, June 16, 1900.

Figure 12. Sokolovskii. “Dlia ‘Sinikh molodtsov.’ [For the ‘boys in uniform’].” December 21, 1900.

Figure 13. Sokolovskii. “Kak ia burma sochuvstvuiu! [How I sympathize with the Boers!]” December 22, 1900.

Figure 14. Sokolovskii. “Pozvali obedat’ (Iaponia) [Called to dinner (Japan)].” June 20, 1900.

Figure 15. Sokolovskii. “Soidutsia li kharakterami? (Evropa i Iaponia) [Will their personalities be compatible? (Europe and Japan)].” August 1, 1900.

Figure 16. Sokolovskii. “V nogu! Evropa smotrit na vas! [In step! Europe is watching you!]” September 24, 1900.

Figure 17. Sokolovskii. “Iaponets.—Okh, tiazhela tsivilizatsiia! [The Japanese.—Ugh, civilization is heavy!]” May 25, 1901.

Figure 18. Sokolovskii. “Troistvennyi soiuz [A triple alliance].” June 13, 1903.

Figure 19 Sokolovskii. “Smelee! Ne upadete: ia smotriu na vas. (Dzhon-Bul’ i Iaponia). [Be bold! You won’t fall, I’m watching you. (John Bull and Japan)].” October 9, 1903.

Figure 20 “Na Dal’nem Vostoke. (Evropa, Kitai i Iaponia) [In the Far East. (Europe, China, and Japan).]” November 26, 1903.

Figure 21. Sokolovskii. “Angliiskaia pressa.—Szadi nikogo net. (Dzhon Bul’ i Iaponia) [The English Press.—There’s nothing back there. (John Bull and Japan)].” January 18, 1904.

Figure 22. Sokolovskii. “Angliiskaia pressa [The English press].” March 12, 1904

Figure 23. Sokolovskii. “—Vezde otkryto! (Myshelovka) [—They’re all open! (The Mousetrap)].” March 23, 1904.

Figure 24. Sokolovskii. “Dzhon Bull: skoro ponesete sami, mne uzhe nadoelo [John Bull: Soon you can carry this yourself, I’m already tired].” April 30, 1904.

Figure 25. Sokolovskii. “Da, eto dlia vas... Poprobuite nadet’ na golovu [Yes, this is for you... Try to put it on].” May 16, 1904.

Figure 26. Sokolovskii. “Korespondenty princess iaponskoi armii [Correspondents with the Japanese Army].” April 18, 1904.

Figure 27. Sokolovskii. “Viskont Gaiashi [Viscount Hayashi].” May 26, 1904.

Figure 28 Sokolovskii. “Krepche verevku, mister Bul’! [Pull the rope tighter, Mr. Bull!]” May 30, 1904.

Figure 29. Sokolovskii. “Pechat’ ne tronuta [The seal is untouched].” August 1, 1904.

Figure 30. Sokolovskii. “Mezhdunarodnoe pravo [International Law].” August 15, 1904

Figure 31. “Sravnitel’naia scheme raspolozheniia Port-artus i Sevastopolia 1854 g. [A comparative diagram of the locations of Port Arthur and Sevastopol in 1854].” December 17, 1904.

Figure 32. Sokolovskii. “Zhdu! [I’m waiting!]” August 3, 1904.

Figure 33. Sokolovskii. “Nogi protianite! [Stretch out your legs!]” December 20, 1904.

Figure 34. Sokolovskii. “Ia ne boius’—menia znaiut.. (Iaponia i Kitai) [I’m not scared—they

know me.. (Japan and China].” March 6, 1905

Figure 35: Sokolovskii. “Dveri, konechno, ostanusia otkrytymi. [The doors, of course, will remain open].” April 15, 1905.

Figure 36: Sokolovskii. ““Business’ prinuzhdaet [Business” compels it].” February 28, 1905.

Figure 37: Sokolovskii. “Ruzevel’t. Smotrite, seichas upadet [Roosevelt. Watch, I’ll knock it down].” March 7, 1905.

Figure 38. Sokolovskii. “Poka nikto ne meshaet [While no one’s stopping me].” June 26, 1905.

Figure 39. Sokolovskii “Dveri otkryty [The doors are open].” September 23, 1905.

Figure 40. Dmitrii “Mitrich” Togol’skii. “Neuzheli one uletiat? [Are they really flying away?]” August 14, 1905.

Figure 41. Sokolovskii. “Nazad, nazad! Zhdite menia—ia k vam priedu [Back, back! Wait for me—I’ll come to you].” September 6, 1905.

Figure 42. Sokolovskii. “Kto eshche khochet voevat’? (Angliia i Amerika) [Who else wants to fight? (England and America)].” September 27, 1905.



Image: P. V. N. Myers, *Outlines of Nineteenth Century History* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1906)

Introduction

On December 25, 1904, a leading article in St. Petersburg's most prominent conservative newspaper, *Novoe vremia* [*The New Times*], took stock of Russia's relationship to Asia and, by extension, Europe.¹ A few days prior, General Anatoly Mikhailovich Steesel' had surrendered the fortress of Port Arthur to Japanese forces after a five-month siege. The loss of Russia's only warm water port on the Pacific had been a humiliating end to a terrible year, one that had begun with Japan's surprise attack on the fortification in January. The article, titled "Our future relations to the yellow race," expressed confidence that Russia could still win the war and create "lasting peace" in Northeast Asia. In the wake of the defeat at Port Arthur, it became more important than ever to secure this lasting peace without any European interference, it argued. Russia's interests in Asia, as well as its "state dignity and national honor," demanded this. Europeans spoke of "Yellow Peril" but ultimately knew nothing about Asian peoples. They had only recently forced their way into the region with gunships and opium. Europeans sought only lucre and to upstage their imperial rivals. Russians, on the other hand, had maintained relations with the "yellow race" based on "reasonable and neighborly reciprocity" for centuries.²

¹For the majority of its history, the Russian Empire was an autocracy that banned all political parties. As this dissertation takes place before the emergence of legal parties, I use the terms "conservative" to mean active support for the tsarist government and principle of autocracy and "liberal" to mean support for civil liberties and popular representation following the Western model. For a recent treatment of liberalism in the late imperial period see Anton A. Fedyashin, *Liberals under Autocracy: Modernization and Civil Society in Russia, 1861-1904* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012). For conservatism, see I. V. Omel'ianchuk, "Parlamentarizm v ideologii rossiiskikh konservatorov nachala XX v.," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 2 (February, 2015): 13-35 and Don C. Rawson, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). The classic study of political parties and orientations as they emerged immediately before and during the Duma period (1906-1917) is Terrance Emmons, *The Formation of Political Parties and the First National Elections in Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

² "Nashi budushchie otnoshenii k zheltai rase," *Novoe vremia*, December 25, 1904.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 came at the end of a decade of continuous Russian expansion into Northeast Asia.³ Together with France and Germany, the tsarist regime had intervened after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 to thwart Japan's demands for Port Arthur and the Liaodong Peninsula. A few years later, Russian politicians had pressured China to lease the peninsula to them and allow a branch of the Trans-Siberian Railway to pass through its three northeastern provinces (known collectively as Manchuria). In 1900, Russian forces participated in a multi-national expedition to put down the anti-foreign Boxer Uprising in northern China and sent troops to occupy all of Manchuria. Japan viewed this region and its border with Korea as its own sphere of influence, and the Russian government's refusal to end the occupation over the next three years ultimately precipitated war in 1904.

As the December 25, 1904, article shows, however, newspapers like *Novoe vremia* presented their empire's actions in Northeast Asia quite differently. By the 1890s, this region had become a meeting point for nearly every global empire. European treaty ports and concessions dotted the Chinese coastline, while a newly modernized Japan had begun flexing its muscles in Korea. This offered a unique setting for empire building, since imperialist forces worked to gain concessions and build spheres of influence alongside their most important rivals. Russia's vast Asian territories compelled *Novoe vremia* and conservative segments of Russian society to claim a special understanding and connection with East Asia. Events such as the Sino-Japanese War, Boxer Uprising, and Russo-Japanese War, offered a chance to demonstrate Russia's special

³ Important works on Russian foreign policy in East Asia during this period include David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb: Northwestern University Press, 2001); S. C. M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals: Russia, China, and Their Disputed Frontier* (Armonk, New York: M. E Sharpe, Inc, 1996); Steven G. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850-1917* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991); R. K. I. Quesed, "Matey" *Imperialists? The Tsarist Russians in Manchuria, 1895-1917* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1982); Andrew Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904: With a Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958); and Boris Aleksandrovich Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria, 1892-1906*, Susan Wilbur Jones trans. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards, 1952).

strength and virtue as colonizer on the international stage of Northeast Asia, in full view of its detractors. The tsarist empire's involvement in these events sparked public discussions regarding Russia's national identity and status as a global imperial power. *Novoe vremia* served as the meeting point for varying strata of Russian society and acted as a principal venue for this discursive identity-crafting.

Novoe vremia occupied an important position in the Russian popular press.⁴ The journalist Aleksei Sergeevich Suvorin (1834-1912) bought the newspaper in 1876, and, over the next twenty-five years, built it into the empire's most widely read conservative daily. By 1905, it was one of Russia's five highest-selling papers with 70,000 subscribers and annual street sales exceeding five million.⁵ Innovative printing technology from Europe, the use of graphics and illustrations, and a global network of correspondents made *Novoe vremia* one of St. Petersburg's best sources for domestic and international news at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶

⁴ A standard work on the pre-revolutionary Russian periodical press is Louise McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991). For the growth of literacy and popular print in Russia more broadly, see Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985). For a recent work on the press as a whole, see Octavie Bellavance, "Fourth Estate, Fifth Power: The Daily Press, the Public and Politics in Russia, 1861-1907" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2015).

⁵ The most complete figures on the circulations and yearly street sales of contemporary St. Petersburg newspapers are in McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*. Appendices offer tables based on material from the fonds of the Russian Empire's Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pechati [Chief Bureau of Press Affairs] in the Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv [The Russian State Historical Archive] (henceforth, RGIA) and a few secondary works based on archival materials. For the sales and circulation figures on St. Petersburg newspapers in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see *ibid.*, 296 and 297; for Moscow, see 299. According to the available data, only *Peterburgskii listok* [*The Petersburg Sheet*] and *Birzhevye vedomosti* [*The Stock Market Gazette*] outsold *Novoe vremia* in St. Petersburg's streets in 1905. Just these two Petersburg papers and Moscow's *Russkoe slovo* [*The Russian Word*] topped *Novoe vremia*'s circulations that year. For comparison, another prominent voice of monarchism in the Petersburg press, Prince Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii's *Grazhdanin* [*The Citizen*], circulated only 3,000 issues in 1905 and sold 6,271 on the street in 1905. *Ibid.*, 296, 297.

⁶ Suvorin imported Russia's first high-speed rotary press in 1877 and was the first Russian publisher to power his printers with electricity. *Novoe vremia* was also one of the first newspapers to regularly use illustrations. Daniel Balmuth, *Censorship in Russia, 1865-1905* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), 95. As Effie Ambler notes, however, while these innovations increased the speed and output of the newspaper, the quality suffered, sometimes causing the ink to smear or the typeset to appear uneven. Ambler, *Russian Journalism and Politics: The Career of Aleksei S. Suvorin, 1861-1881* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972), 119, 176.

Yet, Suvorin himself was in many ways the newspaper's primary asset. *Novoe vremia* and his successful publishing house, *Izdatel'stvo A. S. Suvorina* [A. S. Suvorin Publishing] made him very wealthy.⁷ His prestigious career as a journalist and patronage of the theater—most notably, he was an early benefactor of Anton Chekhov—made him a media mogul.⁸ More importantly, however, Suvorin moved in some of the empire's most influential social circles. He counted Finance Minister Sergei Iul'evich Witte and War Minister Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin among his personal friends.⁹ He also regularly attended the salon of Aleksandra Viktorovna Boganovich, which hosted many of the imperial government's most powerful ministers.¹⁰ All of these connections made him privy to inside information and lent *Novoe vremia* an air of semi-official authority among readers when it came to government policy. Nationalist, and staunchly supportive of the tsarist regime, Suvorin's paper became a preferred news source for many members of the government, including tsar Nicholas II.

Between 1894 and 1905, *Novoe vremia's* melodramatic reportage and commentary on the events in Northeast Asia offered its readers a distinct view of Russia's rightful position among

⁷ On Suvorin's publishing ventures see Ambler, *Russian Journalism and Politics*, 176-178 as well as E. A. Dinershtein, *A. S. Suvorin. Chelovek, sdelayshii kar'eru* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998), 135-144. One of the publishing house's biggest and most successful ventures was "Deshevaia biblioteka [Cheap Library]," a series that printed inexpensive editions of the great works of nineteenth-century Russian literature. On the "Cheap Library" see *ibid.*, 144-153.

⁸ Ambler's *Russian Journalism and Politics*, offers an in-depth treatment of Suvorin's journalistic career from the 1860s through 1881. See also, Dinershtein, *A. S. Suvorin*, 21-54. For Suvorin and Chekhov see *ibid.*, 243-266. Suvorin opened his own theater in St. Petersburg in 1895, which quickly earned acclaim. For Suvorin and the "Suvorin Theater" in late Imperial Russia see, Murray Frame, *School for Citizens: Theatre and Civil Society in Imperial Russia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 114-126 *passim*.

⁹ Suvorin often mentioned Witte in his diary, Aleksei Sergeevich Suvorin, *Dnevnik Alekseia Sergeevicha Suvorina* (London: Garnett Press; Moscow: Izd-vo Nezavisimaia Gazeta, 1999) and they corresponded frequently, see Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva [The Russian State Archive of Arts and Literature] (henceforth, RGALI), fond 459, opis' 1, delo 719 for over a hundred letters between the two. Witte mentions Suvorin several times in his memoirs as well, S. Iu Witte, *Iz arkhiva S. Iu Vitte. Vospominaniia*. 3 vols., B. V. Anan'ich, R. Sh. Ganelin, and F. Vhislo eds. (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003). The memoir is available in English as *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, Sydney Harcave ed. and trans. (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990). Kuropatkin's correspondence with Suvorin is in RGALI, f. 459, o. 1, d. 2178.

¹⁰ Bogdanovich was wife of General Evgenii Vasil'evich Bogdanovich. Her diary was first published in 1924 and offers insights into Suvorin's private interactions with Witte, Viacheslav Konstantinovich Pleve, and others. A. B. Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhtsa* (Moscow: Novosti, 1990).

the “great powers”¹¹ and its identity between Europe and Asia. Beginning with the Sino-Japanese War, its articles, editorials, and political cartoons wove a detailed narrative of Russia’s heroism and nobility as an empire. The newspaper defined Russia against its peers and placed it within a matrix of national and ethnic stereotypes. Its readers regularly saw Russia as a moral force in the region that acted honorably toward its backward, but noble, Chinese neighbors. All the while, it kept on guard for the snares of the greedy and villainous British or the treacherous Japanese. A clear through line for the newspaper’s coverage of events in Northeast Asia suggested that Russian expansion into the region and war with Japan could redress damage to Russian prestige in the Crimean War (1853-1856) and diplomacy following the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). *Novoe vremia* readers from almost all echelons of society replied to its coverage of the events in Northeast Asia by contacting the newspaper through official and unofficial channels to offer their own opinions and exert their own influence on this narrative.

This study examines the interaction between domestic public opinion and foreign policy in late Imperial Russia. Specifically, it explores how the Russian Empire’s encroachment into Manchuria sparked an extended discussion between the journalists of *Novoe vremia* and a broad swath of society regarding the nature of “Russianness” on the international stage. Using the periodical’s content, memoirs and correspondence, and archival caches of unpublished letters to the editor and the files of the empire’s censorship bureau, it traces the ways Russians responded to the developments in the Far East. Of these events, the Russo-Japanese War weighed heaviest on the narratives of journalists, calculations of diplomats and politicians, and the hopes and fears of average newspaper readers. As Russia faced consistent defeats on the battlefields of the Russo-Japanese War, these conversations would turn especially confrontational and contribute

¹¹ *Novoe vremia* often used the phrase “velikaia derzhava [great power]” to refer to Russia and the imperialist countries of Europe, especially Great Britain, France, and Germany.

powerfully to dissatisfaction with the government that nearly toppled the tsar in the Revolution of 1905.

Historiography

The historiography of Russia's Far Eastern imperialism has yet to fully account for the ways public opinion influenced, and was influenced by, Russian diplomacy and imperial competition in this region. There is insight to be gained from the substantive literature on the imperialism and public culture of Russia's West European peers during this period, however. John M. MacKenzie's *Propaganda and Empire* (1984) set the terms of the debate in British historiography by showing that empire permeated British culture from the press to public education to advertising. As he argues, imperial propaganda proliferated so successfully (and profitably) throughout Britain that its tropes became key components of British national identity.¹² Though his thesis is not without counterarguments,¹³ it points toward a methodology for exploring public engagement with empire-building projects through popular cultural media. This approach has appeared in studies of French and German imperialism as well.¹⁴

¹² John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

¹³ One of MacKenzie's most prominent opponents is Bernard Porter, whose *The Absent Minded Imperialists: Empire, Culture, and Society in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) argues that empire (which he defines somewhat narrowly) was a peripheral identifier at best when viewed from the perspective of a British society that cared much more about internal divisions based on class. Further works that follow MacKenzie's tack and use popular media and public perceptions to explore the role of empire in British identity include, Thomas G. August, *The Selling of the Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890-1940* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985) and Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ For works on the culture of French imperialism see William H. Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870-1900* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982); August, *The Selling of Empire*; and Dana S. Hale, *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). For German imperialism, see David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2011) and Jeff Bowersox, *Raising Germans in the Age of Empire: Youth and Colonial Culture, 1871-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

An important tenet of imperial culture in this literature is the “civilizing mission,” by which European empires sought to “uplift” the indigenous peoples in their colonies through education, modern technology, and the other purportedly superior elements of western civilization. This civilizing mission was more than an exercise in pomposity. As Mackenzie argues, it was a means of “regenerating” not only the supposedly backward lands and peoples of the empire, but Britain itself. The imperial project unified its disparate classes around a national purpose.¹⁵ Schneider’s study of images of Africa in the French press, *An Empire for the Masses*, shows that this sense of colonized lands as stages for the demonstration of the “civilizing” abilities of colonizers often led to contradictory visions of these lands and their inhabitants. They were viewed as the backward antithesis of Europe, but also as possessing the potential to start on the road to civilization.¹⁶ This view could prove foundational to the colonizing power by inflating exceptionalist ideas about their distinctive suitability to undertake the civilizing mission. As Conklin and others assert, the French in particular believed their revolutionary and republican history, together with their industrial strength, made them the ideal Europeans to spread enlightenment.¹⁷ As noted, Russians made similar arguments about their position in East Asia. Of course, in all cases, these concepts also helped justify and obfuscate the violence and disruption that went hand-in-hand with imperial conquest.¹⁸

The Russian imperial experience differed from that of its rivals in a number of fundamental ways. Unlike the representative (or semi-representative) governments and relatively

¹⁵ MacKenzie, *Propagand and Empire*, 2.

¹⁶ Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses*, 203.

¹⁷ Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1-2; Hale, *Races on Display*, 175. The United States’ exceptionalist vision of itself as a uniquely qualified imperial power is explored in James C. Thompson, Jr., Peter W. Stanley, and John Curtis Perry, *Sentimental Imperialists: The American Experience in East Asia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

¹⁸ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 9-10. A recent work that focuses on colonial violence and resistance to conquest is Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble With Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

free presses in the West, the tsarist regime was an autocracy that permitted no dissent and enforced strict censorship laws. This often stifled in Russia the lively exchange of ideas regarding issues of empire and national identity that could occur in Britain or France. Further, while European empires colonized overseas territories, Russian expansion proceeded into contiguous regions along its substantial frontiers. The Russian Empire was itself on the peripheries of Europe. Yet, its extension into Northeast Asia at the turn of the twentieth century caused its government and broader public to use much the same language as its European competitors when discussing the peoples they encountered in this region and Russia's role and influence there.

The literature on Russia's Far Eastern imperialism largely splits between works on diplomacy or politics and broader examinations of cultural perceptions and the study of East Asia in Russian academia. Of the works concerning the diplomacy of Russian eastern expansion in the 1890s and 1900s,¹⁹ David Wolff's *To the Harbin Station* (1999) and David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye's *Toward the Rising Sun* (2001) engage most with culture. In Wolff's discussion of the growth and development of the Russian Manchurian city of Harbin, he explores how ministerial infighting in St. Petersburg influenced the city's cultural and social complexion.²⁰ As Schimmelpenninck shows, the contrasting ideologies of "conquistador imperialism," which called for conquest and subjugation of Asian peoples, and fraternal "Asianism," which urged a fraternal relationship with China, could exert a strong influence on Nicholas II's policies in the lead up to the Russo-Japanese War.²¹ In addition, Chia Yin Hsu's

¹⁹ Cited above, in 5fn.

²⁰ David Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²¹ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 209-211. The author examines these ideologies in detail and integrates them into a narrative of Russian diplomacy in the decade prior to the war. For "conquistador imperialism" see *ibid.*, Chapter Two, for "Asianism" see *ibid.*, Chapter Three.

work on the Chinese Eastern and Amur branches of the Trans-Siberian Railway explores the role of racist ideologies in Far Eastern imperialism with a focus on labor and migration in Northeast Asia.²² Of these, Schimmelpenninck's book and a related article²³ make brief allusions to the popular press, but remain primarily concerned with the role of ideology among the ruling elite.

Several studies explore the cultural angle by focusing on the Russian Empire's press and offering analyses of its reactions to the events of this period in East Asia. A chapter in Louise McReynolds' *The News Under Russia's Old Regime* (1991) covers the press' interpretations of the Russo-Japanese War. Sun Zhengching's *Kitaiskaia politika Rossii* [*Russia's Chinese Politics*] (2008), articles by Alena Eskridge-Kosmach in *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (2008-2013), and S. C. M. Paine's *The Sino-Japanese War* (2005) provide helpful summaries of how the empire's newspapers reported on the Sino-Japanese War, Boxer Rebellion, and prelude to the Russo-Japanese War.²⁴ More specific to *Novoe vremia*, Robert Bartol's 1972 dissertation gives an in-depth look at Suvorin's published writings on these events, as well as domestic issues, including Witte's economic reforms and the Revolution of 1905.²⁵ These works remain

²² Chia Yin Hsu, "A Tale of Two Railroads: 'Yellow Labor,' Agrarian Colonization, and the Making of Russianness at the Far Eastern Frontier, 1890s-1910s," *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2006): 217-253. See also her dissertation "The Chinese Eastern Railway and the Making of Russian Imperial Orders in the Far East" (PhD diss., New York University, 2006).

²³ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Russia's Ambivalent Response to the Boxers," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 41, no. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 2000): 57-78.

²⁴ Sun, Zhingching, *Kitaiskaia politika Rossii v russkoi publitsistike kontsa XIX-nachalo XX veka* (Moscow: Natalis, 2008); Alena Eskridge-Kosmach, "China and Policy of Russia in Respect to China Before 1894 in the Russian Press," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, no. 24 (2011): 481-528; "The Russian Press on Russia's Chinese Policy in Period of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895)" *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, no. 25 (2012): 618-661; "The Boxer Rebellion and the Standpoint of the Russian Press," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, no. 26 (2013): 414-438; "Russian Press and the Ideas of Russia's 'Special Mission in the East' and 'Yellow Peril,'" *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, no. 27 (2014): 661-675. S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War, 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power Primacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁵ Robert Bartol, "A. S. Suvorin and His 'Malen'kiia pis'ma': a Publishers Commentary on Tsarist Russia, 1900-1906," (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1972).

primarily concerned with broad trends in the content of the empire's newspapers, however, and therefore make fewer connections to their political and cultural context.²⁶

Other works place the press in a larger scope of sources, including literature, the arts, philosophy, and academia. Of these, Schimmelpenninck van der Oye's *Russian Orientalism* is one of the most inclusive, yet in some ways the most problematic.²⁷ It gives a broad survey of attitudes toward and understandings of Asia across Russian culture and academic studies of Asian languages and peoples.²⁸ This work also makes a compelling case for how the Russian Empire problematizes Edward Said's famous argument about how academic studies of "oriental" societies created an image of them as inferior "others" and went hand-in-hand with conquest and colonization.²⁹ Russians from the eighteenth through twentieth centuries remained acutely aware of their position as both a European and Asian country, as well as the fact that Europe considered them uncivilized, even as they took on their own civilizing missions in Asia. Russia, thus, did not fit in the firm categories of East and West that Said's model posited. As a survey, however, Schimmelpenninck's approach is necessarily broad, and it offers more of a scan of Russian attitudes toward East Asia than a systematic treatment.

²⁶ Paine's work goes the farthest in this regard, and draws on newspaper reports about the war from European, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese sources to create a larger narrative of the political and cultural clashes that the Sino-Japanese War highlighted among its participants and observers. Stephen M. Norris provides insights into another aspect of print culture with his study of popular print images known as *lubki* during the Russo-Japanese War in chapter three of *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity, 1812-1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Another work that takes this broad approach is Milan Hauner, *What is Asia to Us?: Russia's Heartland Yesterday and Today* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

²⁸ Works that explore the academic study of Asian peoples and languages both inside and outside of the Russian Empire include: Robert Geraci, *A Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Vera Tolz, *The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Marina Mogil'ner, *Homo Imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

²⁹ This thesis appears in Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). The foundational studies of Orientalism in the Russian case appear in the collection *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, Daniel Brower and Edward J. Lazzarini eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

Works focusing on literature and philosophy, such as Susanna Soojung Lim's *China and Japan in the Russian Imagination* (2013), and the first section of Alexander Lukin's *The Bear Watches the Dragon* (2003), provide helpful insights into Russian stereotypes about China and East Asia.³⁰ They emphasize the ways in which many writers saw China as both a potential friend and object of tsarist colonization. They also show the importance of Europe to this equation. Russia's expansion into the Northeast Asian neighborhood was a marker of its own civilization. It was therefore critical that Europe witness its prowess as an imperial power.³¹

Mark Bassin's *Imperial Visions* (1999), though focusing on Russian Far Eastern imperialism in the middle of the nineteenth century, makes the strongest case for this interpretation of Russia's own civilizing mission.³² In his research on the fanfare in intelligentsia circles surrounding Russia's annexation of Outer Manchuria, he shows that colonization of Northeast Asia served both Russian nationalism and imperialism. Russia could achieve its national destiny by conquering and developing the eastern peripheries of its empire. After the ignoble experience of the Crimean War, he argues, the Far East offered a space to demonstrate "their vital national energies and capacity for independent accomplishment... for the world, but more importantly for themselves."³³ The cultural elite that championed these ideas saw relations with this region as inherently tied to Russia's prestige and reputation in Europe.

³⁰ Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations Since the Eighteenth Century* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), Chapter One; Susanna Soojung Lim, *China and Japan in the Russian Imagination, 1685-1922: To the Ends of the Orient* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013). See also, Marlène Laruelle, "The White Tsar": Romantic Imperialism in Russia's Legitimizing of Conquering the Far East" *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, Tomus 25 (2008): 113-134 and Rosamund Barlett, "Japonisme and Japonophobia: The Russo-Japanese War in Russian Cultural Consciousness," *The Russian Review*, no. 67 (January 2008): 8-33.

³¹ Lim, *China and Japan in the Russian Imagination*, 9.

³² Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³³ *Ibid.*, 275.

This study uses *Novoe vremia*'s position between public opinion and government policy to cross some of these historiographical dividing lines. Many of Russia's highest-ranking officials tried to use the newspaper to support certain policies and manage Russia's (and often their own) national and international reputation.³⁴ *Novoe vremia* served as an entry point for diplomats and politicians into the broader cultural discussions about Russia's identity that expansion into Northeast Asia produced. Suvorin and *Novoe vremia* spoke in much the same way as the writers in Bassin's work. They looked to the Far East as a place where Russia could undo the embarrassment of Europe's intervention in the agreements that followed its victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.³⁵ The newspaper's prestige and semi-official reputation among the empire's readers led the Foreign Ministry to intervene in these discussions and try to steer them to benefit Russian policy in Northeast Asia.

Further, the late imperial press remains underappreciated as a focal point for exchanges among various levels of society, otherwise impossible without a parliamentary system. Russians from peasants to government ministers viewed newspapers like *Novoe vremia* as potentially the only link between public opinion and government policy. Unpublished letters from average readers to newspaper editors and the files of the censorship bureau offer direct rebuttals to the ideas in the popular press but remain critically underutilized in the historiography. This study uses the newspaper and its readers among both the public and imperial government as a subset of Russian society and explores the ways the events in turn-of-the-century Northeast Asia influenced their understandings of their country's role on the Eurasian continent. As scholars of

³⁴ See, for example, Anton Fedashin's "Sergei Witte and the Press: A Study in Careerism and Statecraft," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, no. 3 (Summer, 2013): 507-534, which explores the finance minister's formal and informal interactions with the organs of the Russian press to manage his public persona and support his economic policies.

³⁵ For more on the Congress of Berlin, which curtailed Russia's gains during this war, see W. N. Medlicott, *The Congress of Berlin and After: A Diplomatic History of the Near Eastern Settlement, 1878-1880* (London: F. Cass, 1963).

nationalism, such as Benedict Anderson, have shown, the growth of the press helped standardize and disseminate the collective language and ideas necessary to form “imagined” national communities.³⁶ The conversations surrounding *Novoe vremia*’s reportage and commentary on the events of this period offer important insights into how this swath of the population imagined Russia’s identity as both a nation and an empire on the eve of the Revolution of 1905.³⁷

Sources

My research traces these conversations about Russia’s place in Europe and Northeast Asia by examining *Novoe vremia*’s content alongside archival sources from Suvorin’s extensive personal collection at the Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatura i iskusstva [The Russian State Archive of Arts and Literature] (RGALI) in Moscow and government memoranda in the Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv [The Russian State Historical Archive] (RGIA) in St. Petersburg.

An immense amount of information and opinions appeared in *Novoe vremia* every day. This study, therefore, focuses primarily on three segments of the newspaper: the daily *peredovitsa* or leading editorial, Suvorin’s regular “*Malen’koe pis’mo* [Little Letter]” feuilletons, and political cartoons and illustrations. The front pages of issues during the 1890s and 1900s typically contained advertisements and government proclamations before moving to telegram news reports from cities across Russia and the world. The leading editorial followed the telegrams, usually appearing on the second, or bottom of the first, page. These anonymous

³⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 38-46.

³⁷ In addition to the works described above, important studies of Russian nationalism and identity include: Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1996); Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997); and Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis eds., *National Identity in Russian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

articles featured in most major dailies and purported to speak for the whole paper.³⁸ Prior to April 14, 1900, *Novoe vremia* printed these articles without specific titles, giving only “S. Petersburg” and previous day’s date as a heading. During the decade in question, these pieces almost invariably covered international news. They generally gave analyses and commentary on major issues in world politics with the paper’s characteristically strong monarchist and Russian nationalist slant. As such, these editorials offer an important basis for examining *Novoe vremia*’s overarching opinions and attitudes.

Suvorin’s “Little Letters” offer another important source for the newspaper’s views.³⁹ Russian writers borrowed the feuilleton style of light commentary and criticism from the French press in the second quarter of the 1800s. It quickly became an important feature of Russian journalism, and, by the 1860s, every major newspaper had a dedicated section for feuilletons.⁴⁰ Suvorin described the feuilleton as “reinforce[ing] the lead article and, for the busy person weighed down by the trifles of life, repeat[ing] in light form what he has no time or inclination to read in serious form.”⁴¹ As one of the Russian press’ great masters of this informal, conversational style, his feuilletons in and of themselves often drew readers to *Novoe vremia*.⁴² Suvorin exercised considerable influence over the paper, even after he stepped down as its primary editor in 1901. This authority, together with his connections and stature within Russian publishing and society make Suvorin a defining figure at *Novoe vremia*. His writings, therefore,

³⁸ Katia Dianina, “The Feuilleton: An Everyday Guide to Public Culture in the Age of the Great Reforms,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 47, no. 2 (Summer, 2003): 187-210; Bellavance, “Fourth Estate, Fifth Power,” 38;

³⁹ These feuilletons have recently been compiled and published as A. S. Suvorin, *V ozhidanii veka XX. Malen'kie pis'ma, 1889-1903 gg.* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2005) and A. S. Suvorin, *Russko-Iaponskaia voina i russkaia revoliutsiia. Malen'kie pis'ma, 1904-1908 gg.* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2005).

⁴⁰ Ambler, *Russian Journalism and Politics*, 118. 57-59; McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 66-70.

⁴¹ Suvorin, quoted in Ambler, *Russian Journalism and Politics*, 59.

⁴² This is evidenced by the number of letters in Suvorin’s fond at RGALI that are specifically in response to his “Little Letters.”

figure prominently in this study.⁴³ His diary and correspondence flesh out his opinions and relationships that occurred outside of the newspaper's pages and influenced what he decided to publish.⁴⁴

The political cartoons and illustrations that appeared in *Novoe vremia* and its weekly illustrated supplement form the final part of this study's analyses of the newspaper's content. In particular, it will focus on the works of Stepan Fedorovich Sokolovskii, the newspaper's primary political caricaturist for the decade in question.⁴⁵ His drawings offer a visual component to the newspaper's narrative about the various peoples Russia encountered during its supposedly peaceful expansion into Northeast Asia. He used grotesque imagery to depict both Asians and Europeans, and, in the process, differentiate Russia from their undesirable qualities. These stereotyped images were, in a sense, inversions of Russian virtue.⁴⁶ This fit neatly into *Novoe vremia*'s overall presentation of Russia as a moral and benevolent authority in the region. Further, illustrations were an important tool for expanding the newspaper's influence. Illustrated magazines and supplements to periodicals proliferated in the late nineteenth century. These

⁴³ Biographical works on Suvorin cover various stages of his life. Ambler's biography *Russian Journalism and Politics* (1972) is a study of his life and writings during his formative years. Robert Bartol's dissertation "A. S. Suvorin and His 'Malen'kii pis'ma'" (1972) analyses his feuilletons for these years and gives them basic biographical and political context using the admittedly limited primary sources available to Western scholars at the time. Treatments of his entire life are Boris Borisovich Glinskii, *A. S. Suvorin. Biograficheskii ocherk* (S. Petersburg: Tip. T-va A. S. Suvorina, 1912) and Dinershtein's *A. S. Suvorin, Chelovel sdelavshii kareru* (1999). See also the recent dissertations: Liudmila Mikhailovna Khutrova, "Aleksei Sergeevich Suvorin, 1834-1912gg.: sud'ba i vzgliady," (Kandidat istoricheskikh nauk diss., Kazanskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2001); Larisa Anatol'evna Ostapenko, "Gazeta A. S. Suvorina 'Novoe vremia' v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizn' Rossii, 1907-1912gg.," (Kandidat istoricheskikh nauk diss., Nizhegorodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet im. N. I. Lobachevskogo, 2002); and Lidia Evgen'evna Azarina, "Literaturnaia pozitsiia A. S. Suvorina," (Kandidat filologicheskikh nauk diss., Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet im. M. V. Lomonosova, 2008).

⁴⁴ Suvorin's diary was first published in Moscow in 1923 by L. D. Freinkl'. I use the revised, corrected, and more complete version: Suvorin, *Dnevnik* (London: The Garnett Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ For a survey of Russian political caricature and international politics see A. G. Golikov and I. S. Rybachenok, *Smekh—delo ser'ezno: Rossiia i mir na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov v politicheskii karikatura* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2010).

⁴⁶ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 123-126, 134, 139.

visual media appealed to less-educated audiences and thus helped expand Suvorin's newspaper's reach into the countryside.⁴⁷

Materials in Suvorin's fond at RGALI form another cornerstone of my work. This collection contains a massive inventory of correspondence between Suvorin and dozens of writers, artists, journalists, politicians, and military officers.⁴⁸ Of particular importance to this study are the letters he received from ministers such as Witte and Kuropatkin. His correspondence with Witte spans three decades and includes letters on everything from intense political disagreements to plans for dinner.⁴⁹ He spoke less frequently with Kuropatkin, but the timeliness of their communication was important, as we shall see.

Another important part of Suvorin's fond is the large number of letters he received from his readers in response to *Novoe vremia*'s content. This collection includes hundreds of handwritten letters from the public from the 1870s to 1900s. While some wrote to express their general consent or disagreement with the newspaper's opinions, many more wrote to argue with a specific piece. An entire section of this reader correspondence responds exclusively to Suvorin's "Little Letters."⁵⁰ These letters provide invaluable evidence about how readers received and interacted with *Novoe vremia*'s ideas.⁵¹ While editors might exercise considerable creative license with published letters to the editor, private correspondence remained untouched by the newspaper's staff. This reader mail, of course, does not provide a complete picture of how the audience understood Russia's engagements in the Northeast Asia or the newspaper's

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Brooks explores this phenomenon in Chapter Four of *When Russia Learned to Read*, esp. pp. 111-120.

⁴⁸ Letters to Suvorin from prominent Russian author are also collected in D. I. Abramovich comp., *Pis'ma russkikh pisatelei k A. S. Suvorinu* (Leningrad: Izdanie Gosudarstvennoi Publichnoi Biblioteki v Leningrade, 1927).

⁴⁹ Correspondence between the two also appears in Witte's fond at RGIA, f. 1622, o. 1.

⁵⁰ These are found in RGALI, f. 459, o. 2. d. 671-677. Dela 671-674 contain general letters from the 1870s through 1906, whereas dela 676 and 677 contain responses to Suvorin's "Little Letter" feuilletons from the column's inception in the mid-1880s until 1908.

⁵¹ Octavie Bellavance offers a detailed examination of letters to the editor in the Russian press in chapter two of her dissertation "Fourth Estate, Fifth Power."

presentation of it. This collection is necessarily unrepresentative of the opinions of the large number of Russians that read *Novoe vremia*. Regardless, it offers a unique window into the minds of at least some of the paper's audience. The timing of most of this correspondence is telling. While the collection shows a steady flow of letters in the 1880s and 1890s, the quantity drastically spikes in 1904 and 1905, during the denouement of events in the Far East.

Finally, my work makes extensive use of the files of the Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pechaty [the Chief Bureau of Press Affairs] at RGIA.⁵² The Chief Bureau emerged as a department of the Ministry of the Interior during the Great Reforms of the 1860s to handle censorship matters.⁵³ The press laws of 1865 governed the chief bureau's actions and set out a basic framework for its supervision of the press. It had the authority to fine and issue warnings to periodicals, as well as temporarily ban their street sales or shutter them completely. The chief bureau could take these actions if the periodical violated the law's general stipulations on prosecutable offenses or the Bureau's regular circulars, which informed the press of specific contemporary topics it deemed off limits. The law's broadest ban was its vaguely-worded prohibition on writing about the Empire's laws or policies "with the aim of undermining public

⁵² Studies of the censorship regime in Imperial Russia include Balmuth, *Censorship in Russia* and Charles A. Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). The reference work *Periodicheskaya pechat' i tsenzura Rossiiskoi imperii v 1865-1905gg. Sistema administrativnykh vskazanii. Sravocnoe izdanie*, ed. M. A. Benina, comp. N. G. Patrusheva (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2011) documents every punitive action the chief bureau took against the empire's periodical press, compiles all of Russia's press laws during this period, and includes a helpful essay on the workings of the chief bureau by Patrusheva. The main statutes of the 1865 press laws also appear in the appendices of Ruud, *Censorship in Russia*. Works that draw on the files of the chief bureau include McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime* and Balmuth's institutional history of the newspaper *Russkie vedomosti, The Russian Bulletin, 1863-1917: A Liberal Voice in Tsarist Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000). Dinershtein uses this source as few times in *A. S. Suvorin. Chelovek sdelayshii kareru*, as well. For the Russian Empire's censorship regime for foreign publications, see Marianna Tax Choldin, *A Fence Around the Empire: Russian Censorship of Western Ideas Under the Tsars* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985).

⁵³ The process of reforming Nicholas I's censorship regime, which mostly relied on preliminary review of all publications by the Ministry of Education, was long and arduous. The chief bureau officially came into being in 1865. See Ruud, *Fighting Words*, Chapters Eight and Nine.

confidence... or arousing disrespect.”⁵⁴ This made any number of topics or positions off limits, and ostensibly quashed any public criticism of the regime. Further, if an individual submitted a refutation of or correction to an article or report in a specific periodical, the chief bureau had the power to force that periodical to print it “without delay.”⁵⁵ Local censorship offices in the Empire’s cities monitored provincial presses and kept Petersburg apprised of suspicious or provocative publications. Finally, government ministers or officials could also contact the chief bureau directly and request action against a periodical.

Novoe vremia’s renown among readers for its close association with the tsarist regime made its file in the chief bureau’s records a lively account of the ways in which government personalities sought to manage their public image and public perceptions of their policies. While minor provincial officials might petition to refute a report that damaged their reputations,⁵⁶ more powerful figures could try to use the Bureau to steer or influence the newspaper’s positions on important topics. Between 1894 and 1905, the Foreign Ministry was in regular contact with the chief bureau regarding *Novoe vremia*’s coverage of the events in Northeast Asia. This trend was most pronounced during the ministry of Count Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf, which began in 1900.⁵⁷ While Witte might have tried to influence Suvorin’s reportage through private conversations,⁵⁸ Count Lamzdorf’s machinations played out through official channels.

Interjections into the newspaper’s conversations about these topics were themselves open to

⁵⁴ The 1865 law also specifically cited “inciting one segment of the population in animosity against the other,” questioning the principles of private property or the family unit, and publishing resolutions of the gentry and zemstvo assemblies. “Appendix 1: Regulations on the press: The reign of the sovereign Alexander II, April 1865,” in Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 249.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁵⁶ See, for example, a complaint from a Sevastopol governorate official about a report in *Novoe vremia* that he believed implied the city had a poor public works system, Office of the Sevastopol Governorate to I. L. Goremykin, October 2, 1899, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 442, l. 238.

⁵⁷ A recent biography of Lamzdorf is A. Iu Loshakov, “Graf Vladimir Nikolovich Lamzdorf,” *Voprosy istorii*, No. 3 (March 2014): 20-47.

⁵⁸ See Fedyashin, “Sergei Witte and the Press,” esp. 522-527.

broader conversation with officials at the chief bureau and its parent body, the Ministry of the Interior. As we shall see, this meant that the foreign minister's attempts to guide the newspaper's opinions were not always successful. Nonetheless, his preoccupation with *Novoe vremia* showed the important connection between Far Eastern imperialism in policy and in the popular imagination. Moreover, the fact that it figured in the ministry's calculations at all demonstrated the paper's influence among not just the Russian public, but the government as well. These files, along with the abovementioned sources from the newspaper's vast readership, play an important part in explicating its role as a conduit for ideas to pass through different levels of Russian society.

Outline

The first two chapters of this dissertation cover the culture of Russian imperialism during its entry into Northeast Asia during the 1890s and early 1900s. Chapter One follows *Novoe vremia*'s coverage of the Sino-Japanese War and the government's eventual decision to intervene in the peace negotiations of 1895. This conflict had a defining role in forming and solidifying many of the Asian and European stereotypes and tropes that the newspaper would employ over the next decade. This chapter offers a focused study of these stereotypes and proposes a template for examining *Novoe vremia*'s conceptions of "Europeanness" and "Asianness."

Chapter Two examines how *Novoe vremia* and its peers presented expansion into Manchuria following the Tripartite Intervention of 1895 and its broader role in the region. The anti-foreign Boxer Uprising in 1900 figured prominently in the press' discussions and served as an important showcase for its conceptions of imperial morality. Russia's lease of Port Arthur in 1898 and invasion of Manchuria during the Boxer war also raised international tensions during

this period. *Novoe vremia*'s belligerent rhetoric in this atmosphere caused the newspaper to increasingly gain the attention of the Foreign Ministry and Chief Bureau of Press Affairs.

Chapters Three and Four form a single narrative and cover the lead-up to the Russo-Japanese War in late 1903, its outbreak in 1904, and the wave of Russian defeats that punctuated that year. Still riding the self-righteousness of Russia's supposedly benevolent role in the Boxer Uprising, *Novoe vremia* employed its stock of European and Asian images to mobilize support for the war effort and frame it as a conflict of special national importance. In the war's early stages, the newspaper used bombastic rhetoric to denigrate Russia's foes and praise its national spirit. It also hosted a donation campaign that offered average newspaper readers the opportunity to contribute to rebuilding the navy after the Japanese attack on Port Arthur. Early 1904 saw the beginning of a major increase in reader correspondence as members of the newspaper's audience wrote to Suvorin to express their hopes and fears about the war. It also marked the beginning of a sustained dialogue between the newspaper and Foreign Minister Lamzdorf about Russia's global position. As battlefield losses continued to pile up, reader letters became increasingly gloomy, and Suvorin and his staff began to express their frustrations in print. This, in turn, led to more recriminations from the Foreign Ministry.

The final chapter covers the events of 1905. This year saw not only the catastrophic defeats of the Russian army and navy but also a revolutionary movement that shook the foundations of the tsarist regime. *Novoe vremia* persisted in pushing for victory, even as the military proved incapable of winning the war and the domestic situation disintegrated into strikes and demonstrations. At this time, Suvorin attempted to further link the war to Russia's national destiny by campaigning for the revival of a version of Russia's medieval consultative body. Only such a step, he argued, could both achieve victory and fix the glaringly inefficient and

incompetent tsarist government. Readers responded by sending even more letters to express their attitudes towards the war and revolution, though they did not always agree with his positions. This year also marked the fiercest argument between *Novoe vremia* and the Foreign Ministry, as the former openly accused the empire's diplomatic corps of negligence and obliviousness. The events of 1905, thus, brought the hopes, preconceptions, and inconsistencies of Russian imperialism in Northeast Asia to a head.

Chapter One

The Sino-Japanese War and Russian Images of East and West

On May 23, 1894, King Gojong of Korea requested Qing Chinese troops to help put down a nation-wide peasant rebellion, unknowingly setting in motion a chain of events that would upset a centuries-old balance of power in East Asia. In asking for Chinese aid he offered the Japanese government the opportunity to fulfill longstanding ambitions for a military presence in Korea. The Tianjin Convention of 1885 had granted Japan the right to match any Qing military force sent to this reclusive Chinese tributary state.¹ The Meiji government jumped at this chance to mass troops on the peninsula under the guise of protecting Japanese diplomats and nationals residing there.² The rebels, fearing just such foreign interference, quickly agreed to a truce with Korean government forces, but it proved too late.³ Within a week of Gojong's request both China and Japan had thousands of troops on Korean soil and by July 20 war between the two empires had begun.

Novoe vremia seized on the tensions in Korea and quickly filled its front pages with telegraphed bulletins, feature articles, and front-page editorials on the "Korean Question." In June and July it urged its readers not to let European news, such as the recent assassination of French president Francois Carnot, "overshadow" events "on the peripheries of the civilized world."⁴ The newspaper repeatedly stated that the Korean Question was significant to "all European nations and governments," but most prominently Russia. It argued that, as the only

¹ Also known as the Li-Ito Convention, for Chinese Viceroy Li Hongzhang and Japanese Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi, the Tianjin Convention followed China's suppression of the Gapsin Coup of 1884. The coup had tried to install a westernized and pro-Japanese government in Seoul, Stewart Lone, *Japan's First Modern War: Army and Society in the Conflict with China, 1894-1895* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 15-16.

² Lone, *Japan's First Modern War*, 26; S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 114-115

³ Ibid., 113.

⁴ "S. Peterburg, 17 iunia," *Novoe vremia*, June 18, 1894.

European empire that bordered the region, Russia was the only such power with legitimate “neighboring interests.”⁵ *Novoe vremia* went out of its way to more or less support maintaining the status quo in Korea during the war. It argued that, lacking ice-free Pacific ports, it was hardly in Russia’s interests to replace its “weak and pliable” Korean neighbor with a “strong, established, ...[and] aggressive” Japan.⁶ Indeed, the paper asserted that Japanese control of both shores of the Korean Strait would present a “sore point” for Russian foreign policy comparable to its longstanding issue with Ottoman control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.⁷ In its opinion, the events in Korea were, therefore, of major importance to Russia and worthy of consistent observation and analysis.

The Russian imperial government shared this view. Throughout the war, special conferences of high-ranking imperial ministers met numerous times to discuss what, if any, action their country should take as the war progressed.⁸ The death of the diplomatically cautious tsar Alexander III in October and ascension to the throne of his less risk-averse son Nicholas II, as well as Japan’s string of early decisive victories, would eventually lead Russia to act in defense of its Pacific interests. The result was the Tripartite Intervention of 1895. This joint diplomatic action undertaken by Russia, France, and Germany stripped Japan of a hard-won foothold on the Asian continent and heralded a significant shift to East Asia in Russian foreign policy.

The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 presents an important starting point to my discussion of the intersection between the Russian imperial government, mainstream

⁵ “S. Peterburg, 12 iunია,” *Novoe vremia*, June 13, 1894; “S. Peterburg, 14 iunია,” *Novoe vremia*, June 15, 1894.

⁶ “S. Peterburg, 17 iunია,” *Novoe vremia*, June 18, 1894.

⁷ “S. Peterburg, 14 iunია,” *Novoe vremia*, June 15, 1894.

⁸ The minutes of these meetings can be found in “Pervye shagi russkogo imperializma na Dal’nem Vostoke,” *Krasnyi arkhiv* 52 (1932): 62-83. A treatment of these meetings can be found in chapter seven of Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*.

conservative news reportage in *Novoe vremia*, and newspaper readers. The inauguration of construction on the Trans-Siberian railway received considerable fanfare in the Russian press, but the Sino-Japanese conflict and Triple Intervention caused a truly marked increase in journalistic focus on affairs in the Far East.⁹ The war received substantial attention from all of the European imperial powers in the region. As noted in *Novoe vremia*, the Russian Empire's *Primorskii krai* [Seaside Territory] on the Pacific made it the only great power possessing extensive borders with China or Korea. Britain, France, and Germany, however, all dominated large portions of the Chinese coast and mainland economically and maintained large local naval and army garrisons. The Sino-Japanese War became a major international affair as these European empires kept a keen eye to protect their interests. The war marked the first in a series of major events in the region that drew the attention, and interference, of the European and Asian imperial powers of Northeast Asia over the next decade. Thus, it initiated Suvorin's and *Novoe vremia*'s interest in Northeast Asia as well.

This chapter explores the attitudes expressed in *Novoe vremia* toward the Asian and European participants and observers of the Sino-Japanese War. Using the newspaper's coverage of the war and the Tripartite Intervention, it outlines the development of a series of national stereotypes in the newspaper's writing. The tropes it developed during this period would figure prominently in its reportage and analysis of future events, such as the Boxer Rebellion and Russo-Japanese War. In addition to its role in the formation of relatively static images of the Chinese and Japanese Empires, the Sino-Japanese War also helped solidify Russian depictions of European imperial powers in the Far East. By focusing on what they viewed as the avarice of

⁹ See, for example Marks, *Road to Power* and Eskridge-Kosmach, "China and Policy of Russia in Respect to China Before 1894 in the Russian Press."

European countries—notably, Great Britain—*Novoe vremia*'s staff criticized these empires, in the process creating an image of Russia as a benign, even benevolent, imperial power.

A crucial point in these developing stereotypes was the distinction between “Europeanness” and “Asianness” to which Suvorin and his associates regularly alluded. Neither of these categories had especially firm definitions or boundaries, but they nonetheless served as important signposts in the newspaper's discussion of the war's combatants. These two groupings went beyond patterns of dress and technology—they had critical mental and moral connotations. For instance, while Asianness often signified backwardness, deception, or decadence, it also contained admirable qualities, such as prudence, decorum, and respectfulness. This seemingly contradictory description has certain parallels to the ways European empires, such as France, viewed certain colonial territories and colonized peoples as simultaneously noble and pliable, and savage and dangerous.¹⁰ Interestingly, *Novoe vremia* viewed Europeanness as similarly two-sided. In its pages, Europeans embodied modernity and civility but were also prone to greed and hypocrisy.

As I argue, *Novoe vremia*, and those in conversation with it, often used this matrix to analyze the participants in and interested observers of the Sino-Japanese War. This produced not just cultural, but also moral stereotypes of these nations. This had important implications for the newspaper's depictions of the Russian Empire itself. A primary concern of the Russia that appeared in *Novoe vremia* during this period was the moral righteousness of its actions. This also had ramifications for Russia's *metaphysical* position between Europe and Asia. As we shall see, Russia's apparent embodiment of the best qualities of both Europeanness and Asianness made it, in *Novoe vremia*'s opinion, best equipped to exert a morally acceptable influence in this region.

¹⁰ For more on this bifurcated view of colonies and colonized peoples among the French public, see Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses* and Hale, *Races on Display*.

* * *

Images of Asia at the Outbreak of War

Shortly after the formal declaration of war in July 1894, *Novoe vremia* published an article titled “Regarding the Events in Korea.”¹¹ This piece modeled China, Japan, and Korea on three personality types of medieval European physiognomy: phlegmatic [*flegmaticchen*], sanguine [*sangvinik*], and melancholic [*melankholik*].¹² Though clearly an attempt at humor, these characterizations did more or less describe how the newspaper portrayed each of these countries in the months surrounding the outbreak of hostilities.

Novoe vremia depicted China during the summer of 1894 as the phlegmatic. Valuing tradition and contemplation, the Chinese appeared in its pages “temperate[,] sober,” and “as consistent and persistent in life as their government is in politics.”¹³ The Celestial Empire remained cool and calculating, if a little sluggish, as tensions mounted. It was largely content with its military capabilities and prospects for victory against its island neighbor, the newspaper explained. Though European wars and unequal treaties had eroded China’s ability to fend off incursions from the West, in East Asia it could look to millennia of dominance due to its geographic size, immense population, and cultural influence. It was, in the paper’s estimation, this regional ascendancy that had left the Chinese reluctant to fully adopt ideas and technologies from a western civilization it viewed as peripheral and inferior to “The Middle Kingdom.” From this self-important position, *Novoe vremia* argued, the Qing Dynasty would not take to “hasty innovations if it did not want to,” and only did so when thoroughly “confident of its real benefits

¹¹ As the war proceeded, this article became a somewhat regular feature in the newspaper.

¹² “Po povodu sobytiia v Koree,” *Novoe vremia*, July 24, 1894.

¹³ Ibid.

for the conditions of Chinese life.”¹⁴ For these reasons, this esteemed and shrewd empire maintained an only slightly guarded confidence regarding its prospects in a war with Japan.

For *Novoe vremia*, China’s most powerful military commander and politician, Viceroy Li Hongzhang, embodied the best Chinese qualities.¹⁵ Li held numerous titles in the Qing government and exercised a level of control over the empire comparable to that of a prime minister.¹⁶ As an ardent, yet cautious, reformer and modernizer, Li had overseen the construction of railways and telegraph lines in the preceding decades. Moreover, he led efforts to develop a Europeanized army and navy in the northeast province of Zhili, which contained the Qing capital, Beijing, and would fight the majority of the war for the Chinese side.¹⁷ *Novoe vremia*’s leading articles referred to him as an “almighty” force in China that, nonetheless, valued prudence over coercion, epitomizing the even-tempered Chinese sensibility. During the build up to war, he was shown as seeking “to protect the honor—i.e., interests—of China, but... try[ing] to keep the peace.”¹⁸ Li clearly impressed Suvorin and his staff, appearing in the newspapers’ pages more often than any other East Asian politician. The model of Chinese discretion and

¹⁴ “S. Peterburg, 20 iulia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 21, 1894. Emphasis original.

¹⁵ For a concise treatment of Li’s efforts to modernize Qing China’s military, economy, and infrastructure see Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd Ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 217-222.

¹⁶ Li’s official titles included “Grand Minister of the Northern Seas, Governor-General of Zhili Province, Commander of the Huai Army, Associate Controller of the Board of the Admiralty, and Grand Secretary,” Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 46. In his memoirs, Witte regarded Li as an excellent statesman, noting that he was the major political and military authority in China, “in fact, ... govern[ing] the country,” Sergei Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 232.

¹⁷ At this point the Qing Dynasty possessed no unified national army. Owing to a lack of central government funding and the initiative of figures such as Li, by the 1890s, the Qing military relied on a number of regionally funded and maintained armies. The Manchu Qing had a long history of organizing its military under a number of regional and ethnic “banners,” a system that ostensibly worked to prevent any one force (or the majority Han ethnicity) from acquiring enough military strength to challenge this foreign dynasty. Li’s Zhili army, as the main military force of northeast China, thus faced the Japanese largely on its own. For more on the military during the late Qing period, see Richard S. Horowitz’s essay, “Beyond the Marble Boat: The Transformation of the Chinese Military, 1850-1911,” in *A Military History of China*, David A. Graff and Robin Higham eds. (Lexington: The University of Kentucky, 2012).

¹⁸ “S. Peterburg, 17 iunia,” *Novoe vremia*, June 18, 1894.

venerability, he would remain a prominent image in *Novoe vremia*'s depictions of the Qing Empire until his death in 1901.

Li's authority and influence in foreign affairs during 1894 was comparable, if not surpassing, that of Russian Finance Minister Sergei Witte, the tsarist government's dominant politician for most of the 1890s. The two spent considerable time together negotiating the Russo-Chinese alliance of 1896, and Li left a strong impression on Witte. Mirroring *Novoe vremia*'s sentiments, he would later write that he had "met many notable statesmen in [his] career and would rate Li Hungchung [Hongzhang] high among them." Li possessed a "remarkably sound mind and good sense," in Witte's view, making up for a lack in European learning with a "sound Chinese education."¹⁹ Witte was unimpressed with certain trappings of Li's rank in the Chinese system, such as the excessive servility of his bodyguards and his smug pompousness in front of dignitaries he considered inferior.²⁰ Even so, he, much like Suvorin and his writers at *Novoe vremia*, held great respect for Li as a diplomat and politician.

In terms of China's manpower and martial ability, *Novoe vremia* asserted that despite its caution and wariness in adopting Western technology, Li's military improvements and the country's large population in theory made it more than a match for Japan. On July 21, it pointed out that while not long ago China had employed Europeans as commanders and specialists aboard its ships of the line, now the foreign presence was limited to advisors. Its navy now possessed such arsenals and hardware that, from a distance, only the Chinese flag differentiated its navy from that of "any European power."²¹ Alluding again to the viceroy's reforms, the article also noted that the Chinese army possessed up to date artillery. Under Li's enlightened guidance the Qing government had also been stepping up the "military colonization" of its

¹⁹ Sergei Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 232.

²⁰ Ibid, 236.

²¹ "Po povodu sobytiia v Koree," *Novoe vremia*, July 21, 1894.

strategically important Manchurian borderlands, which abutted Russia and Korea. Finally, China's sheer available manpower and widely scattered immigrant communities alone clearly made it a potential power on the international stage.²² *Novoe Vremia*, thus, shared many of the opinions expressed in the contemporary western presses regarding China's ability to defeat Japan in the brewing conflict.²³

Novoe vremia did, however, express a certain wariness of these nascent military and economic capabilities. Speaking to the immensity of the Chinese population in the Qing realm and abroad, it evoked the specter of a slow, but irresistible, invasion. In terms of latent military potential, the Qing possessed the resources to raise "a horrifying mass of armed men."²⁴ Still more troubling was the far-flung nature of the Chinese population. "China has no rivals on its path of peaceful conquest," it suggested. Regarding Chinese trans-Pacific migration in the nineteenth century, the paper argued:

The yellow race is, like nature, capable of... absorbing, and digesting any nation if not very strongly opposed... The Chinese have hundreds and thousands everywhere: in Alaska and Canada, on the Cape of Good Hope, on all islands of the Pacific Ocean, and all along the mainland of America. ...[As] cheap, sensible worker[s], knowing neither strikes, nor truancy, nor holidays, getting along in the most impossible conditions, the Chinese have flooded the labor market in our Primorskii krai...[T]hey are contented with, comparatively, very small wages, they live scantily ...Of the earnings of the Chinese almost nothing remains in the place of his temporary residence—all is exported to China or, perhaps, to Chinese elements in the region—a parasite sucking [the region's] life juice and hindering its development.

From the newspaper's perspective, these immigrant communities presented a major concern for their host countries. As a laboring population, they could outcompete all others through their willingness to work for pennies on the local workers' dollar and then rarely used these wages to contribute to the local economy. More frightening, in the article's estimation, was the potential

²² Ibid.

²³ Foreign opinions and predictions for the outcome of the approaching war can be found in Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 138-145.

²⁴ "S. Peterburg, 12 iulia," *Novoe vremia*, July 13, 1894.

of these communities to act as fifth columns in future Chinese expansion—especially in regions bordering the Qing state, such as the Russian Far East. If a military conflict were to occur, Chinese residents of these bordering lands might easily turn to banditry or offer “unsolicited help” to any advancing Chinese army.²⁵ At the onset of the war, *Novoe vremia*, thus, did not fail to present its readers with the troubling prospect of a “Yellow Peril” flowing out of the Chinese mainland to overrun Northeast Asia.

These possibilities rarely left the realm of the hypothetical, however, as Suvorin’s writers also presented a wholly different picture of the Chinese state and its people. Alongside the newspaper’s depictions of its great history and latent potential was a concurrent image of China as ignorant, corrupt, and profoundly disorderly. In the same July 21 article, the author explained that although China had the human resources to marshal a colossal army, its archaic military under the Qing “Banner” system left them woefully unprepared for modern warfare. Li Hongzhang’s Zhili force contained fifty thousand men modeled on the Imperial German army, but *Novoe vremia* noted that their “discipline is purely Chinese, i.e., atrociously bad.” Clearly, the Chinese national character was at fault in the Qing’s military shortcomings. Any Europeanized aspect of their army was purely cosmetic, the article asserted, as “European military organization... opposes all that is innate in the Chinese.” Pompously self-assured of his own cultural superiority, the Chinese man saw little merit in western military organization. He remained dishonest and obstinate in his resistance to modern military drills and conduct.²⁶ In the author’s opinion, no amount of European learning or armaments could jolt the Chinese out of their traditional, backward mindset.

²⁵ “Po povodu sobytiia v Koree,” *Novoe vremia*, July 21, 1894.

²⁶ Ibid.

Images of the Chinese military in *Novoe vremia*'s weekly supplement illustrated this sentiment. In Figure 1, an officer in European dress stands next to a counterpart in traditional garb. Nearby, regular infantrymen wear traditional dress and turbans. Mounted troops appear labeled not as lancers or hussars, but as "Tatar cavalry," a title more likely to evoke visions of medieval raiders than modern soldiers to contemporary Russian readers.²⁷ Their army seems motley and outdated, a hodgepodge of Western and Chinese organization, armaments, and uniforms. For these reasons, China remained an Asian country toying with some European ideas and technologies but unable or unwilling to fully adopt them on a large scale.

The China that appeared in *Novoe vremia* at the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, though possessing Europeanized elements and overwhelming manpower, seemed held back by its phlegmatic nature. Most Russian periodicals in St. Petersburg and Moscow shared this view. The conservative papers *Novosti* [*The News*] and *Moskovskoe vedomosti* [*The Moscow Gazette*] agreed with *Novoe vremia*'s assertion that if China possessed any real martial strength, it lay in its enormous population, as its military, despite a few bright points, was not fully modernized.²⁸ This mass of people had had great success in establishing outposts of Chinese society along the Pacific Rim. Nonetheless, this colonization presented more the *specter* of Chinese power than a truly formidable fighting force. Indeed, even liberal periodicals, such as *Nedel'ia* [*The Week*] and *Russkaia mysl'* [*Russian Thought*], usually at odds with *Novoe vremia*'s staunchly pro-government positions, shared this view of the Chinese military as lackluster. In the opinion of the Russian press as a whole, unless China managed to bring its advantage in manpower to bear, Japan stood to out-class the Qing Dynasty on the battlefield.²⁹

²⁷ "Kitaiskaia armiia," *Novoe vremia*, August 6, 1894.

²⁸ Eskridge-Kosmach, "The Russian Press on Russia's Chinese Policy in the Period of the Sino-Japanese War," 624-626.

²⁹ Ibid; Sun Zhingqing, *Kitaiskaia politika Rossii*, 115-117.



Figure 1. The Chinese Army



Figure 2. The Japanese Army

Despite its much smaller size, the sanguine Japanese faced few problems implementing European military concepts and seemed a formidable force in the Russian press's estimation. As *Novoe vremia* noted, Japan was malleable and capricious and had absorbed Western culture and technology seemingly without a second thought. "In life, politics, and commerce [the Japanese person] uses cunning," an article from July 24 put forward, explaining that the Japanese took European civilization "on faith." Unlike their more temperate and lethargic Chinese neighbors, the Japanese person was "a fervent patriot, [and] a brave soldier" who was "passionate in politics."³⁰ The boundless ambition that appeared as the defining characteristic of the Japanese state and its people in the papers' pages lent itself to this wild enthusiasm for their country and desire to adopt new customs and ideas to strengthen it. In *Novoe vremia*'s opinion, this overriding, and at times insolent, ambition to advance its position on the international stage led Japan to overstep its bounds and take major diplomatic risks. Yet, according to Suvorin and his

³⁰ "S. Peterburg, 23 iulia," *Novoe vremia*, July 24, 1894.

writers, this excitable and self-important little country was not to be scoffed at, at least not entirely.

During the lead-up to the war, *Novoe vremia* consistently mentioned Japan's recent modernization and attempts to claim a position as a regional power. On June 10, the leading article focused on Japan's attempts to escape the system of unequal trading treaties that Western powers had imposed on Japan and China. In the interest of "recover[ing] ... autonomous, unconstrained customs" arrangements with these empires, it had recently been strongly agitating for an end to the extraterritoriality that these countries enjoyed on its shores. Extraterritoriality, the deference of foreign nationals to the authority of their consulate rather than local magistrates, served as one of the most humiliating manifestations of the unequal nature of Japan's and China's relations with the West. As the article noted, the Meiji government had thus far negotiated an end to consular jurisdiction with weaker countries, such as Mexico.³¹ Though China had expressed similar dissatisfaction with customs relations with the West it had only achieved small victories that benefited rich mandarins in port cities.³² Moreover, Japan's actions on the international stage demonstrated a desire to expand its territory and influence in a much more active way than the wobbling Qing Empire. In *Novoe vremia*'s assessment, Japan's sudden ability to undertake active and aggressive actions, such as landing troops on the Korean peninsula and capturing the Korean king, itself "constituted a major international event." Having

³¹ Japan was in tense talks with Great Britain during July 1894 to renegotiate their diplomatic and economic relations. On August 25, the two countries agreed on a new treaty that removed many of the unequal elements of this relationship, such as extraterritoriality and the "most favored nation" clause. Japan would successfully renegotiate all of its unequal treaties with European powers by 1896. For a thorough treatment of its negotiations with Great Britain see, Louis G. Perez, *Japan Comes of Age: Mutsu Munemitsu and the Unequal Treaties* (Madison-Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999).

³² "S. Peterburg, 9 iunia," *Novoe vremia*, June 10, 1894. The Chinese regulations the article refers to required permission from local officials to import machinery across Chinese borders. The regulations stated that import could be refused if the machinery interfered with the vaguely worded "existence and well-being of the Chinese people [*narod*]." The article's author tended to agree with sources he cited in English newspapers that believed this regulation was the pet project of a number of Chinese officials hoping to gain themselves a monopoly on machine imports, *ibid*.

moved to modernize its army and navy along European lines in “frenzied haste,” Japan had achieved “significant results” that its Chinese neighbors, and much of the West, still seemed to ignore.³³ Unlike the calculating and cautious Chinese phlegmatics, the sanguine Japanese moved quickly and impulsively to display their newly gained military and diplomatic clout.

As war loomed, *Novoe vremia* did not hesitate to voice suspicions that the entire Korean crisis might be a Japanese ploy to seize some or all of the peninsular kingdom. On June 18, it wrote that Japan made no secret of its dissatisfaction with the constraints of its island territory and dreamed of conquering Korea.³⁴ The Japanese Empire had taken every chance to intervene in Korean affairs in preceding decades, the article explained, even fabricating incidents to give themselves cause for action. Yet, these prior encroachments had been rebuffed by the “decisive countermeasures” of European imperial powers.³⁵ This time, however, the Japanese government had taken advantage of a convenient peasant rebellion in Korea to use its newly updated military, and it appeared that Europe would not check their advances.

Novoe vremia remained extremely skeptical of the Meiji government’s claims that the occupation of Seoul and capture of King Gojong were necessary to maintain the safety and economic interests of Japanese living in Korea.³⁶ By the end of June, the paper openly proposed that the peasant rebellion itself was a Japanese creation.³⁷ As it argued, Japan had sought to

³³ “S. Peterburg, 17 iunia,” *Novoe vremia*, June 18, 1894.

³⁴ Saya Makito argues that this was actually true. Alluding to legends of Japanese rule over Korea in the first century CE and its serious attempts at invading Korea in the sixteenth century, prominent writers and politicians revived ideas of “ancient privileges and authority” over Korea in the late nineteenth century. Saya, *The Sino-Japanese War and the Birth of Japanese Nationalism*, David Noble trans. (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2011) 15.

³⁵ The article gives no specific examples but is likely referring to Europe’s support of the Qing government putting down the Gapsin Coup.

³⁶ “S. Peterburg, 17 iunia,” *Novoe vremia*, June 18, 1894.

³⁷ This was not true. The Tonghak rebellion began in the 1860s as an anti-western religious movement that aimed to, among other things, revitalize the Korean kingdom by improving its institutions and rooting out corruption. Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 112-113. For a recent study of the Tonghak see Carl F. Young, *Eastern Learning and the Heavenly Way: The Tonghak and Ch’ondogyo Movements and the Twilight of Korean Independence* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2014).

undermine the Korean government by mobilizing imbedded agents throughout the kingdom after the assassination a pro-Japanese politician.³⁸ Using Japanese government money, these agents had agitated the Korean population to revolt. The ensuing disturbances damaged Japanese persons and their property, offering Japan's government "a pretext for interference."³⁹ During the summer of 1894, as far as *Novoe vremia*'s front pages were concerned, the Japanese Empire's ambitions knew no bounds, and it used deception and trickery to achieve them. The combination of newfound power, ambition, and ruthlessness that comprised Japan's image in *Novoe vremia* in the summer of 1894 pointed toward a deeper conflict that Suvorin and his staff saw between the island empire's Europeanization and its Asian nature.

Despite these suspicions, the newspaper did not deny Japan's success at quickly and effectively developing a large modernized army and navy. Its standing army, according to *Novoe vremia*, numbered 250,000 Europeanized troops, compared to the meager 50,000 similarly armed troops Li Hongzhang maintained within his numerically larger but mostly outdated Zhili army.⁴⁰ Indeed, just one week prior to its illustrated supplement's unflattering image of the motley Chinese military it ran a very different picture of the Japanese. In the illustration (Figure 2), Japanese officers and their troops appear decked out in full European uniforms and equipment. Unlike the jumble of styles and armaments in the Chinese army of Figure 1, the Japanese in this image seem European from head to toe. Additionally, this large, well-trained army was more than simply the result concerted military reform: it was also a statement of Japan's ambitions to ascendancy in East Asia. As the leading article from July 13 wrote, "the Japanese in all

³⁸ Kim Ok-gyun, a pro-Japanese and pro-Western politician had been involved in a failed coup against the Korean government in 1884 but escaped to Japan where he entered the employ of the Japanese government and continued to work against the largely anti-Japanese Korean government. In 1894, a Korean agent tricked Kim into visiting Shanghai, where Chinese assassins killed him. Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 96-97.

³⁹ "S. Petersburg, 26 iunia," *Novoe vremia*, June 27, 1894.

⁴⁰ "S. Peterburg, 17 iunia," *Novoe vremia*, June 18, 1894.

seriousness consider themselves ‘the Europeans of the Far East,’ and view Chinese civilization, with its resistant hatred to all European innovations, with undisguised contempt.”⁴¹ With their “frenzied” embrace of Western technology, dress, and culture, Japan clearly felt themselves approaching membership in the Great powers.

Novoe vremia made sure to qualify any statement about Japan’s successes and pretensions to Europeanness, however, by pointing out what it considered to be the lingering Asian core beneath a European veneer. A few days after war officially began in late July, a front-page article criticized Japan for its petty and treacherous motivations. Unlike the cool and calm Chinese, the Japanese were “brave and warlike” and had “reached a painful sense of patriotism and national pride.” In order to join “the society of civilized nations,” Japan had leapt into avid study with western teachers and advisors. Yet, their intention had been merely to gain power, not to attain a truly European level of refinement and civility. They, therefore, discarded these teachers and advisors almost as quickly as they had sought their tutelage. By the 1890s, the article argued, “wholesale adoption” of Western technology and customs had ended. Now, the Japanese busily adapted Western practices to their goals of ending unequal relations with Europe and attaining political, military, and economic superiority over Northeast Asia.⁴²

Novoe vremia acknowledged that the Japanese possessed a commendably genuine love for their country and justifiable resentment at unfair treatment from Europe. They were not merely short, “swarthy men [*smuglykh chelovekov*]” wearing western clothing.⁴³ Success in adopting Western ideas, it argued, however, had resulted in an only superficial westernization of the Japanese Empire and its people. The July article expressed clear disdain for the “purely Asian qualities” that Japan still possessed despite its rapid and successful modernization.

⁴¹ “S. Peterburg, 12 iulia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 13, 1894.

⁴² “S. Peterburg, 23 iulia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 24, 1894.

⁴³ Ibid.

“Vindictiveness, deceit, ... and frivolity” characterized the Japanese psyche, it explained. In economic matters Japanese merchants acted not reputably, but as “huckster[s] ...always ready to cheat the buyer or lender.” Further, they were apparently unable to grasp that “fair trade” could offer their country more than “fraudulent tricks.”⁴⁴ A similar characterization of the Japanese underlay *Novoe vremia*’s previously mentioned suggestion that the Japanese government had orchestrated the entire Korean crisis. Having mastered European military ideas and technology, they now used them in the pursuit of the “Asian” goal of underhandedly advancing their own base desires for regional power and prestige.

During the summer of 1894, *Novoe vremia* accordingly argued that while Japan’s newfound military and diplomatic power demanded a modicum of respect, the nation still embodied some of the worst “Asian” qualities, which were evident in its interactions with its regional neighbors. Japan belonged to the same “yellow tribe” as Qing China, but as the paper asserted, it stood in stark contrast to this country.⁴⁵ Despite its external appearance and pretensions to “Europeanness,” its petty motivations dictated how it used Western ideas. As with its depiction of the Qing, *Novoe vremia* would repeatedly hearken back to this trope of the untrustworthy Japanese upstart.

⁴⁴ “S. Peterburg, 23 iulia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 24, 1894.

⁴⁵ “S. Peterburg, 12 iulia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 13, 1894.



Figure 3. “Tempest in a Teacup. The conflict between Japan and China”

Aside from a few articles on its history, Korea largely took a backseat to China and Japan in *Novoe vremia*’s pages. As the physical setting for the growing regional tensions, Korea remained largely that—a background. This fit with its physiognomic designation as the slow and listless melancholic of Northeast Asia. A reprinted European cartoon from the weekly supplement aptly illustrates this state of helplessness (Figure 3). In this image we see a stereotypical Chinese mandarin and Japanese geisha in a tug of war over a teacup labeled “Corea [Korea].” Inconsequential to the point of inanimacy, Korea appears as merely an object for two much stronger countries to squabble over. Indeed, this image of melancholic Korea as a small, weak country beholden to the influences of larger Asian and European powers, unlike the still malleable images of China and Japan, would remain static in the newspaper through the early 1900s.

Thus, at the outbreak the Sino-Japanese War on July 20, 1894, *Novoe vremia* was already using a number of stock images of the main countries of Northeast Asia. Yet, in the early conflict

these identities were still in flux. China appeared as both a sophisticated giant still working to harness its terrifying potential and a hopelessly stubborn and decadent old man. For its part, Japan was both the shining example of the ability of Western ideas to alter Asian nations in their image and a cautionary tale about how this transformation could never be truly complete. As we shall see, the war did much to construct a more definitive depiction of these two nations in the Russian media. As Japanese victories mounted and China's inadequacies became clearer, a more static picture of the countries of Northeast Asia appeared.

Stereotypes Solidify

Military engagements in the weeks following the formal declaration of war between China and Japan remained relatively small. Though most of these skirmishes were Japanese victories, *Novoe vremia* withheld predictions of the war's outcome. It chastised both Russian and foreign newspapers for claiming a victory for Japan that was still far from certain, explaining that "this clash of the 'yellow' nations of the Far East [was] still in its first stage."⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the Russian imperial government held a special conference to confer about the war and its implications for Russian interests. On August 9, the ministers of war, the navy, finance, and foreign affairs convened to decide the Russian course. After debriefing his colleagues on the situation in Korea, Foreign Minister Nikolai Girs suggested that Russia maintain a cautious distance from the conflict. Though suspicious of possible British involvement in a conflict so close to Russia's borders, Finance Minister Witte agreed.⁴⁷ After brief discussion, the conference concluded that the most desirable outcome was "maintenance of the status quo in Korea." Leaving open the door for future intervention, it made no definitive

⁴⁶ "S. Peterburg, 11 avgusta," *Novoe vremia*, August 12, 1894.

⁴⁷ Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 120.

statement of Russian neutrality in the conflict. The conference decided that the Russian Empire should work with interested European powers “to persuade the warring parties to a speedy cessation of hostilities.”⁴⁸ Despite these resolutions, the empire’s leadership paid little attention to the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1894, not convening another special conference to update its strategy until early 1895.⁴⁹

By late August, Japan had pushed Chinese ground forces from Seoul’s environs north to Pyongyang.⁵⁰ On August 31, as Japan prepared for what would become the crucial battles of Pyongyang and the Yalu River, *Novoe vremia* remained reluctant to pick a side. Referring again to foreign—and especially British—periodicals calling the war a triumph of Japanese westernization, it exclaimed, “that the clever successes of Japan were explained not so much by absolute military power, but by how unprepared China was for war.” Indeed, China was only just beginning to bring its “massive superiority in brute force” to bear.⁵¹ This hesitancy to predict Japanese victory faded from *Novoe vremia*’s pages after the major battles that September, however.

Between September 3 and 5 the Japanese military dealt shattering blows to Li Hongzhang’s land and naval forces. On land, it launched a major assault on China’s Korean stronghold at Pyongyang, driving them from the city in an intense two-day battle. A mixture of their own strategic guile and their enemy’s miscalculations and disorganization allowed Japanese forces to rout the city’s Chinese defenders. Their final attack proved so formidable that Chinese forces abandoned huge amounts of supplies in their haste to retreat. This proved an especially unfortunate turn for the Chinese since the city had been their main supply point on the Korean

⁴⁸ “Zhurnal Osobogo soveshcheniia (21) 9 avgusta 1894 g.” *Krasnyi arkhiv* 52 (1932): 66-67.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 67; Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 120.

⁵⁰ A good blow-by-blow account of these small early battles can be found in Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 157-163.

⁵¹ “S. Peterburg, 30 avgusta,” *Novoe vremia*, August 31, 1894.

peninsula and held some of Li's army's most modern weaponry and ammunition. The exhausted and logistically strapped Japanese readily co-opted these supplies.⁵² A day later, the Japanese outmaneuvered Li's slightly better armed Zhili navy at the mouth of the Yalu River in the northern Yellow Sea. Though roughly equal in size to the Chinese squadron, the Japanese ships possessed more maneuverable and rapid-firing cannons. Li's ships were equipped with larger, more powerful guns but faced significant issues with the quantity and quality of their ammunition.⁵³ Suffering a thorough tactical defeat, a fraction of China's surviving ships of the line managed to limp back to port, effectively conceding Japanese naval dominance for the rest of the war. For foreign observers, Europeanized Japanese military strength and Asian Chinese backwardness and incompetence now seemed established fact rather than conjecture.

These images became especially clear in the Russian press, as both liberal and conservative journalism observed a new paradigm of Japanese strength and Chinese weakness.⁵⁴ Like many of these periodicals, *Novoe vremia* looked on the condition of the Chinese military and infrastructure with particular dismay. Throughout autumn 1894, it described Chinese troops as "extremely poor" and as "unfortunate hordes."⁵⁵ The battles of Pyongyang and the Yalu proved so swift and conclusive that *Novoe vremia* soon began to talk about the potential for domestic strife within the Celestial Empire. Alluding to reports that there was a "complete lack of funds in the Chinese treasury," a September 11 article wondered whether "major unrest"

⁵² Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 169-170; 170. As Paine notes, though exact reports vary, these supplies likely included "35 good field guns, hundreds of magazine rifles, hundreds of breechloaders, 2,000 tents, and 1,700 horses. The magazine rifles were [also] superior to the Japanese Murata rifles." Japanese troops had nearly expended them ammunition and had had little time to rest or eat during the battle. Lone, *Japan's First Modern War*, 36.

⁵³ In addition to shortage of supply, Chinese ammunition was often the wrong caliber or in some cases filled with cement or porcelain instead of explosives. Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 181-182.

⁵⁴ Eskridge-Kosmack, "The Russian Press... Sino-Japanese War," 628-630.

⁵⁵ "S. Peterburg, 26 noiabria," *Novoe vremia*, November 27, 1894; "S. Peterburg, 7 sentiabria," *Novoe vremia*, September 8, 1894.

might soon erupt, as the Manchu Qing dynasty had “numerous opponents” on its own soil.⁵⁶ As defeats continued, reports began to speak of the internal “stagnancy” and the “treacherous politics of [China’s] highest officials,” in addition to the poor quality of its troops.⁵⁷ By late September, *Novoe vremia* and most of the Russian press feared China’s inevitable defeat.⁵⁸

As the Japanese marched through Manchuria and conquered Qing military strongholds on the Yellow Sea, the prospect of Chinese disintegration dominated the press’s discussions of the war. As early as September 25, *Novoe vremia* began to contemplate China’s fragmentation into smaller regional states.⁵⁹ If Japanese victories continue apace, it asserted, such a fragmentation was “not so incredible” to imagine. The nineteenth century had seen massive rebellions rock the Qing government, with the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) establishing a de facto independent state in south China for over a decade. Further, viceroys, such as Li Hongzhang, wielded “extensive powers” in several important regions of the empire, ranging from the capital province of Zhili, to the southern region surrounding the major port of Guangzhou (known in the West as Canton). If Japanese troops forced the Chinese emperor to flee Beijing, it asked, might Li consider becoming the ruler of an independent state in northeast China?⁶⁰ Li’s loyalty to the Qing government (which, true to the image *Novoe vremia* had presented of him, did not seriously waver) made this quite unlikely. Still, the prospect of a Japanese puppet state in north China with Li at its head appeared in *Novoe vremia* again after Japan’s capture of the strategically important coastal fortress at Port Arthur in November.⁶¹ This image of an archaic and disintegrating regime

⁵⁶ “S. Peterburg, 10 sentiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, September 11, 1894.

⁵⁷ “S. Peterburg, 14 sentiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, September 15, 1894.

⁵⁸ Eskridge-Kosmach, “The Russian Press... Sino-Japanese War,” 632.

⁵⁹ Conservative newspapers, such as *Novosti* voiced similar concerns, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ “S. Peterburg, 24 sentiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, September 25, 1894.

⁶¹ “S. Peterburg, 16 noiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, November 17, 1894.

followed China through the end of the war in April of 1895, when Russia and other European powers intervened to amend the peace treaty in their favor.

After its September victories, Japan's depiction in *Novoe vremia* could not have appeared more different from that of its adversaries. It declared Pyongyang a "decisive" success and noted that the Japanese army had annihilated a force of 20,000 Chinese troops.⁶² As they steadily marched toward Beijing the question in the Russian press became not whether Japan could achieve victory, but the terms of China's imminent surrender. In this atmosphere, *Novoe vremia*'s earlier misgivings about Japan came to dominate, as the island empire became more brazen in its actions against and demands on the recumbent Chinese state. It harkened to the notion of Japan as superficially westernized. In contrast to the poor performance of the Chinese military, Japanese martial prowess stood out as a stunning success of the European military model. Yet, as *Novoe vremia* continued to argue, these technologies and military institutions still served what it viewed as Japan's base, "Asian" goals and proclivities. With its dominance of the Sino-Japanese conflict, the paper argued, the cruelty and arrogance that flowed from the Japanese national character were on full display.

After Pyongyang and the Yalu, the seizure of the Chinese stronghold at Port Arthur on the Liaodong peninsula in mid-November 1894 proved the Japanese military's next great victory. Japanese troops took the city on November 9, and upon discovering that Chinese forces had mutilated several Japanese prisoners of war, launched a brutal retaliation. Over the next five days, Japanese troops summarily executed several thousand Chinese troops and civilians.⁶³ This slaughter stood in contrast the overall good military conduct the Japanese army had thus far displayed. Indeed, its commanders had taken particular care to ensure that their troops followed

⁶² "S. Peterburg, 14 sentiabria," *Novoe vremia*, September 14, 1894.

⁶³ Two accounts of the massacre and the disconcertingly minor repercussions for its perpetrators are Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 209-216 and Lone, *Japan's First Modern War*, 154-162.

the statutes of the Geneva Convention.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the atrocity led *Novoe vremia* to reiterate anxieties about Japan's incomplete Europeanization. On December 1, its leading article stated that the battle for Port Arthur had been "marked by cruelty on both sides." In a sweeping judgment, it proclaimed, "cruelty, it seems, is the distinctive mark of the yellow race." In this display, *Novoe vremia* argued, Japan's Asian core shined through its well kempt, Europeanized exterior:

The "civilized" Japanese savagely butchered the Port Arthur garrison for the torture of [Japanese] prisoners; they quartered, disemboweled and so on, instead of [applying] a limited, standard punishment to those responsible. Now a telegram from Shanghai says that the same "civilized" Japanese insist that the Chinese officials that promised rewards for Japanese heads must be punished before peace talks can be discussed.⁶⁵

This kind of savagery, in *Novoe vremia*'s opinion, went directly against Japan's meticulously crafted image as "the Europeans of the Far East." When its publisher, Aleksei Suvorin began to specifically weigh in on the Sino-Japanese conflict in his "Little Letter" feuilletons a few months later he had much the same opinion. The Japanese "dream of being the stewards of the Far East," he exclaimed, and yet Japan itself remained a "wild and bloodthirsty snake."⁶⁶ As the newspaper saw it, Japan's conduct at Port Arthur raised major questions about whether it should now be counted among the European great powers.

Suvorin and his writers also alluded to what they had previously called a "Purely Asian" vindictiveness in Japan's early statements regarding its war goals and ambitions for power in Northeast Asia. Given Russia's own regional ambitions, *Novoe vremia*, as well as nearly all of the empire's newspapers, began to worry how far Japan would go to extract war spoils from its

⁶⁴ Ibid, 210. On Japan's use of international law to present itself as civilized and China as barbaric, see Junnan Lai, "Sovereignty and "Civilization": International Law and East Asia in the Nineteenth Century," *Modern China* 40, no. 3 (2014): 282-314.

⁶⁵ "S. Peterburg, 30 noiabria," *Novoe vremia*, December 1, 1894.

⁶⁶ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, February 11, 1894.

vanquished foe.⁶⁷ Responding to (ultimately false) rumors that China intended to request peace just weeks after Japan's brilliant victory at Pyongyang, *Novoe vremia* hoped that the latter's leaders were "'Europeanized' enough" to exercise moderation. In its opinion, Japan ought to be content with China's renunciation of any claim on Korea and a hefty indemnity. Pushing for any more might dangerously destabilize the region.⁶⁸ On October 20, an article titled "The War of Japan with China" praised the Japanese as brave and patriotic, but exclaimed that recent victories over China had made them "conceited and arrogant."⁶⁹ After the fall of Port Arthur, Japanese victory seemed assured, yet its campaign continued.

Immediately following the battle, a leading article drew a stark comparison between the two emperors and, by implication, their nations. Again working off of incorrect rumors of Chinese calls for peace, it showed the Chinese emperor as dignified, if resigned, in defeat, while his Japanese counterpart was arrogantly certain in his victory:

The military ambition of the Japanese emperor should be completely satisfied. His troops took possession of this very strong fortress in Northern China, his ships almost completely destroyed the Chinese fleet and the proud 'son of heaven' sent him a humble request for peace. The Mikado cannot wish for more a solemn recognition of his military might. But he is not satisfied. Neither military success nor the unprecedented humiliation of his opponent seems to him enough as the fruits of victory.⁷⁰

The Chinese state had numerous shortcomings, but in *Novoe vremia*'s view, its emperor at least had the decorum to admit defeat.⁷¹ Japan, on the other hand, sought not just victory but uncontested supremacy and the thorough humiliation of its enemy. For Suvorin and his writers, refusing to discuss peace went against the conventions of civilized war. Japan once again was

⁶⁷ Eskridge-Kosmach, "The Russian Press... Sino-Japanese War," 632-633, Sun, *Kitaiskaia Politika Rossii*, 117-120.

⁶⁸ "S. Peterburg, 1 oktiabria," *Novoe vremia* October 2, 1894.

⁶⁹ "S. Peterburg, 19 oktiabria," *Novoe vremia*, October 20, 1894.

⁷⁰ "S. Peterburg, 16 noiabria," *Novoe vremia*, November 17, 1894.

⁷¹ Writers at *Novoe vremia* did not express universal praise for the Chinese emperor, however. During the peace talks Suvorin explained that while he "sympathized with the misfortunes of the Chinese people," he was more than a little unsympathetic to a Chinese emperor who "orders the execution of his generals, but remains in his palace while his empire collapses." Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, February 11, 1895.

allowing what *Novoe vremia* viewed as its primal, “Asian” instincts toward brutality and rapine to drive its use of European military organization and technologies.

These depictions of the two eastern empires were not always consistent or reflective of reality, but the meanings and identities they bestowed on Japan and China in the Russian conservative press endured. The Chinese emperor and his realm had a generally sympathetic, if contradictory, identity in *Novoe vremia*’s pages. Though characterized by rampant corruption, archaic political and social forms, and pompous rejection of European ideas, China was also the victim of Japanese and European aggression. The Russian conservative press had long pointed to the lengthy history of Russo-Chinese relations (conveniently playing down their own country’s transgressions against the Celestial Empire), and the prospect of Chinese collapse brought these feelings to the fore. While the lead up to the war had seen concerns over a China’s potential, the Qing Dynasty’s sound defeat at the hands of much smaller Japan largely removed such sentiments from *Novoe vremia*. The rise of Japan as a more likely rival in the region, together with the strengthening of Sino-Russian relations over the next few years, combined to give *Novoe vremia* a positive and friendly attitude toward China at the turn of the century.

Further, in its eyes, China had failed to Europeanize in any meaningful way, and therefore, remained a thoroughly Asian country in its appearance and outlook. For these reasons, China and its people embodied both the positive and negative connotations “Asianness” had in the Russian conservative press. To be sure, *Novoe vremia* did not fail to mention the decadence and pettiness of the Chinese royal court or the emperor’s tendency to order the execution of generals who failed on the battlefield. Yet, with China’s defeat at the hands of an aggressively expansionist Japanese state, the newspaper could not help but emphasize the venerable and

prudent way in which it believed the Middle Kingdom conducted itself. This depiction would only strengthen as Russo-Chinese relations became closer over the next few years.

In contrast, the Japan that appeared in *Novoe vremia* between the end of the Sino-Japanese War and the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (1904) seemed an ugly pastiche of European and Asian qualities. The conservative press had no reason to doubt Japan's military capabilities after the first three months of the war with China, but these periodicals often had severe misgivings about the way it had bounded onto the international stage. For observers like those at *Novoe vremia*, the massacres at Port Arthur and vocal ambitions to lay low the Chinese empire showed the incompleteness of Japan's transformation. This left the Japanese Empire on an odd footing with regard to the positive and negative connotations of Asianness and Europeanness in the Russian press. The editorials in *Novoe vremia* painted it as having abandoned its Asian political and cultural ideals in favor of European technology and ideology. Within the matrix of moral stereotypes, Japan was left with many more negatives than positives. To *Novoe vremia*, the abovementioned elements of cruelty and vindictiveness demonstrated that Japan still held these negative "Asian" qualities under its Europeanized exterior. It had relinquished the positive Asian qualities still held by the Chinese in favor of Europe ideals it had yet fully to assimilate. Moreover, its ambition seemed more in line with the negative moral elements of Europeanness seen in Britain or Germany, such as greed and hypocrisy, which we will encounter in the next section. Regardless, this image of Japan as the dangerous offspring of Europe and Asia lingered in *Novoe vremia*'s depictions of it in the war, peace negotiations, and beyond.

Great Power Personas in Observation and Intervention

In early 1895, the Japanese military prepared to attack the Chinese naval base at Weihaiwei on the Shandong peninsula. This would serve as a coup-de-grâce, unlocking the maritime approaches to Beijing and leaving the Chinese capital open to attack. The fall of Port Arthur had more or less assured Japanese victory; the fall of Weihaiwei would mark China's thorough humiliation.⁷²

With this in mind, another special conference of the Russian government's top ministers met to decide whether the approaching Japanese victory necessitated any change in Russian foreign policy. The government had made no major changes to its strategy following the August special conference. Tsar Alexander III's death in October and the enthronement of his young son Nicholas II had taken much of the government's attention during the string of Japanese victories that fall. Though inexperienced, the young tsar had a particular interest in the Far East, having travelled through the Primorskii krai, as well as China and Japan, on his grand tour in 1890-1891.⁷³ Russian attachés in China and Japan fed the foreign ministry a constant stream of information regarding Japanese victories and the deterioration of the Chinese military. An official at the ministry—its future head, Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf—noted in his diary that Nicholas showed great interest in these dispatches.⁷⁴ The siege of Weihaiwei seemingly brought this interest to the fore, and the new tsar called for the special conference to reconvene on January 20.⁷⁵

⁷² Lone, *Japan's First Modern War*, 166-167.

⁷³ Chapter one of Schimmelpenninck *Toward the Rising Sun* gives a concise account of this tour, taken when the tsar had completed his education at age 22. The eventful journey included meetings with viceroys in South China, an assassination attempt in Japan, and a groundbreaking ceremony for the final leg of the Trans-Siberian Railroad in Vladivostok. Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 15-23.

⁷⁴ Lamzdorf, *Dnevnik*, 90.

⁷⁵ Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 122.

The session itself brought no major changes to the resolutions of the previous meeting. After much discussion, the council decided to continue its policy of preserving Korea's prewar status. It did, however, provide more concrete instructions for how to achieve this goal. First, it resolved to increase Russian naval presence in the region in order to outnumber the Japanese fleet. Next, and most important, it authorized the foreign ministry to begin actively courting European powers to act against Japan in case its demands of the Chinese violated Russia's "vital interests." It specifically singled out England and France as the most desirable partners in such a venture.⁷⁶ As the minutes of the meeting show, Minister Witte and his associates continued to view Great Britain as Russia's greatest rival in the region.⁷⁷ Naval representatives suggested seizing an ice-free port in Korea to house the Russia Pacific fleet now that China, its erstwhile protector, was substantially weakened. Witte successfully nullified this proposal in favor of joint diplomacy to end the conflict, however.⁷⁸ Though policy did not substantially change, the imperial government's attention was now fixed on the events in Northeast Asia.

The issues of an ice-free port on the Pacific, the threat of Great Britain, and Russia's potential stake in the Sino-Japanese conflict appeared in the Russian press even before the tsarist government met to discuss them.⁷⁹ During the summer of 1894 *Novoe vremia*, worked diligently to define Russia's role in the brewing conflict. In addition to constructing detailed images of the two belligerents it also sought to outline Russia's legitimate "neighboring interests" in the outcome of the war.⁸⁰ In the context of imperial power in the region, this meant not only justifying Russian actions, but also casting aspersions on those of its rivals.

⁷⁶ "Zhurnal Osobogo soveshcheniia (ianvar 20) 1 fevralia 1895 g." *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 52 (1932): 73-74.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 68, 72.

⁷⁸ Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 122.

⁷⁹ Eskridge-Kosmach, "The Russian Press... Sino-Japanese War," 622-623.

⁸⁰ "S. Petersburg, 14 iuliia," *Novoe vremia*, July 15, 1894.

Novoe vremia's coverage of the war shared many of the special conference's concerns. Among these, its suspicion of Great Britain stood apart. If Russia was the epitome of a benevolent empire in the Far East, Great Britain undoubtedly served as its antithesis. Russia's contiguity to China and Northeast Asia, as well as the proposed eastern terminus of its Trans-Siberian Railroad in Vladivostok, made the region part of Russia's local neighborhood. As such, *Novoe vremia* asserted that Russia dealt with China on a more just, equal basis. The British, on the other hand, had sailed from the other side of the world to greedily coerce economic concessions from the Middle Kingdom. This notion of Britain as an aggressive outsider played a crucial role in *Novoe vremia*'s depiction of Russian interests as legitimate. The argument, of course, ignored the rather damning counterpoint that among the great powers, Russia had gone furthest in terms of outright annexation of Chinese territory.⁸¹ Indeed, territory represented the tsarist empire's primary goal in Northeast Asia, as opposed to the commercial interests that drove the British and French empire building in China, as will become clear in later chapters.⁸² Regardless, the stereotype of Britain as a foil to Russia appeared repeatedly in *Novoe vremia*'s coverage of the Sino-Japanese conflict.

Novoe vremia presented a clear distinction between the fidelity and morality of Russia and the underhandedness of its European rivals. As war between China and Japan neared, it had been quick to suspect Britain's motives. Recent agreements with Belgium had increased its influence in Africa by creating a British protectorate over Uganda. A cartoon in the weekly supplement illustrated these fears in a sequence of images showing the African continent slowly transforming into the head of the British national personification John Bull in a Scottish cap

⁸¹ In two treaties in 1858 and 1860 the tsarist government had pressured the Qing government into granting Russia Outer Manchuria, the southern portion of this territory would become Russia's Primorskii krai. The British had gained possession of Hong Kong in 1842, but the size of Outer Manchuria dwarfed this territorial transfer.

⁸² Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 7.

(Figure 4). With these developments in mind, *Novoe vremia* scoffed at Britain's offers of third party arbitration after the war broke out as a naked grab for economic influence. Instead, it suggested a joint Sino-Russian protectorate over Korea as the best means of diffusing tensions.⁸³ By the start of war in late July its rhetoric had shifted to the trustworthiness of various statements of neutrality from European powers in the region.



Figure 4. “The physiognomy Africa acquires little by little with new treaties”

In a leading article soon after the formal declaration of war *Novoe vremia* questioned Britain in this regard. In its view, recent telegrams from London left British hypocrisy on full display. Swift official statements of neutrality came directly alongside reports of English officers volunteering to fight for the Qing and British trading houses entering discussions to provide them with armaments and uniforms. These kinds of apparent contradictions between stated policy and the actions of its subjects “never confuse anyone” in Britain, the newspaper explained. Britain had proclaimed neutrality during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 while simultaneously allowing its officers to serve in the Ottoman military and its trading houses to turn “huge profits” by

⁸³ “S. Peterburg, 1 iulia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 2, 1894; “S. Peterburg, 26 iunia,” *Novoe vremia*, June 27, 1894.

supplying the Turks arms and materiel. Clearly, the British sentiment in these types of situations had long remained “neutrality is neutrality, but profit is profit.”⁸⁴

In stark contrast, *Novoe vremia* asserted that Russia had no vested interest in the potential victor to the conflict, and therefore its assurances of neutrality were “unconditionally sincere.”⁸⁵ While it did mention that a “weak, pliable” Korea remained more conducive to Russian interests in the Pacific, it did not speak to the prospect of a Manchurian route for the Trans-Siberian Railway, which had already been expressed in official circles for a few years at this point.⁸⁶ Moreover, the newspaper’s language took a distinctly moralizing tone with regard to the interests of other neighboring powers. Asian countries had every right to mistrust Europeans, it argued, as nineteenth century history had shown that Europeans tended to come to the East with “a large appetite and... a disproportionately small conscience.”⁸⁷ Unlike the evenhanded Russians, the British sought profit no matter the cost to their reputation and appearance on the international stage. These images became entrenched as the Sino-Japanese conflict proceeded.

As Japanese victories mounted and Great Britain began to shift its support to the island empire, *Novoe vremia* became even more mistrustful of its intentions.⁸⁸ Immediately following the battles of Pyongyang and Yalu the paper presented the British press as falling over itself to praise Japan and support its goals in the Northeast Asia. By contrast, *Novoe vremia* continued to assert that Korean independence must remain “immune” to Japanese designs.⁸⁹ In an article titled “The Question of the Far East” it singled out Britain as particularly nefarious in its policies

⁸⁴ “S. Petersburg, 21 iulia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 22, 1894.

⁸⁵ Ibid. As the minutes of the first special conference in August show, the Russian government made no such statements about neutrality, “Zhurnal Osobogo soveshcheniia (21) 9 avgusta 1894 g.” *Krasnyi arkhiv* 52 (1932): 67.

⁸⁶ The idea of a shortcut through Manchuria had been discussed among Russian politicians and railway officials since at least 1888. Marks, *Road to Power*, 42-43.

⁸⁷ “S. Petersburg, 23 iulia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 24, 1894.

⁸⁸ The Russian press shared a general mistrust of Britain. Eskridge-Kosmach, “The Russian Press... Sino-Japanese War,” 634.

⁸⁹ “S. Petersburg, 7 sentiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, September 8, 1894.

toward the Sino-Japanese conflict. “We would not be surprised,” the newspaper wrote, “if England... swung back to the side of China if later events in the war pushed the odds back in its favor.” As the “true nature” of Britain’s actions in the region could always “be explained by their traditional distrust of Russia,” this capricious attitude stemmed not just from economic interests, but imperial brinkmanship.⁹⁰ In addition to mirroring the opinions of the Imperial government, this kind of reportage also worked to present Russia as impartial and consistent in its policies.

By November, the Russian press spoke often of the likelihood for European intervention in the conflict. Though not explicitly clamoring for the empire to claim a piece of the Chinese pie like some of the other, less widely read, conservative newspapers, *Novoe vremia* nonetheless saw possible benefit in a Chinese defeat.⁹¹ Despite the generally positive image it presented of the Celestial Empire, the paper wrote that its haughtiness made all foreign relations difficult. Foreshadowing its government’s intervention the following year, it wondered if a blow to the Qing dynasty’s pride might make it a little easier for all of the great powers to deal with.⁹²

At the same time, the tide of the war only deepened Suvorin’s and his writer’s concerns over the possibility of a disruption of the status quo in Northeast Asia. With the new British Prime Minister Archibald Rosebery briefly attempting to warm relations between Great Britain and Russia, their suspicions rose even further.⁹³ In an article from November 20, *Novoe vremia* only cautiously approached the possibility of cooperation with Britain regarding the Sino-Japanese conflict. Would Britain act in accordance with Russia in Northeast Asia while simultaneously siding with its “enemies and rivals” in “another corner of the world?” it asked.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ “S. Peterburg, 14 sentiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, September 15, 1894.

⁹¹ Eskridge-Kosmach, “*Russian Press... Sino-Japanese War*,” 634-635.

⁹² “S. Peterburg, 29 oktiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, October 30, 1894.

⁹³ For Rosebery’s considerations during the war see T. G. Otte, *The China Question: Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1894-1905* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chapter one. For his friendly entreaties toward St. Petersburg in late 1894 see pages 46-47.

⁹⁴ “S. Peterburg, 19 noiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, November 20, 1894.

Suvorin examined the situation further in a “Little Letter” on November 25. He reminded his readers that this rival had done nothing but “create difficulties” for Russian foreign policy since the Crimean War. Here, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and a more recent protracted confrontation between the two powers over borders in the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia weighed heavily on his mind. Echoing his newspaper’s earlier sentiments, he noted that Russia remained forever afraid that England might “embrace Russia with one hand and go behind its back with the other.” As he saw it, England did not understand that a “serious competition between the Anglo-Saxon and Russian tribes” was taking place in Asia. In the preceding decades the Russian tribe had grown not just in “numbers and material force, but in the forces of enlightenment,” and thus, marched into Asia “not as a rude conqueror, but as a spreader of culture.”⁹⁵ For Suvorin, the rivalry between the two nations transcended mere strategic concerns. Rather, Russia and Britain represented two very different models of global empire confronting each other in the East. Both brought “enlightenment” to the peoples of Asia, but as its actions to thwart Russian progress showed, Britain did so with greed and jealousy. In *Novoe vremia*’s eyes, British flip-flopping between Japan and China and its sudden—and suspect—interest in warming relations with Russia only bolstered the righteousness of the Russia’s influence compared to that of the British. As the Sino-Japanese War drew to a close, these feelings came to a head in *Novoe vremia*’s rhetoric.

With the fall of Weihaiwei in February the Qing dynasty finally sued for peace, bringing the question of European intervention in the region to the forefront of the Russian press’s coverage of the conflict. Even before the capitulation of the Chinese fortress *Novoe vremia* began to speculate regarding the form such an intervention might take and the possible role Russia might play. Indeed, as early as December it asserted that European powers “undoubtedly

⁹⁵ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis'mo,” *Novoe vremia*, November 25, 1894.

had the right to a voice” in any negotiations.⁹⁶ Confident that Russia would act to maintain Korean independence and Chinese territorial integrity, it boldly stated on January 28, 1895, “the future of China is not in the hands of the Japanese.” *Novoe vremia*, as well as the majority of the Russian press, insisted that Russia, as the most legitimately interested great power, ought to play the prominent role in any such intervention.⁹⁷ Unknowingly in agreement with the recent special conference of the Russian government, it argued that Russia should seek a joint intervention with its ally France and rival Great Britain.⁹⁸

In the weeks prior to the official opening of peace negotiations in March both China and Japan maneuvered to gain western backing. While Japan quickly moved to placate Russian fears by pledging its unwavering support for Korean independence, the Chinese one-upped them by sending an envoy to St. Petersburg to meet with the tsar himself in hopes of gaining Russian aid. In Beijing, Li Hongzhang made similar entreaties to the Russian ambassador, Count Artur Pavlovich Cassini. Using much the same language as *Novoe vremia* in the previous summer, Li insisted that Russian interests would be better served by the maintenance of the status quo in Northeast Asia than allowing any major continental foothold for a clearly aggressive Japanese Empire.⁹⁹ As the peace talks approached, *Novoe vremia* continued to have misgivings about Japanese and British actions and pity toward the defeated Chinese. The imperial government acted with similar considerations owing to the decisions of the special conference in January. Nicholas seemed to share this perspective. As Lamzdorf noted in his diary, “the sovereign show[ed], generally speaking, sympathy for the Chinese and a certain distrust of the

⁹⁶ “S. Peterburg, 13 dekabria,” *Novoe vremia*, December 14, 1894.

⁹⁷ Eskridge-Kosmach, “The Russian Press... Sino-Japanese War” 639, 641-643; Sun, *Kitaiskaia politika Rossii*, 117-124.

⁹⁸ “S. Peterburg, 27 ianvaria,” *Novoe vremia*, January 28, 1895.

⁹⁹ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 123.

Japanese.”¹⁰⁰ The empire’s leading conservative daily and the major players of the imperial government, thus, were united in their general opinions as the peace negotiations began.

The tense atmosphere surrounding the talks gained considerable attention from the Russian press and the imperial government. A delicate game of “face” unfolded between the two belligerents in the Japanese city of Shimonoseki as both sought to preserve their own honor and disparage the other.¹⁰¹ With its armies capturing the Pescadores islands off the coast of Formosa and positioned to begin an assault on the approaches to Beijing, Japan clearly had the upper hand. In a “Little Letter” from March 4 Suvorin took stock of the situation. Japanese victory had put “the yellow race...into the role of the European” for the “first time in history.” Wielding “advanced European weapons and European forms of government,” he exclaimed, “the yellow man, as if to say he’s ...a European, ...intends to join the field of European culture.” Despite doubts about the extent to which the Japanese had achieved “Europeanness,” the island empire now stood as a major player in the East. Russia needed to pay close attention to Japan, he argued, as “she is our neighbor and may become our enemy.”¹⁰² With this newly arisen power on Russia’s eastern doorstep, Suvorin and his writers believed the time had come to thwart its inroads into the Asian continent. The paper would never openly advocate war as a solution, even when relations with Japan strained to breaking in 1903. Nonetheless, *Novoe vremia* did not pull punches in its calls for Russia to contain Japanese expansion. In its view, Russia had the right to protect its peaceful and legitimate interests in Northeast Asia.

¹⁰⁰ Lamzdorf, *Dnevnik*, 157.

¹⁰¹ Paine’s *The Sino-Japanese War* speaks at length about the concept of “face” in the East Asia milieu. Arising out of centuries old political and diplomatic customs, the strict code of decorum dictated superior and subordinate actors in relationships between nations and saw little gray area between honor and disgrace. For more on this system see Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, Chapter Nine.

¹⁰² Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, March 4, 1895.

On March 18, the Japanese envoy at Shimonoseki presented Li Hongzhang with peace terms that the Russian government almost immediately found unacceptable. In addition to a huge indemnity and “most-favored nation” status, Japan demanded Formosa and the Liaodong peninsula, which protruded south into the Yellow Sea east of Beijing and included the fortress city of Port Arthur. In the aftermath of this disclosure the Russian government held a third special conference to decide how best to deal with the possibility of a Japanese base near its eastern borders. Convened on March 30, the conference split along roughly two lines.¹⁰³ General-Admiral of the Navy Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich Romanov, and Nicholas (who did not attend) were inclined to side with Japan and join in carving the Chinese pie. Minister of War Petr Semenovitch Vannovskii and the new minister of foreign affairs, Prince Aleksei Borisovich Lobanov-Rostovskii, on the other hand, sided with Finance Minister Witte in urging a defense of Chinese territorial integrity.

In the end, wariness of Japan and Britain outweighed the grand duke’s suggestion that Russia take this opportunity to seize a long-desired warm water Pacific port. Witte successfully persuaded the grand duke (and a few days later, the tsar) that as the great power with the most territory and bases in Northeast Asia, Russia potentially had the most to lose from Japanese expansion in the region.¹⁰⁴ The special conference therefore resolved to “defend the status quo antebellum” and advise Japan “at first in a friendly way” to withdraw its claims on the Liaodong peninsula. Further, it suggested Russia begin “official communications” with the European empires and China regarding the best way to enforce this “friendly advice.”¹⁰⁵ Prince Lobanov had put out feelers to this end even before the conference. Earlier meetings had expressed the

¹⁰³ The minutes of the meeting can be found in “Zhurnal Osobogo soveshcheniia (marta 30) 11 aprelia 1895 g.” *Krasnyi arkhiv* 52 (1932): 78-83.

¹⁰⁴ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 128.

¹⁰⁵ “Zhurnal Osobogo soveshcheniia (marta 30) 11 aprelia 1895 g.,” *Krasnyi arkhiv* 52 (1932): 83.

desire to work with France and Britain to rebuff Japanese demands. In light of a recent surge in pro-Japanese sentiment that viewed the Meiji regime as a potential new ally against the tsar, however, Britain turned Lobanov down. In its stead, Lobanov secured the somewhat unexpected support of the German government, which had its own designs on the northern Chinese coast and jumped at the chance to curtail Japanese expansion. By Li's begrudging acceptance of Japanese demands on April 5, the Tripartite Alliance was poised to act.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile, *Novoe vremia* hosted its own debate over how Russia might best exploit the Japanese victory and obtain an ice-free port in Northeast Asia. In a series of featured letters to the editor, guest writers A. E. Belomor and "I. S." discussed the viability of southern Korea and the Pescadores Islands as permanent bases for the Russian Pacific Fleet.¹⁰⁷ An unsigned editorial speaking for *Novoe vremia* joined the conversation and argued that now was the time to acquire this long needed component of Russia's eastern defenses. Further, it reiterated the newspaper's support for a joint Russian-Chinese protectorate over Korea.¹⁰⁸ Like many other conservative newspapers, such as *Moskovskie vedomosti* and *Grazhdanin* [*The Citizen*], Suvorin's daily decried Japan's territorial demands at Shimonoseki as a first step toward the annexation of Korea.¹⁰⁹ With China laid low, *Novoe vremia* remained apprehensive about the future of the Pacific under the newly strong Japan.

In a "Little Letter" on April 10, 1895, Suvorin used the national stereotypes that had formed in his newspaper's pages over the past year to powerful effect. With biting sarcasm and sharp accusations he rebuked Russia's old and new rivals on the Pacific seaboard. Given its

¹⁰⁶ *Toward the Rising Sun*, 129-130; Otte, *The China Question*, 60-62.

¹⁰⁷ Unlike the shorter letters to the editor that regularly appeared in the later pages of the paper, these pieces were full-length articles that appeared on its first and second pages. A. E. Belomor, "Nazamerzaiushii port na Dal'nem Vostoke," *Novoe vremia*, March 16, 1895; I. S., "Nazamerzaiushii port a Dal'nem Vostoke," *Novoe vremia*, March 22, 1895. Belomor was the pseudonym of Aleksandr Grigor'evich Konkevich. The identity of "I. S." is unclear.

¹⁰⁸ "Eshche na nazamerzaiushom porte na Dal'nem Vostoke," *Novoe vremia*, March 27, 1895.

¹⁰⁹ Eskridge-Kosmach, "The Russian Press... Sino-Japanese War," 647.

snubbed offer of cooperation and tacit support of Japan, Britain had done much to earn Suvorin's scorn. In letting Japan's territorial demands at Shimonoseki stand Britain seemed actively interested in harming China for its own gain. As he saw it, Britain had told the Japanese to "take whatever they wanted in north" China so long as they did not encroach on its possessions and interests in the south. Japan's occupation of the Liaodong peninsula would, thus, do little to prevent the English from reaping huge profits by "intoxicating the Chinese with opium." As the Sino-Japanese conflict played out, he asserted, Britain had attempted to hide its true intentions with "saccharine speech" about a rapprochement with Russia.¹¹⁰ Now that all the pieces had fallen into place, however, Britain emerged as the undisguised opportunist among the great powers.

Japan fared equally poorly in Suvorin's polemics. He expressed fatigue at the Japanese press's "arrogant" insistence that their victories over China "were more brilliant than those of the Germans over the French" in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Japanese ambitions did not stop at simply defeating China, he bemoaned. Total victory over their previous Chinese superiors had so emboldened them that they now held ludicrous dreams of placing Japan's emperor on the Chinese throne.¹¹¹ The image Japan acquired in *Novoe vremia* throughout the course of the war reached its logical endpoint in these feuilletons. To Suvorin and his writers, the Empire of the Rising Sun had mastered European military and diplomatic machinery and now eagerly entered the ranks of the great powers. Most startlingly, this new power seemed poised to set up a colony right on Russia's eastern doorstep. In such a situation, he felt Russia needed to act quickly and decisively.

¹¹⁰ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, April 10, 1895.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

In stark contrast to these disreputable countries, Suvorin presented Russia as taking nothing but “solid and dignified steps... [to] defend [its] national interests” in Northeast Asia. Referring to the pressure Russia, France, and Germany soon put on Japan to withdraw its claims on the Liaodong peninsula, he insisted that “urging ...prudence” did not equate to an affront.¹¹² Russia had long dealt magnanimously with Japan, he contended in a “Little Letter” on April 15. Here, he made specific reference to mid-century quarrels over the island of Sakhalin that lay between the two countries. When Russia moved to occupy the island it had specifically asked the Japanese government if it claimed its southern half. When they responded in the affirmative Russia graciously offered them the Kuril island chain north of Hokkaido in exchange.¹¹³ This simplified account of the events leading up to the Russo-Japanese treaty of St. Petersburg in 1875 nonetheless offered an unmistakable portrayal of Russia’s benign and honest relations with Japan.¹¹⁴ The intended parallel with the Tripartite Intervention (as the Russian, French, and German intrusion into the Shimonoseki treaty became known) was clear—then, as now, Russia acted justly and in its legitimate interests.

The Tripartite Intervention itself unfolded as a two-pronged plan to intimidate the Japanese government into forfeiting its claim on the Liaodong peninsula. On April 11, envoys from the three nations initiated the first part of the plan by each delivering identical notes to the Japanese assistant foreign minister expressing concerns about Japanese occupation of the peninsula and the stability of the region. The note presented Japan’s presence as a persistent threat to Beijing and a fatal impediment to Korean independence.¹¹⁵ The second prong relied on

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, April 15, 1895. The disagreement over Sakhalin had been more one-sided. Japanese diplomats realized they could not match the Russian military presence on the island and withdrew their claim. Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869-1942* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 23-24.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 131; Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 287.

the imposing presence of the combined navies of the three powers in the vicinity of the Yellow Sea. Their shared force outnumbered and substantially outclassed the Japanese navy. At first Japan hesitated, causing the Russian government to mobilize its army in the Priamur military district to make the point clear. In the face of such overwhelming force the Meiji government finally relented and on April 25 announced that it would return the peninsula to China in exchange for an increased indemnity.¹¹⁶ The success of the Intervention put Russia in an ascendant position in Northeast Asia, setting the stage for a substantial increase in its economic and military influence in the region in the coming decade.

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A few weeks after Japan consented to revise the Shimonoseki Treaty, a group of Russian surveyors and engineers crossed the Chinese border and began secret preliminary assessments for a potential railway route through Manchuria.¹¹⁷ Minister of Transportation Prince Mikhail Ivanovich Khilkov had received Nicholas' approval for the hushed expedition without Witte's or Lobanov's knowledge. Though the finance minister had suggested a Manchurian line to the tsar that February, he had not yet made an official request for the Qing government to allow Russian survey teams in the area.¹¹⁸ Ambassador Cassini, therefore, responded with confusion when his

¹¹⁶ In total, Japan was to receive a sum of 250 million *taels* of Chinese silver currency, almost three times the Qing government's annual revenue. Lone, *Japan's First Modern War*, 175-176; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 133.

¹¹⁷ The reconnaissance team also included small teams of geologists and botanists. Quested, "Matey" *Imperialists?*, 21.

¹¹⁸ The formal requests came in October, during negotiations over the Russo-Chinese Bank and Sino-Russian defensive alliance. *Ibid.*

Chinese counterparts began pressing him about an unauthorized Russian excursion into Manchuria.¹¹⁹

On September 27, a telegram reporting unidentified engineers departing Vladivostok for a survey expedition into the region appeared in *Novoe vremia*.¹²⁰ Minister Khilkov quickly moved to cover his tracks and contacted the Chief Bureau of Press Affairs. Explaining that he knew of no such expedition and not wanting to spread “unfounded information” he asked the chief bureau to request that *Novoe vremia* provide the source of this report and the nationality of the supposed surveyors.¹²¹ In a brief back and forth, Suvorin’s assistant editor revealed the newspaper’s source. He also informed the chief bureau and Khilkov that, according to the newspaper’s information, they were not Russians, but foreign engineers on a private mission.¹²² This appears to have satisfied the minister, and he did not ask the chief bureau to compel the newspaper to print a clarification about the nationality of the expedition. With Witte’s support and negotiations already underway he perhaps viewed an official survey of a Manchurian rail line as inevitable.

Khilkov’s concern illustrated a broader desire among many Russian ministers that Sino-Russian relations appear friendly. This cohort saw informal economic expansion into Manchuria as preferable to forced concessions and military occupation. As the leader of this faction, and the empire’s most powerful politician, Witte took an active role in positioning Russia as China’s good neighbor. Over the next few years he would strive to use this position as supposedly the most moral empire in the region to peacefully acquire the Manchurian railway.

¹¹⁹ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 139.

¹²⁰ The telegram originated from Vladivostok and was dated September 24, 1895, “S. Peterburg, 26 sentiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, September 27, 1895.

¹²¹ Mikhail Ivanovich Khilkov to Ivan Nikolaevich Durnovo, September 27, 1895, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 442, l. 78.

¹²² The source was Aleksandr Yakovlevich Maksimov, a naval officer and *Novoe vremia* correspondent living in Vladivostok. The conversation among the chief bureau, Minister Khilkov, and *Novoe vremia* is in RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 442, lls. 79-82.

Throughout the Sino-Japanese conflict, Suvorin and his writers at *Novoe vremia* steadily built images of aggressors and victims on the imperial stage of East Asia that played into this persona of Russia as a good neighbor. In its capacity as a greedy and amoral businessman, Great Britain unmistakably fell into the aggressor group in the newspaper's pages. Japan's apparently rapacious appetite for conquest and glory placed it among the aggressors as well. After initial bluster, China's abysmal performance on the battlefield relegated it to the role of victim. Long the object of European expansionist designs, it now suffered at the hands of a fellow Asian nation. The actions of these stock characters during the war supported a particular image of Russian imperialism as a kind of alternative to the aggressor-victim model in the Russian conservative press.

These roles had strong racial connotations for *Novoe vremia*'s writing, as well. In its logic, Russia wielded the most potent moral authority among the Great powers in Northeast Asia because of its special position relative to the concepts of "Europeanness" and "Asianness" that so frequently appeared in its pages. As an imperial power, Russia possessed the majesty and magnanimity of the Chinese without any of the vindictiveness or corruption that had led to such a poor performance in the war. In turn, the Russian Empire used its knowledge of Western military technology to successfully defend its interests in what *Novoe vremia* considered a civil, enlightened manner. Unlike the British, greed and duplicity did not motivate its actions. From the newspaper's perspective, this supposed combination of the positive qualities of "Asianness" and "Europeanness," and lack of their negatives, provided a crucial framework for Russia's success in the Tripartite Intervention.

In a "Little Letter" from a few weeks after Japan's concession to the Triple Alliance Suvorin laid out this sentiment succinctly. "The Russian soul is a double soul," he stated; "in it

the West and East are united.” He continued: “Enlightened by the West, she stretches to the East—partly because she wants to convey something of the West, partly because she, herself, has needs in the East...”¹²³ This attitude of Russian particularity led to more than an air of moral superiority in issues of imperial rivalries. The belief in an imperial model unique to Russia also pushed *Novoe vremia* and the Russian conservative press to justify a more vigorous defense of Russian interests in the decade to come.

¹²³ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, May 11, 1895.

Chapter Two

Boxers and Bureaucrats at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

In the summer months of 1900 the Russian Army took part in a multi-national assault on Beijing to free hostages and emissaries trapped in the city's foreign legation quarter. A mix of rebels from the ongoing Boxer Uprising and Qing Dynasty troops held the city captive as the world's great empires coordinated efforts to liberate their countrymen. An allied force of eight countries finally breached the city walls on August 1, relieving the legations.¹ *Novoe vremia*'s reportage on the siege applauded Russian troops' efforts, but quickly shifted to a sympathetic tone when describing the Chinese forces they had just defeated. Europeans must be "satisfied" with simply ending the siege and ousting the pro-Boxer government in Beijing, it argued. There was no need to seek further revenge on the Chinese people.²

In a "Little Letter," Suvorin questioned the motives and strategies of the Chinese fighters who had held off the joint European, Russian, and Japanese force for almost two months. The Boxer "tragedy" had drawn all the great powers to the Qing capital, which their troops now occupied. Suvorin pondered why it had taken them so long to lift the siege. Perhaps the leader of the first, failed, march on the city, the English Admiral Edward Seymour, had been a poor commander. Or perhaps the reason lay in the spirit and courage of the defenders themselves—in

¹ The eight countries in the alliance were: Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Japan, and the United States. Three recent treatments of the Boxer Rebellion are Paul A. Cohen's broad cultural study *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), Vladimir Grigor'evich Datsyshen's account of Russian military involvement in the conflict *Bokskerskaia voina: Voennaiia kampaniia russkoi armii i flota v Kitae v 1900 – 1901 gg.* (Krasnoyarsk: Krasnoyarskii gosudarstvennii pedagogicheskii universitet, 2001), and the collection *The Boxers, China, and the World*, Robert Brickers and R. G. Tiedmann eds. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007). For a study of the origins to the uprising see Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). For a standard account of the conflict based on Chinese sources, see Chester C. Tan, *The Boxer Catastrophe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

² "Kitaiskii krizis dlia Rossii i prochikh derzhav," *Novoe vremia*, August 5, 1900.

the Chinese national character.³ The publisher favored the second possibility. Despite decades of interaction, “we must say that China is an unknown country to Europe,” he concluded.⁴ His newspaper’s writings that summer had made it clear that China was not an unknown country to Russia, however.

Battles at the Chinese capital and nearby city of Tianjin between June and August marked the climax of the anti-foreign and anti-Christian Boxer Uprising. Around the same time, Russian forces launched a separate invasion of Manchuria to secure Russian assets along the Chinese Eastern Railway and on the Liaodong peninsula. Although concluding a defensive alliance with the Middle Kingdom against Japan in 1896, tsar Nicholas and expansion-minded ministers had used this leverage to seize the cities of Port Arthur and Dalian in 1898. Thus, Russia fiercely competed with other European colonial powers greedily slicing out concessions from the weak Qing Empire. Many of these states saw the Boxers as proof of Chinese backwardness and the uprising as an opportunity to squeeze more concessions from the weakened Qing Dynasty. Russian periodicals like *Novoe vremia* often described their country’s encroachment into China differently, however. The virtuous image it had cultivated of the Russian empire during the Sino-Japanese War five years prior allowed the paper to portray Russia as having a unique relationship with China. For them, the Boxers represented an outflowing of righteous patriotism from a downtrodden people against their oppressors.

The Boxer Rebellion caused these sentiments to coalesce into a distinct narrative of Russian involvement in China. Building on the Russian persona it had crafted to justify the Tripartite Intervention, *Novoe vremia* presented Russia as an empire, and the Russians as a

³ For a revisionist work that argues the Seymour Expedition of June 1900 failed because of the skill, armaments, and patriotism of the Qing Army’s westernized regular units, see Jane Elliot, *Some Did It for Civilisation, Some Did It for Their Country: A Revised View of the Boxer War* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002), esp. chapter six.

⁴ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 5, 1900.

people, as China's closest ally and a uniquely benevolent force in the Northeast Asia. Ironically, the years 1896 to 1902 marked both the zenith of Russian expansion and influence in the region and the era of its strongest declarations of Sino-Russian friendship and good will. Suvorin's newspaper attempted to resolve this cognitive dissonance by using the national and moral stereotypes it had developed during the Sino-Japanese War to present Russia as the only great power virtuous enough come to China's aid in its hour of need. In this story, avaricious Europeans and duplicitous Japanese exploited the Qing dynasty by carving out spheres of influence. The Boxers represented an understandable, if crazed and dangerous, effort to escape this bondage. As China's friend and neighbor, Russia joined the international force of its own accord and under its own terms. Of the eight empires that allied to combat Boxer chaos, only Russia acted with restraint in quelling the uprising and restoring order, it asserted.⁵

While of dubious accuracy considering Russia's actual actions in the region, this narrative nonetheless offers insights into the ways Russians imagined their country as a different kind of imperial power. Finance Minister Witte cultivated this image as a way to extend Russian influence in the region with Trans-Siberian Railway and Russo-Chinese Bank. Even Count Mikhail Nikolaevich Murav'ev, a proponent of more coercive methods, still cloaked actions such as the seizure of Port Arthur and Dalian in the language of Sino-Russian camaraderie and mutual benefit. Suvorin's newspaper, like much of the Russian press, viewed the Boxers sympathetically and distrusted European and Japanese empires that did not and could not understand China the way Russia did.

This chapter explores how *Novoe vremia* navigated Russian foreign relations in the Far East during the eventful years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. In its reportage and

⁵ For accounts of Russian military conduct during the Boxer Uprising and on the Manchurian campaign see Datsyshen, *Bokskerskaia voina* and George Alexander Lensen, *The Russo-Chinese War* (Tallahassee: Diplomatic Press, 1967).

commentary on major events, such as the lease of Port Arthur, Boxer Uprising, and occupation of Manchuria, the newspaper struck a nationalistic tone. It spoke kindly toward China as a fellow autocratic monarchy while denigrating Russia's rivals as thieves and hypocrites. This kind of language sought to lend a measure of moral superiority to Russian actions in the region. It also kept the newspaper largely in line with Witte's overall policy of informal expansion rather than military conquest. The paper's chauvinism and bellicose words toward other empires began increasingly to draw the attention of the Foreign Ministry around this time, however. Russia traversed difficult diplomatic terrain during this period, and ministers more and more felt the need to keep an eye on their government's most influential and widely read ally in the press.

* * *

In the aftermath of the Tripartite Intervention of 1895, Russian officials moved quickly to expand the empire's influence in Northeast Asia. The intervention had thwarted Japan's territorial ambitions on the Chinese mainland, but the enormous war indemnity still stood. Seeing an opportunity to ingratiate Russia to the Middle Kingdom, as well as one-up its British and German rivals, Witte and Foreign Minister Lobanov leapt to offer monetary assistance. Working with French financiers, they offered China a large loan with a favorable interest rate, to which the Qing government agreed in June 1895.⁶ In addition to this friendly gesture, the finance minister quickly laid the groundwork for a Russo-Chinese Bank. This entity would further economic and political power in China by bolstering Russian trade and providing cheaper currency exchanges for Russian merchants. Witte viewed this as a critical move in the empire's

⁶ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 132-133.

peaceful conquest of Northeast Asia. The bank, also financed with French money, officially opened in January 1896.⁷ From there, Russian expansion in Manchuria continued apace.

The next stage saw Witte's plans come to fruition with a secret Sino-Russian Alliance later that year. Russian engineers and officials had debated a shortcut through Manchuria for the Trans-Siberian Railway as early as the late 1880s. As noted, the empire had already sent an unsanctioned Russian team to survey China's northeast provinces for this purpose. After a failed attempt to negotiate with Beijing directly, Witte organized a series of meetings with viceroy Li Hongzhang during the Chinese embassy's visit to Moscow for Nicholas' coronation in May 1896. Over three weeks of regular negotiations, he convinced Li and his superiors in Beijing to agree to an alliance to defend China from further Japanese aggression.

Calling in the favor for supplying the 1895 loan, Witte persuaded the Qing government to allow a branch of the Trans-Siberian to transverse Manchuria ostensibly to assist in mobilizing Russian troops to defend the region from Japanese attack. Defeat in the war had led Li and a number of other high-ranking officials at the Qing court to reluctantly acknowledge the need for Russian aid to counterbalance Japan's growing influence.⁸ After receiving Dowager Empress Cixi's approval, Li joined Witte and Lobanov in signing what would become known as the Li-Lobanov Treaty on May 22, 1896.⁹ The Manchurian line, officially dubbed the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), would be funded and operated as a private enterprise by the Russo-Chinese Bank. To clear up any confusion about Russia's intentions, the treaty specifically stated, "the junction of this railway with the railways of Russia shall not serve as a pretext for any encroachment on Chinese territory, nor for an attempt against the sovereign rights of his Majesty

⁷ Ibid., 135-136. For more on the Russo-Chinese Bank, see R. K. I. Quested, *The Russo-Chinese Bank: A Multinational Financial Concern* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Department of Russian Language and Literature, 1977).

⁸ Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 186.

⁹ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 143; Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 186.

the Emperor of China.”¹⁰ The treaty was a major success for Witte and marked a highpoint in Sino-Russian relations. The good will would not last.

Port Arthur and Russia as Global Empire

The impetus for finally obtaining an ice-free port occurred in October of 1897 when Chinese peasants murdered two German missionaries in Shandong, a region southeast of the capital province of Zhili. Kaiser Wilhelm, already interested in the port of Qingdao in Shandong, acted swiftly. He ordered his forces to occupy the port and the surrounding Jiaozhou Bay under the guise of protecting German missionaries and extracting compensation from local authorities.¹¹ Prince Lobanov had died soon after the conclusion of the Chinese treaty in 1896, and his replacement as foreign minister, Count Murav’ev, shared neither his prudence nor his tact when it came to Russian interests in China. Wanting to counteract German’s new concession and secure a year-round port for the Pacific fleet, he suggested to Nicholas that Russia lay claim to the Liaodong peninsula. The fortress at Port Arthur and the nearby city of Dalian would provide an excellent point from which to project Russian naval power, he argued.¹²

The tsar called a special meeting to discuss the matter on November 14. The ministers of finance, war, the navy, and foreign affairs all attended. Witte, of course, categorically opposed seizing the ports and came into immediate conflict with Murav’ev.¹³ Fearing the unraveling of all of his recent work, the finance minister convinced his colleagues that open aggression against

¹⁰ “Sino-Russian Secret Treaty of 1896, 22 May 1896 (3 June 1896)” in Victor A. Yakhontoff, *Russia and the Soviet Union in the Far East*, quoted in Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 187.

¹¹ Wilhelm had privately spoken to tsar Nicholas, his first cousin, about occupying the port that July and had been looking for an excuse to claim it for the German Empire, Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 150-152.

¹² *Ibid.*, 154-155; Boris Alekseandrovich Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria, 1892-1906*, 136-137.

¹³ Witte had a quite poor opinion of Murav’ev as a person as well. In his memoir, Witte described him as a sycophantic playboy who “did not like to work” and “knew and understood little of world diplomacy, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 262.

China would undermine the entire premise of the secret alliance and subvert the Chinese favor that made its sphere of influence in Manchuria sustainable. The other ministers sided with him against Murav'ev but Nicholas had already made up his mind, and ignored the meeting's decision. Citing dubious reports that Britain was about to make a play for Port Arthur, the foreign minister had convinced him that he needed to act now to gain a Chinese port. Additionally, Murav'ev argued that China would welcome a Russian counterbalance to Germany's new position at Jiaozhou.¹⁴

The Qing government did indeed open Port Arthur to the tsar's ships, but soon realized that they did not plan to leave anytime soon. The first ships entered the port in early December 1897. In the following months, Murav'ev's ministry brushed aside requests for a timeline of Russian withdrawal. By January, Russian troops began expelling large numbers of the region's Chinese inhabitants. When the Russian envoy in Beijing formally requested that the Qing lease Port Arthur and Dalian to Russia, Li Hongzhang and his associates could do nothing but accept the fait accompli. Had they not accepted, Russia threatened to withdraw from the anti-Japanese Alliance.¹⁵ In March 1898, Chinese officials signed over the southern tip of the Liaodong peninsula, including Port Arthur and Dalian, on a twenty-five year lease.¹⁶

The lease of Port Arthur and Dalian made a big impression in *Novoe vremia*. On December 7, 1897, the paper ran a special article about the Russian fleet's entry into the port. The report noted that while not unexpected, the appearance of Russian ships there marked an important point in the empire's long search for a warm-water port on the Pacific. This location was far preferable to the Russian fleet's current winter anchorage in Nagasaki. Japanese

¹⁴ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 154-155.

¹⁵ Moreover, Russia forces had orders to seize the port by force if China did not agree to the lease. Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 191, Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria*, 144.

¹⁶ Port Arthur was to be a closed military fortress while Dalian would serve as a commercial port open to ships from all countries. Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 192.

authorities made things needlessly difficult for the fleet and the disconnection from the Asian mainland left Russian sailors reliant on locally controlled telegraph lines for information. It explained that Port Arthur had excellent facilities despite the damage Japan had inflicted on it during the recent war. Minor slights to Japan aside, the article focused primarily on assuring readers of Chinese cooperation and hospitality.¹⁷

Suvorin's newspaper was at pains to present the arrival of the Russian fleet in a Chinese port as a peaceful and mutually agreed-upon event. "It goes without saying," the article continued, that the transfer of Russian ships to Port Arthur was taking place with the "full consent and permission of the Chinese government." In contrast to Germany's aggressive move on Jiaozhou Bay, this arrangement followed a series of negotiations and agreements. This did not constitute the port's "capture," and Russia had not overstepped its bounds by anchoring there. Russia's presence at the Chinese port would strengthen "relations between [these] two vast and powerful" countries.¹⁸ Over the next few weeks, *Novoe vremia* ran a series of articles detailing the specifications of Port Arthur and Dalian and their suitability as bases for the empire's Pacific fleet.¹⁹ It proclaimed that Russia could soon list Port Arthur, alongside Kronshtadt in the Baltic and Sevastopol in the Black Sea, as one of its great naval bases.²⁰

On March 18, 1898, the newspaper announced the official lease of Port Arthur and Dalian (soon Russified as *Dal'nii*, a word meaning far or distant) to great fanfare.²¹ "With the consent of the Chinese emperor our troops have landed at Port Arthur and Dalian," its leading article proclaimed. The lease was "an event of profound significance" for not only Russia, but all

¹⁷ "Russkaia eskadra v Port-Arture," *Novoe vremia*, December 7, 1897.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See, for example, leading articles on December 9, 10, 11, 21, and 23, 1897.

²⁰ "O Port-Arture," *Novoe vremia*, December 11, 1897.

²¹ Witte claims to have come up with the name himself as a neutral designation for the port that average Russians might more easily pronounce than its Chinese name. Witte, *Memoirs*, fn278.

who “cherished peace and ...mutual understanding among peoples.” It boasted that the Trans-Siberian Railway’s connection to this warm water port would revolutionize travel across Asia, making it “undoubtedly the greatest event of the end of this century.” Unable to resist, the article added that Great Britain in particular must envy this accomplishment.²²

The tsar had attained these ports in mutual partnership with China, and this strategic position in Manchuria and on the Yellow Sea positioned Russia to “exert a more direct influence on the course of events in this part of Asia,” *Novoe vremia* wrote. This influence would, of course, benefit both Russia and China. The Qing emperor and his advisors had correctly understood the link between their “vital interests” and the goals of Russian foreign policies, which sought to “consolidate peaceful relations” with its neighbors. The paper argued that Russia stood firmly against the dismemberment of China into concessions and zones of foreign control. From Port Arthur, it could shore up China against further fragmentation.²³ Suvorin’s newspaper took great pride in these new possessions in Northeast Asia. The events of the next few years would only strengthen its rhetoric about Russia’s role in the region.

Suvorin himself greeted the acquisition of Port Arthur and Dal’nii with less enthusiasm. He addressed the lease only implicitly in a “Little Letter” that April. Suvorin maintained the importance of the Far East for Russian global interests, but contemplated the benefits of directing similar funding toward domestic issues, like education.²⁴ Instead, the Dreyfus Affair unfolding in France preoccupied his editorials when it came to international politics in 1897 and early 1898.²⁵ Moreover, he privately shared Witte’s deep apprehension about Russia’s new possessions on the Liaodong peninsula. In his diary, he wrote unflatteringly about the “fools and scoundrels”

²² “S. Peterburg, 17 marta,” *Novoe vremia*, March 18, 1898.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, April 11, 1898.

²⁵ For more on the European and Russian press’s reaction to the affair, see James F. Brennan, *The Reflection of the Dreyfus Affair in the European Press, 1897-1899* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).

advising the emperor. He held Count Murav'ev chief among them, agreeing with Witte's characterization of the Count as "the son of Ivan Aleksandrovich Khlestakov," the fatuous conman from Nikolai Gogol's play *Revizor* [The Government Inspector].²⁶ Suvorin's editorials would more enthusiastically support Russia's role in Northeast Asia as the region drew more international attention. Still, his uneasiness about the costs of these ventures only grew.

Around the time of the acquisition of Port Arthur, *Novoe vremia* also increasingly featured the work of another commentator on international politics, the political cartoonist Stepan Fedorovich Sokolovskii. In the mid-1890s, the paper ran illustrated satire almost exclusively in its weekly supplement. This mostly consisted of translated reprints of cartoons from foreign periodicals. Though Russian artists occasionally appeared in the supplement, cartoons from European periodicals, such as France's *Le Figaro* and Germany's *Simplicissimus*, more often held pride of place.²⁷ After selling his work to the paper on a freelance basis for a few years Sokolovskii joined *Novoe vremia* as an employee and began contributing regular caricatures.²⁸ Within a year, his works appeared in both the illustrated supplement and the daily edition, displayed prominently at the top of the third or fourth pages. He proved a prolific caricaturist, and the paper published over three hundred of his cartoons between 1898 and 1905. In these years his drawings appeared more frequently and prominently than those of any other artist in *Novoe vremia*.

Sokolovskii's work, often signed with the pseudonym "Coré," focused almost solely on international politics. He lived primarily in Paris while working for Suvorin and mailed his illustrations to the newspaper's office in St. Petersburg. In creating his cartoons, he kept a close

²⁶ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 312.

²⁷ The works of well-known Moscow-born French cartoonist Caran d'Ache, for example, appeared often.

²⁸ Stepan Fedorovich Sokolovskii to Suvorin, August 22, 1910, RGALI, f. 459, o. 1, d. 4020, l. 1. Sokolovskii also contributed color drawings to the satirical magazine *Shut* [*Jester*] at this time.

eye on not just current events, but also *Novoe vremia*'s editorial orientations and interpretations of the news.²⁹ This meant his illustrations often served as neat encapsulations of the paper's narrative of international politics. Censorship protocols during this period forbade the ridicule of government officials and institutions, and so these figures, as well as depictions or personifications of Russia itself, remain almost entirely absent from his work.³⁰ Sokolovskii's illustrations instead depicted the various misadventures and humiliations of Russia's imperial competitors. His cartoons often depicted national stereotypes and personifications, such as Great Britain's John Bull and the US's Uncle Sam. In this way, his cartoons offered readers a visual complement to the newspaper's account of Russian morality in the face of great power duplicity.

Given *Novoe vremia*'s hierarchy of European villains, Sokolovskii made a point of regularly mocking Great Britain. In addition to the tensions in the Far East, the Boer War of 1899-1902 provided ample fodder for his pen at the turn of the century. This conflict jelled nicely with the paper's already existing stereotype of Britain as the greediest and most arrogant world power. The discovery of large gold and diamond deposits in the South African republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1886 had caused Great Britain to attempt to absorb them into its neighboring Cape Colony, eventually leading to war in 1899.³¹ The Boers, Dutch colonists who had settled in the region several decades prior, handed British forces a number of early defeats and then gave stubborn resistance when the conflict shifted to a guerrilla war after

²⁹ Sokolovskii to Suvorin, August 22, 1910, RGALI, f. 459, o. 1, d. 4020, lls. 6-7.

³⁰ Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 249; See also Sokolovskii, letter to unidentified person with appeal "Nikolai Vladislavovich," August 23, 1913, Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka Otdel rukopisei, f. 259, o. 1, d. 47, l. 6. Russian politicians do appear in a few of his cartoons during the relaxed censorship regime of the 1905 Revolution. For one of the few Sokolovskii caricatures to feature a Russian character see "Foreign capital in Russia," March 28, 1900, where he draws Russia as a peasant whose crops have been overrun by large pigs.

³¹ Great Britain had already tried to annex the region prior to the discovery of gold and lost a brief "First" Boer War against the two republics in early 1881.

Britain brought its full force to bear in 1900.³² Over-confidence and brutality towards the Boer civilian population while quashing the insurgency turned international public opinion against Britain. A few thousand foreign volunteers from across Europe and North America even travelled to South Africa to fight with the Boers.³³ Prior the emergence of the Boxer threat, the Boer War was the primary international news story in *Novoe vremia* at the beginning of the new century.³⁴

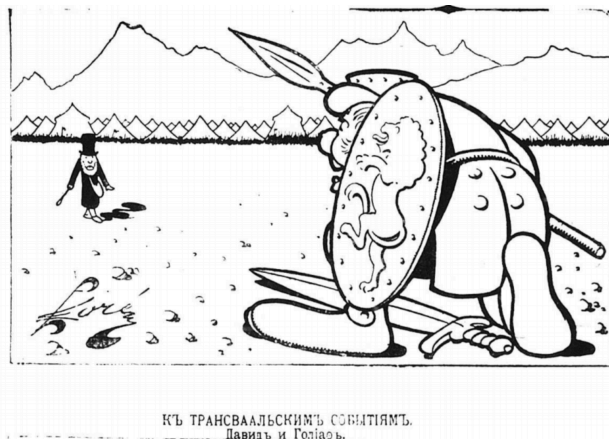


Figure 5. “On the Transvaal Events. David and Goliath.”



Figure 6. “The British Lion in Africa. – They won’t give my prestige back!”

Reports of Boer bravery and British haplessness and humiliation abounded in *Novoe vremia* in late 1899 and early 1900. The paper expressed sympathy for the Boers from the start, depicting them as patriots defending their home from an evil invading empire.³⁵ Sokolovskii’s cartoon “On the Transvaal Events” showed Transvaal Republic president Paul Kruger as David preparing to hurl a stone at Goliath, represented by John Bull (Figure 5). As Boer forces defeated

³² For an account of this conflict see Dennis Judd and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War: A History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

³³ *Ibid.*, 247-250.

³⁴ I. S. Rybachenok, “‘Novoe vremia’ ob Anglo-Burskoi Voine 1899-1902 godov: Verbal’noe i Vizual’noe,” *Novaia i noveishaia*, no. 2 (2016): 80-93.

³⁵ “S. Peterburg, 1 oktiabria,” *Novoe vremia*, October 2, 1899; Rybachenok, “Novoe vremia ob Anglo-Burskoi voine,” 82.

the British and besieged the cities of Ladysmith and Mayfeking in the final months of 1899 the paper could hardly contain its glee. No matter how the war ended, it explained, Boer victories had altered Britain's international position entirely. Kruger's cohorts had proven that it was possible to stand up against the "greedy demands of British imperialists [*imperialistov*]." ³⁶ Sokolovskii's "British Lion in Africa" (Figure 6) reveled in the embarrassment of Russia's rival by showing a once-proud lion weeping over the loss of its tail. Though a relatively minor physical wound, the psychological damage is irrevocable.

Suvorin chimed in with a "Little Letter" to tie things together for his readers. Russians' sense of equality and sympathy for the independence of "small nations [*malen'kie narody*]" gave them a natural aversion to British "self-conceit," he asserted. Launching into a tirade, he argued that Britain had turned Europe against Russia during the Russo-Turkish War and watched with "mocking arrogance" as Russia lost spoils of victory at the Congress of Berlin. Now they sought to turn both China and Japan against Russia in the Far East, as well. Britain constantly insulted Russia's "national feeling [*national'noe chuvstvo*]," "treated us with malice and disdain," and considered Russians "barbarians and fools." ³⁷ The Boer War was Britain's just dessert for the way it treated both the great and small powers.

When the Boxer Uprising became major news in May of 1900, *Novoe vremia* was still riding the wave of anti-British sentiment. A buffoonish and self-important John Bull was already bumbling his way through South Africa in a plethora of Sokolovskii's cartoons. Leading articles and editorials gushed sympathy for victims of European imperialism. The events in China that year proved even more dramatic and far-reaching in their consequences.

³⁶ "S. Peterburg, 11 ianvaria," *Novoe vremia*, January 12, 1900.

³⁷ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, December 15, 1899.

The Boxer Crisis

As Paul A. Cohen has argued in his book, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth*, the Boxer Rebellion has a deep and tangled history that is further troubled by the lack of substantial records from the Boxers themselves. The movement arose from social and environmental stresses within Shandong province in the late 1890s. These pressures combined with folk religion and village culture in the province to focus discontent on foreign merchants and missionaries that were intruding on their way of life.³⁸ The movement slowly expanded throughout the mid-1890s in a small series of attacks focused almost entirely on Christian-held properties and Chinese converts. The movement consisted largely of peasants and townspeople who dressed in brightly colored clothing and practiced mass spiritual possessions that supposedly made them impervious to bullets. They sought to rid their homeland of what they viewed as the scourge of foreign influence. The Boxers emerged as a serious anti-foreign and anti-Christian force only after they spread from villages in Shandong to Zhili province in early 1900.³⁹

During winter and spring of 1900 European foreign ministers became disturbed by the increase in the size and frequency of Boxer attacks against local missionaries and Chinese Christians in Zhili and repeatedly called for the Qing government to disperse them. Not exactly keen to suppress a group that gave vent to its own resentments, the Chinese court never fully committed to quashing the movement. On May 1, a large group of Boxers ambushed and defeated a sizeable Qing force at the small village of Shiting, killing its commander. This first

³⁸ Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 327-329.

³⁹ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 16-21; Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 274-275.

major victory sent shockwaves through the province, swelling the ranks of the Boxers to a size beyond the Qing government's ability to control.⁴⁰

Becoming increasingly nervous about the growing size and fervor of the Boxer movement, the foreign powers in China formed an Eight Nation Alliance and sent a small contingent of soldiers (with the Qing government's sanction) to Beijing.⁴¹ Between May 18 and 19 around 500 Alliance troops arrived to reinforce the foreign legations there. With 97 sailors and Cossacks, the Russians constituted the largest national presence.⁴²

In late May, Boxer attacks intensified in Tianjin and disrupted the rail line that connected it with Beijing (and thus Beijing to the Yellow Sea). Ferociously ripping up track and telegraph wires, Boxer forces succeeded in severing both communication and transport to Beijing on May 29, effectively isolating the small international corps behind the walls of the capital.⁴³ With the last communications indicating that Beijing was under attack, the British commander of the Alliance forces at Tianjin, Admiral Seymour, left the city with a group of 2,000 soldiers. The expedition quickly experienced major resistance from Boxers and some Qing soldiers, forcing a retreat back to Tianjin after only two weeks, a few dozen miles, and heavy casualties.⁴⁴ The Qing court had not been consulted, however, and Dowager Empress Cixi grabbed the chance to move against the foreign powers, declaring war on all international forces on June 9. The day before, accompanied by Qing regulars, the Boxers had opened fire on the foreign legations in Beijing,

⁴⁰ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 46; Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 286-287.

⁴¹ The eight nations were: Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Japan, and the United States.

⁴² The Russian legation's resident doctor, Vladimir Viktorovich Korsakov, published a memoir of his experiences there in 1900, including the onset of the uprising, the siege, and the arrival of the international force. Korsakov *Pekinskie sobytiia. Lichnye vospominaniia uchastnika ob osade v Pekine, Mai-Avgusta* (St. Petersburg: Tifografiia A. S. Suvorin Eretelev per. d. 13, 1903), 94.

⁴³ Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 164-165; Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 288.

⁴⁴ A detailed account of the expedition appears, in Elliot, *Some Did It for Civilisation*, 511-520.

starting a siege of the quarter that would last until the beginning of August.⁴⁵ Inside the city, the small group of European, Russian, and Japanese soldiers fortified the borders of the legations with barricades and successfully repelled successive Chinese attacks throughout June and July.⁴⁶

The Boxer crisis fit neatly into *Novoe vremia*'s depiction of European and Japanese predation in Northeast Asia. The newspaper had kept up this refrain of exploitation, even as the empire had settled into its own concessions with Port Arthur and Dal'nii, speaking eloquently about Chinese suffering and European and Japanese greed. Sokolovskii's cartoons "The Chinese Dragon" (Figure 7) and "Help!" (Figure 8) in 1899 had shown the Celestial kingdom in a death grip. While the former depicted Europe as a boot stomping an anguished dragon, the latter showed it as a shark dragging a Chinese man underwater. The struggling figure in "Help!" calls out in vain to a ship in the distance labeled "Japan," but no assistance is forthcoming. Given this attitude, it is not surprising that the newspaper initially spoke of the Boxers from an almost entirely positive angle.

⁴⁵ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 49, 51.

⁴⁶ The Qing commander at Beijing, Prince Ronglu, did not favor the Boxers and understood that all of the foreign powers together were an insurmountable enemy. He believed China would sooner or later face major repercussions for the uprising, and thus, made sure his forces never fully pressed their advantage in the legation siege. *Ibid.*, 54.

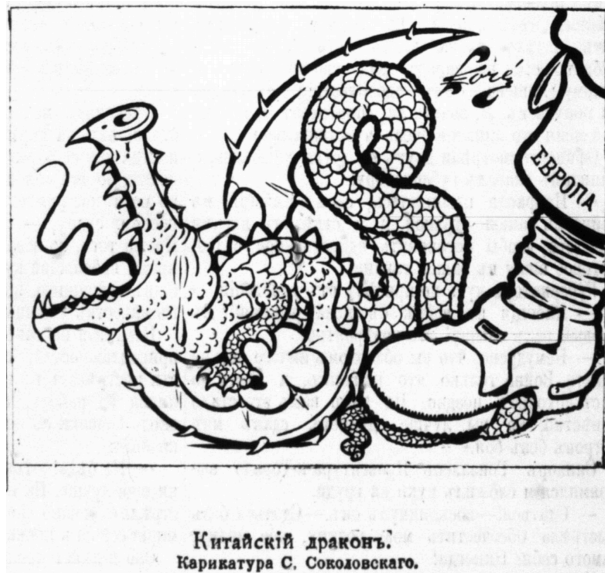


Figure 7. “The Chinese Dragon.”

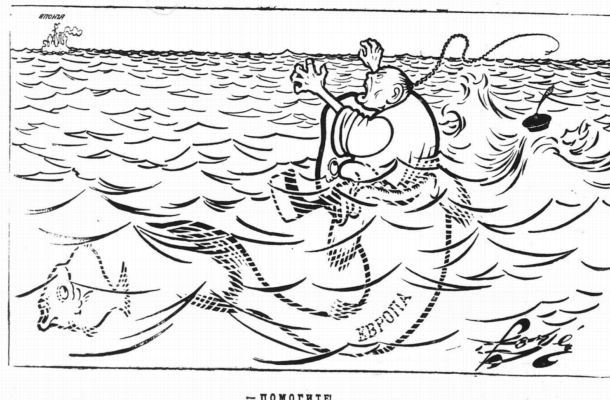


Figure 8. “Help!”

Novoe vremia repeatedly described the Boxer Uprising as the lashing out of a once great people driven to the edge. The paper’s contrast of China’s cultural achievements with the Boxers’ viciousness against Europeans in many ways mirrored its image of China during the Sino-Japanese War. Chinese civilization could not be called backward, it said, since it predated Greece and Rome by thousands of years and had achieved cultural feats of which Europe could not dream. Its religion rested upon ancient philosophical tenets that preached “harmony,” “humanity,” and “broad tolerance.” Regrettably, Europe had so violently disrupted the Chinese way of life as to bring these “ignorant” elements to the forefront in form of the uprising.⁴⁷ As the crisis played out in summer 1900, the paper, therefore, did not refrain from deriding the Boxers as a “brutal mob of rebels.”⁴⁸ After Chinese forces attacked Russian cities along the CER, it

⁴⁷“Kitai i nashi zadachi,” *Novoe vremia*, June 3, 1900.

⁴⁸ “Chto delat’ v Kitae dal’she?,” *Novoe vremia*, June 26, 1900.

wrote of them as a “rabble” that “must be punished.”⁴⁹ For *Novoe vremia*, decades of foreign maltreatment had led this noble, if stagnating, society to violent and dangerous ends.

Suvorin waited until July to speak on the events in his “Little Letters.”⁵⁰ As his diary shows, he paid close attention to the unfolding saga at the besieged legations. The crisis was major international news and like many observing the siege of Beijing, he found the situation “disturbing” and worried about the Russian civilians stuck inside.⁵¹ On the evening of July 15, he visited Witte and they spoke about the meeting in November 1897 where Murav’ev had recommended occupying Port Arthur. The finance minister’s strategy of informal expansion was now in flux. Russia’s heightened military position in Northeast China contradicted protestations of Sino-Russian friendship and economic interests, not to mention the secret alliance. Nicholas himself maintained a pro-Chinese line and hesitated to commit Russian forces to the relief of Beijing, only relenting upon news that Boxers had murdered the German ambassador.⁵²

If the emperor and Witte wanted Russia to have a lighter presence in the conflict to meet their policy concerns, Suvorin saw the situation in monetary terms. After relating his talk with Witte, he made a quick note in his journal about the exorbitant costs of transporting soldiers to the Far East.⁵³ He publicly endorsed the Witte line, however, and contended that Russia acted separately from other members of the Eight-Nation Alliance.

In his editorials that July, Suvorin argued emphatically that Russia should not view China as its enemy. Though noting the expenses of sending Russian forces to China, he justified this military action by drawing attention to China’s current plight and the supposedly friendly

⁴⁹ “Miatezh ili voina?,” *Novoe vremia*, July 4, 1900.

⁵⁰ Bartol argues that this may indicate Suvorin shared Witte’s and Murav’ev’s view that the Boxers posed no threat to Russia’s interests in the region. Bartol, “A. S. Suvorin,” 68-69.

⁵¹ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 391-392, 394.

⁵² Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 168.

⁵³ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 394.

relations that had existed between the two empires for centuries. He agreed with the conservative newspaper *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* [*The St. Petersburg Gazette*]'s comparison of the Middle Kingdom's problems to Russia's Time of Troubles in the seventeenth century. Much as the Poles had invaded Muscovy during this period of chaos and famine, Europe now sought to take advantage of China's disorder. Alluding to the heroes of the Time of Troubles, he called the Boxers China's own Minins and Pozharskiis.⁵⁴ Despite their violence, Russians must see the rebels as "patriots" fighting to preserve their ancient civilization from destruction. Again comparing the Qing dynasty to pre-Petrine Russia, he reminded his readers that not long ago Europe had viewed Russia as mysterious and backward.⁵⁵ Russia had intervened on China's side at the end of the Sino-Japanese War, he asserted, and it ought to continue to offer aid to its fellow monarchical empire. Boxer attacks on Russia's people and infrastructure did not negate Nicholas' words of friendship to the Chinese. Russians must, thus, understand that their forces were taking part in putting down the uprising for entirely different reasons than those of China's oppressors.⁵⁶

As during the Sino-Japanese War, these so-called oppressors received wide ridicule in *Novoe vremia*' pages as the Boxer saga played out. After China's defeat in 1895, the nations of Europe had undertaken an "orgy of conquest," wherein all tried to take as many concessions as possible. European businessmen and missionaries had invaded the Chinese interior with little regard for the Chinese customs or traditions. As such, the Boxers' response was "cruel, but perhaps somewhat justified."⁵⁷ A Sokolovskii cartoon on June 6 (Figure 9) captures this sentiment vividly. This illustration depicts European fishermen pulling a large fish labeled "China" on

⁵⁴ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, July 17, 1900.

⁵⁵ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, July 25, 1900.

⁵⁶ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, July 17, 1900.

⁵⁷ "Bezporiadka v Kitae," *Novoe vremia*, May 26, 1900.

board their ship. The dragon-like creature is wounded and covered in arrows, yet it still thrashes violently, prompting the fishermen to keep their distance. European countries had brutally captured China, but its violent struggles for freedom now threatened to knock them all overboard.

Another illustration even showed amusement at China's revenge. In Figure 10, a furious Boxer pounds a large fist down onto the head of a toad-like European figure whose crushed top hat and dislodged monocle identify him as a European capitalist. Sokolovskii's choice to have the Boxer deride European "civilization" in French further underscores that the Chinese recognize the import of this civilization as the heel of European domination.



Figure 9. "Beware! Don't get close!"

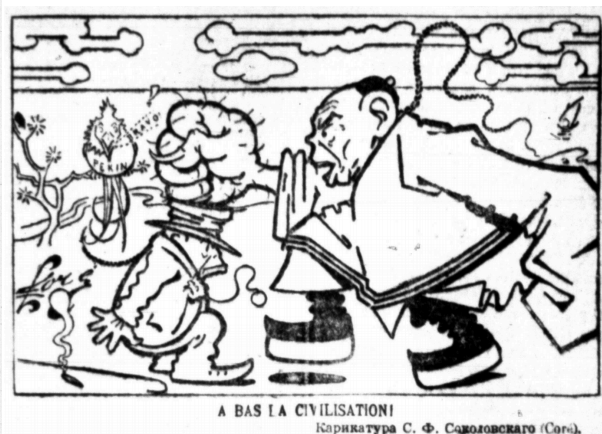


Figure 10. "A Bas La Civilization [Down with Civilization]!"

While *Novoe vremia* made the occasional jab at Germany over Jiaozhou Bay,⁵⁸ it more often identified Great Britain as the worst offender. Still riding the schadenfreude of the Boer War, it accused Britain of supporting unified action against the Boxers only in order to protect its

⁵⁸ See, for example "Sobytiia v Kitae," *Novoe vremia*, May 23, 1900.

own economic interests.⁵⁹ As “exploiters” and “concessionaries” who had “imposed” opium on China, they saw the Middle Kingdom not as a neighbor, but as a source of labor, resources, and markets for goods.⁶⁰ Recalling the Opium Wars of the 1840s and 1860s, when Britain forcibly opened China to European trade, the newspaper argued that in subsequent decades, Europeans had not taken the time to learn anything meaningful about Chinese society. For its part, China’s chief lesson from this experience had been that “white barbarians” were “primarily greedy people” who cared little about how their machinations harmed Chinese society.⁶¹ All the while, the newspaper maintained its unflattering coverage of Britain’s struggles to contain the Boers in South Africa.⁶²

Other periodicals made similar arguments. Petersburg newspapers, such as *Novosti* [News] and *Nedelia*, blamed the explosive violence on European intrusions into China’s land and society. *Russkie vedomosti* saw aggressive proselytization of European missionaries as a major element of this interference.⁶³ The conflict brought journalists from opposite political leanings, such as *Grazhdanin* [*The Citizen*]’s archconservative Prince Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii and *Rossiia* [*Russia*]’s progressive Vlas Mikhailovich Doroshevich, together in self-satisfaction as Europe finally reaped what it had sowed.⁶⁴ *Novoe vremia*’s views, thus, fit into a larger journalistic trend presenting an overall sympathetic view of the Chinese and their motives.

While the siege played out in Beijing, Boxer forces made inroads into Manchuria and launched a series of minor attacks on the CER. Hoping to refrain from the diplomatically delicate prospect of openly occupying Chinese territory, Witte rebuffed Kuropatkin’s suggestions to

⁵⁹ “Kitsaiskie dela i Angliia,” *Novoe vremia*, May 30, 1900.

⁶⁰ “Rossiia i Evropa v Kitae,” *Novoe vremia*, June 1, 1900.

⁶¹ “Kitai i nashi zadachi,” *Novoe vremia*, June 3, 1900.

⁶² See, for example, “Nashi druž’ia Anglichane,” *Novoe vremia*, June 16, 1900; “Dvizhenie v Kitae,” *Novoe vremia*, July 28, 1900; also, Rybachenok, “‘Novoe vremia’ ob Anglo-Burskoi Voine,” 90.

⁶³ Elena Eskridge-Kosmach, “The Boxer Rebellion and the Standpoint of the Russian Press,” 415-416.

⁶⁴ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, “Russia’s Ambivalent Response to the Boxers,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 41, no. 1 (2000): 69-70.

Nicholas that forces enter Manchuria *en masse* to secure the railway. This changed when pro-Boxer Chinese provincial officials joined their troops to the cause in late June, laying siege to the railway hub of Harbin, and attacking the Russian border town of Blagoveshchensk. With Russian infrastructure under direct threat, Witte relented and gave his support for troops to invade the northeastern provinces of their erstwhile ally. By the end of July, over 100,000 Russian troops⁶⁵ had entered Manchuria, relieving Harbin and occupying important depots. By September, they held all the major cities of Manchuria, including the important stronghold of Mukden.⁶⁶

The entrance of major Russian forces into Manchuria and the dramatic siege of the legations in Beijing brought about a slightly less positive image of the Boxers in *Novoe vremia*. Still, most of the press gave more praise to Russia's benign role than condemnation of the Chinese insurgents' violent excesses.⁶⁷ A week before it began reporting on the Boxers as a major story it spoke of the empire's benevolence. Referring to its recent acquisitions in Manchuria and on the Liaodong peninsula, it assured readers that "Nowhere and at no time has Russian been a threat and hindrance to the peaceful development of other nations." On the contrary, it brought "enlightenment and truth" to the East. Russia was not subject to the "greedy lusts" that drove Britain and caused it to "suck the juices out of its colonies in outlying areas and from neighboring territories."⁶⁸ Though the negative elements of China's "Asianness" that it had written of during the Sino-Japanese War appeared in depictions of Boxer violence, the paper gave more sympathy than derision. In this way, the image of Russia as China's good neighbor

⁶⁵ This was five times the number of troops that were in the Eight Nation Alliance force that eventually lift the siege on Beijing. See below.

⁶⁶ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 176-177; Datsyshen, *Bokskerskaia voina*, 119-131; Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 212.

⁶⁷ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Russia's Ambivalent Response," 70.

⁶⁸ "Na dal'nem vostoke," *Novoe vremia*, May 10, 1900.

formed the centerpiece of *Novoe vremia*'s coverage of the Boxer crisis and the empire's role in resolving it.

Suvorin and his employees informed readers that intervention was not only in Russia's interests; it was its duty as China's only friend in the region. Russia needed to act with caution, a leading article on June 1 argued. As a member of the Eight-Nation Alliance, it would fight alongside China's exploiters, but its goals lay only in helping its comrade quell a rebellion and protecting Russian civilians under direct threat. To act differently and try to extract retribution from China would be to "betray our traditions and interests."⁶⁹ If China needed help, Russia must answer the call. It remained critical that the Chinese understand Russia was not its enemy.⁷⁰ As *Novoe vremia* explained, the tsar's empire wished to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. Unlike the suspect motives of the other seven nations, Russia sought only to restore peace to its "old neighbor" and a "solid government" that would ensure the safety of foreigners on its soil and "severely punish" the leaders of the upheaval.⁷¹

Suvorin emerged as *Novoe vremia*'s most vigorous voice of Sino-Russian friendship during the conflict. Picking up where he left off in 1895, when he spoke of Russia's "double soul" that combined East and West, he told readers that not even Peter the Great could change the fact that Russia remained "one third Asian" in blood, culture, and, most visibly, the various nationalities that pledged their allegiance to the tsar. He expressed "deep sympathy" for the "hardships and courage" of the Chinese people, as did "all Russians."⁷² Geography, but also the goals of peace and mutual prosperity, linked the two empires. Russians must not have malice toward the Chinese, even if they attacked Russians in Beijing or Manchuria. Whereas the

⁶⁹ "Rossiia i Evropa v Kitae," *Novoe vremia*, June 1, 1900.

⁷⁰ "Rossiia i Kitai," *Novoe vremia*, July 21, 1900.

⁷¹ "Dvizhenie v Kitae," *Novoe vremia*, July 28, 1900.

⁷² Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, July 20, 1900.

Germans might suddenly decide to take down their flags and leave Jiaozhou Bay, “we are connected with China, as with Siberia, as with Asia,” he argued.⁷³ Russia had a permanent link to its Qing neighbors, and must strive to act in both empires’ common interests.

On July 28, Suvorin took the dramatic step of calling for a triple alliance of Russia, China, and Turkey. Russia’s place supposedly lay in Europe, but its expansion and focus in the past fifty years clearly pointed to the East and Asia, he explained. The East listened to and understood Russia more than Europe did.⁷⁴ This alliance made sense as a way to bolster Russia’s position in the East as it pursued its own legitimate interests in Northeast Asia alongside untrustworthy rivals.⁷⁵ He spoke of this potential alliance often in his editorials over the next week, even going so far as to print a chart displaying this alliance’s potential population against that of Europe.⁷⁶

It is doubtful Suvorin thought of the alliance as anything more than a rhetorical device to encourage his readers to identify with the Chinese, and thus, support Witte’s and Nicholas’ policies. His diary shows a peaked interest in China during the siege of Beijing, but little identification with or sympathy for China.⁷⁷ Later entries also show a continued concern about the flow of state funds to defend and maintain the empire’s possessions in the Far East.⁷⁸ He stopped mentioning the idea in early August, soon after the relief of the legations in Beijing. Nonetheless, the basic premise of friendship and benevolence toward China as compared to Europe and Japan remained a constant for his and his newspaper’s treatment of the Boxer conflict.

⁷³ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, July 17, 1900.

⁷⁴ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, July 28, 1900.

⁷⁵ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 1, 1900.

⁷⁶ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, July 30, 1900.

⁷⁷ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 392-393.

⁷⁸ See for example, his entry from July 31, 1900, in *Ibid.*, 463.

Despite its relentless talk of Sino-Russian friendship, *Novoe vremia*'s coverage of the events of 1900 also displayed clear expressions of the negative connotations of Asianness the paper had formed during the Sino-Japanese War, however. For all the talk of China's great civilization, *Novoe vremia*'s articles claimed that the Chinese were still like "simple-minded children, frightened by the mighty manifestations of modern technology."⁷⁹ Trains appeared to them as "evil spirits,"⁸⁰ and their forces attacked in "hordes [*polchishch*]" of disorganized fanatics.⁸¹ In his "Little Letters" Suvorin depicted the Chinese as hundreds of years behind Russia and the West. As noted, the newspaper did not refrain from condemning Boxers' violence, either.



Figure 11. "A sinister missionary."

Sokolovskii's cartoon depictions of the Boxers offer more striking manifestations of this stereotype. While the Chinese people certainly seem justified in their rebellion against foreign domination, Chinese figures themselves appear as grotesque caricatures. The Boxers in Figures 10 and 11 are brutish, primal, and out of control. Their faces are dehumanized and ape-like and

⁷⁹ "Bezporiadok v Kitae," *Novoe vremia*, May 26, 1900.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Polozhenie del v Kitae," *Novoe vremia*, August 2, 1900.

they wear traditional Chinese clothing. They act aggressively and charge angrily at their adversaries. Additionally, their fists—after which the foreign press labeled the Boxer movement⁸²—appear dirty, hair-covered, and have long, unkempt fingernails. Regardless of the delight with which some Russian observers may have greeted this anti-European uprising, China itself was, for all of its virtues, a backward country and the Boxer Uprising itself was seemingly carried out by the rabble of this society. In this way, the Boxers epitomized some of the worst proclivities of Asian peoples and cultures according to *Novoe vremia*'s matrix of East and West.⁸³

On July 22, an Allied force of almost 20,000 soldiers, including 4,500 Russians (second in representation only to the Japanese, who numbered about 10,000) finally departed Tianjin and this time successfully fought its way to Beijing. Arriving at the capital by the end of the month, they stormed the city on August 1 and quickly defeated Chinese regulars and Boxers, with Russian forces reaching their legation by 4:00 pm.⁸⁴ Though the Chinese suffered over 5,000 casualties, the foreign side experienced fewer than 800. Of these, 300 were Japanese and 148 Russian.⁸⁵ Inside the compound, legation defenders lost 79 men, including five Russians.⁸⁶ Boxer disturbances would persist in northeast China until 1901, but after a few more days the Alliance had cleared Beijing of Chinese combatants and the rebellion in Zhili province quickly concluded.⁸⁷

⁸² The Boxers as a movement contained numerous martial arts-practicing societies. The name of one of the most prominent of these is usually translated as “the Righteous and Harmonious Fists,” hence the English language press began calling them “boxers.” Esherick contends “Boxers (or Fists) United in Righteousness” or “Boxers of United Righteousness” is a better translation of this society’s name. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 154. In its reportage, *Novoe vremia* called the insurgents *boksery* [boxers] or *kulaki* [fists] and the uprising the *bokserskoe vosstanie* [Boxer Uprising] or *bol’shie kulaki* [Big Fists].

⁸³ See Chapter One, esp. conclusion.

⁸⁴ Datsyshen, *Bokserskaia voina*, 96-98.

⁸⁵ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 53 fn85; Datsyshen, *Bokserskaia voina*, 98.

⁸⁶ Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 169.

⁸⁷ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 54-55.

Entrenchment in Manchuria

With Beijing in allied hands and Kuropatkin's men firmly in control of Manchuria's supply points and cities, the question for St. Petersburg became the timeframe and nature of its withdrawal from Chinese territory. Witte, obviously, wanted to end military operations and extract Russian troops as soon as possible. The architect of the seizure of Port Arthur, Count Murav'ev, had died in June 1900. Voices calling for opportunistically extending the occupation or even annexing the region emerged from the officer corps, however, in the form of Admiral Evgenii Ivanovich Alekseev. As commander of Russian forces in Liaodong, Alekseev worked quickly to strong-arm an agreement with local Chinese authorities giving Russia administrative control over most of southern Manchuria. Though Beijing ultimately disavowed the arrangement, it set a precedent for a hardline approach to the occupation. While the foreign ministry had issued a circular stating its right to negotiate a separate peace, Russia's dispute with the Qing over Manchuria prevented Russia from unilaterally ending its involvement in the Boxer war.⁸⁸ Throughout the autumn 1900, Russian troops bivouacked on Chinese soil.

Novoe vremia applauded the liberation of the Beijing legations but quickly grew uneasy as the Eight Nation Alliance repositioned itself to begin suppressing the uprising in China's surrounding provinces.⁸⁹ It expressed anxiety about the appointment of a German field marshal, Count Alfred von Waldersee, to lead allied forces in the campaign. Russia wanted only "the earliest possible restoration of normal order" in its "old neighbor," the newspaper argued.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 217; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 178, 182.

⁸⁹ *Novoe vremia* reported that Russian troops had been the first to successfully enter the city, "Polozhenie v Pekine," *Novoe vremia*, August 11, 1900. Sikh troops from the British colonial force were in fact the first to reach the besieged legations. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 169.

⁹⁰ On Waldersee's appointment and Germany's involvement in the Boxer War more generally, see Annika Mombauer, "Wilhelm, Waldersee, and the Boxer Rebellion," in *The Kaiser: New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany*, idem and Wilhelm Deist eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91-118.

Russia did not want excessive violence or retribution. For this reason, it should work with Waldersee only so far as his orders corresponded to Russia's "humane" goals and interests.⁹¹ Suvorin saw Waldersee's appointment as a positive, however, since having a Russian in charge of quelling the uprising would complicate Russia's "position and responsibility." Russian troops had served with bravery at the walls of Beijing and their general, Nikolai Petrovich Linevich, occupied a senior position in the international force.⁹² Still, Russia's role in staying the hand of European retribution remained a prominent feature of the paper's reportage on the crisis in the following months.

Novoe vremia preached restraint and continued to defend the Boxers' motives as the conflict wound down. It called western missionaries un-Christian for imposing their beliefs without any regard for Chinese traditions and advancing their faith hand in hand with economic expansion.⁹³ When its old favorite Li Hongzhang returned to Beijing to begin negotiations between the Qing and the allies, articles called for the evacuation of foreign troops from the Chinese capital.⁹⁴ Europe now spoke of "revenge, retribution, and the reorganization of China," Suvorin wrote.⁹⁵ Talk in the British press of continuing the "Open Door Policy," which kept China open for commerce with all foreign powers and created economic spheres of influence, won the paper's ire on more than one occasion.⁹⁶ In its eyes, Russia had accomplished its goal of

⁹¹ "Rossii v Kitae," *Novoe vremia*, August 2, 1900.

⁹² Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 12, 1900.

⁹³ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 7, 1900; "Kitaiskie diplomaty ob sovremennom krizise," *Novoe vremia*, August 14, 1900.

⁹⁴ "Na Dal'nem Vostoke," *Novoe vremia*, August 30, 1900; "Peregovory s kitaiskim pravitel'stvom," *Novoe vremia*, September 4, 1900.

⁹⁵ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 25, 1900.

⁹⁶ For Britain on the Open Door policy during this period see, Otte, *The China Question*, 199, 205-209. A study of the origins and importance of the Open Door in American foreign policy is in Thompson et al., *Sentimental Imperialists* 121-133. For *Novoe vremia*'s critiques of the Open Door Policy see, Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 16, 1900 and "Politika 'okrytykh dverei,'" *Novoe vremia*, October 9, 1900.

liberating the capital and would soon return stable governance to the Middle Kingdom. But the other seven allies wanted more.

Waldersee's violent tactics, such as mass executions of Chinese insurgents, caused disgust and indignation in Russia.⁹⁷ This "cruel old man" had "massacred" droves of Chinese based on scant evidence and with maximum violence, *Novoe vremia* told readers. For example, a leading article in December of 1900 reported the execution of a Chinese soldier charged with murdering the German ambassador in May of that year. Waldersee had the soldier decapitated by sword in the street, on the very spot where the crime had taken place. It mattered little to the German field marshal that the true culprit had already been detained elsewhere months earlier.⁹⁸ Sokolovskii commented on these accusations with black humor in two cartoons that December. In "For 'the boys in uniform'" (Figure 12), he drew Waldersee in a dressing gown decorating a Christmas tree with Chinese heads dangling by their still-attached queues.⁹⁹ In another, he called Europeans hypocrites for their outflowing of sympathy to Transvaal President Kruger during his recent travels on the continent.¹⁰⁰ "How I sympathize with the Boers!" (Figure 13) depicts Europe as a crow crying exaggerated tears while perched atop a Chinese head on a spike. The "civilized" nations of the world waxed poetic about the Boers' heroic struggle against British invaders, but at the same time brutalized a Chinese rising with similar aims.

⁹⁷ On punitive expeditions see William J. Duiker, *Cultures in Collision: The Boxer Rebellion* (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1978), 183-186. On widespread looting by foreign troops see James L. Hevia, "Looting and Its Discontents: Moral Discourse and the Plunder of Beijing, 1900-1901," in *The Boxers, China, and the World*, 93-113.

⁹⁸ "Germanskii itogi v Kitae," *Novoe vremia*, December 21, 1900.

⁹⁹ The field marshal's vaguely Chinese looking clothing and slippers might allude to the fact that Waldersee had taken up residence in the Forbidden City upon his arrival in Beijing. The Qing court had fled just before the Eight Nation force reached the capital, and as Mombauer explains, Waldersee lodged in Dowager Empress Cixi's personal quarters. Mombauer, "Wilhelm, Waldersee, and the Boxer Rebellion," 109.

¹⁰⁰ On Kruger's departure from Africa see Judd and Surridge, *The Boer War*, 185-187.



Figure 12. “For the ‘boys in uniform.’”



Figure 13. “How I sympathize with the Boers!”

All of this fed into *Novoe vremia*’s sanctimony about its empire’s role in China and East Asia at large. Having taken the Chinese capital, all except Russia wanted to keep pushing, to “terrorize China” and “wrest consent to every demand,” said a leading article soon after the capture of Beijing. Its connection to China went beyond the two empires’ eight-thousand-kilometer border, it argued, and no other power could claim a better relationship with the Middle Kingdom.¹⁰¹ Russians had a “special ability to live in harmony and peace” with the Chinese and “Asians in general” that no other people had, another wrote.¹⁰² “We Russians cannot interfere with the internal order of our neighboring empire,” Suvorin roundly asserted. The matter of rebuilding a stable government after the recent catastrophe belonged to China alone, not Russia or Europe.¹⁰³

The occupation of Manchuria, however, did not seem to conflict with Suvorin’s and *Novoe vremia*’s derision toward European imperialism. Russian violence against the Chinese

¹⁰¹ “Kitaiskii krizis dlia Rossii i prochikh derzhav,” *Novoe vremia*, August 5, 1900.

¹⁰² “Politika ‘okrytykh dverei,’” *Novoe vremia*, October 9, 1900.

¹⁰³ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 16, 1900.

populace in Manchuria was on par with the brutality and destructiveness of alliance forces, but it received little coverage in its pages.¹⁰⁴ In their reportage, articles focused on the reconstruction of Russian rail lines and mopping up actions against gangs of bandits still wandering the surrounding area.¹⁰⁵ In fact, the supposed special connection between the two empires gave Suvorin and his writers more reason to demand other nations stay out of their legitimate sphere of influence in China's northeast provinces. The same article that spoke of Russia's special ability to live in peace with China added that this peace could only exist when it was "alone with China, without any participation from European[s]." Manchuria needed freedom from the European businessmen and missionaries that aggravated the local population. Europeans had their concessions in the southern half of China, but in the north Russia had more legitimate interests that rested on not just neighborly relations, but legal right.¹⁰⁶ Suvorin did not support the annexation of northeast China, and presented the occupation as a "peaceful" and temporary action that merely sought to secure the CER, as well as Port Arthur and Dal'nii.¹⁰⁷ The newspaper, thus, showed its readers a Russian presence in the region that was not just non-coercive, but mutually beneficial.

This vociferous, if hypocritical, support for the maintenance of Chinese territorial integrity set *Novoe vremia* apart from a number of voices in the Russian press calling for a more aggressive approach. Ultra-conservative papers such as *Moskovskie vedomosti* advocated more

¹⁰⁴ Some of the worst atrocities happened in and around the border town of Blagoveshchensk. In mid-July, the local military governor, fearing a Boxer attack, ordered the approximately 5,000 Chinese living in the city as merchants, shopkeepers, and itinerant laborers to leave immediately. In the ensuing days a pogrom took place, with extensive looting and Cossack troops forcing thousands of Chinese to cross the Amur River into Chinese territory. Russian forces provided no means of traversing the river and instead coerced them into the water, where many thousands drowned. After executing stragglers, Russian forces crossed the river themselves and occupied the Chinese towns of Aigun and Sakhalian, where looting and anti-Chinese violence continued. Lensen offers a narrative of the massacre on the Amur and fighting at Aigun and Sakhalian but provides few citations in *The Russo-Chinese War*, 89-125. See also, Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 213-214 and Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy*, 138-139, 142.

¹⁰⁵ "Zaniatie Mukdena," *Novoe vremia*, September 27, 1900.

¹⁰⁶ "Politika 'okrytykh dverei,'" *Novoe vremia*, October 9, 1900.

¹⁰⁷ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 25, 1900.

territorial expansion in Manchuria, while the more moderate *Novosti* supported an active role in the Open Door policy. Some periodicals went a step further and pressed for China's devolvement into an international "trusteeship" or even its complete dismemberment into smaller states and protectorates.¹⁰⁸ Particularly vocal support for the latter position came from the philosopher Prince Sergei Nikolaevich Trubetskoi in *Sank-Peterburskie vedomosti*. Evoking images of the Mongol invasion, he presented the Boxer Uprising as a harbinger of future Chinese aggression against the West as it finally woke from its "centuries of slumber."¹⁰⁹ He called for the swift break up of China before it could marshal its full strength.

Few in the press shared such an extreme position, and Suvorin directly addressed Trubetskoi's argument in a "Little Letter." Given China's current internal crises, he saw no reason to assume the "ghost of Genghis Khan" had risen there and would immediately march west. Regardless, he argued, would it not be "a hundred times better" to live in peace with the "yellow race" and even to help it with its problems?¹¹⁰ By taking this line Suvorin not only pushed for closer relations with China, but also leant support to Witte's cautious position regarding Russian actions in the region.¹¹¹

Witte continued to try to speed the military evacuation of the region and return to his informal and economic approach to expansion in Northeast Asia. The new foreign minister, Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf, closely sided with Witte on the need to end the occupation soon and specifically worried about provoking Japan.¹¹² Given its interests in the region, and increasing dominance over Korea, Japan was the imperial power with the most to lose from a

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, both of these arguments came from the political middle and left, with the moderate *Nedelia* suggesting the trusteeship and the socialist-leaning *Vestnik Evropy* [*Herald of Europe*] dismemberment. Eskridge-Kosmach, "The Boxer Rebellion and the standpoint of the Russian press," 431, 436.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 432.

¹¹⁰ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, September 2, 1900.

¹¹¹ Eskridge-Kosmach, "The Boxer Rebellion and the standpoint of the Russian press," 436.

¹¹² Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 179.

major Russian military presence in Manchuria. With the Boxers and their allies crushed, St. Petersburg's attention began a shift toward its competitor across the Yellow Sea. Japan, therefore, began to receive considerable attention in *Novoe vremia* because of its growing disagreement with Russian authorities regarding the occupation of Manchuria.

Other figures in Suvorin's circle of high-ranking friends gave him reason to worry about the island empire. In late July the publisher called on admiral Nikolai Illarionovich Skrydlov the night before he departed to assume command of the Pacific Fleet. Skrydlov informed Suvorin that the sovereign and a number of ministers had spoken to him but offered few definitive orders. The emperor "hated" the Japanese and had wanted them checked at every opportunity. Foreign Minister Lamzdorf had advised caution toward Japan. Kuropatkin had told him the Boxer crisis was a test for Russia in front of all Europe. The admiral knew only that the Pacific Fleet was in poor condition compared to the "beautiful" Japanese fleet, which he believed could easily destroy it.¹¹³ In his diary, Suvorin blamed the naval high command and Grand Prince Alexei Alexandrovich. The grand prince spent his time at Peterhof away from the Admiralty. In his absence, theft in form of kickbacks and corruption in the navy "was colossal." "While the General Admiral is a grand prince," he grumbled, "we have no fleet."¹¹⁴ Suvorin's wariness of his country's military position in the Far East vis-à-vis Japan, thus, likely owed to his private opinions about the imperial government.

During the conflict, *Novoe vremia* spoke of Japan with a mixture of praise and suspicion, much as it had during the previous war. The paper considered Japan among China's most dangerous oppressors. Only Russia rivaled Japan's ability to quickly deploy troops in Northeast Asia. Furthermore, it had demonstrated hostility toward its fellow Asian countries just a few

¹¹³ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 394.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

years prior. Unlike their surprised European counterparts, an article explained, Japanese officials in China knew the local language and had kept a close eye on the disturbances that led to the Boxer Uprising. The European powers that had tried to prevent a Japanese foothold on the continent so recently had needed them to provide the majority of the troops to lift the siege of the Beijing legations.¹¹⁵ Suvorin seized on this irony. The Japanese “passionately” wanted Europe to ask them to “pacify China.” They already viewed China as a Japanese territory, and still dreamed of enthroning their dynasty in the Forbidden City, as they had at the end of the Sino-Japanese War.¹¹⁶ He conceded that Japan had a right to a prominent say in post-Boxer China, but remained skeptical about its intentions.¹¹⁷ Japan had twice proven itself on the field of battle. Yet, its zealous designs on Qing territory and existing stereotypes about Japan’s greed and treachery still tarnished its reputation in this corner of the Russian press.

Sokolovskii drew on these tropes to create an unflattering visual representation of Japan in *Novoe vremia* in 1900 and onwards. In his illustrations, Japanese characters embody the trope of superficial Europeanization the paper had honed in 1895. Japan had partially adopted European culture and technology, but continued to use it solely for selfish and predatory reasons. One drawing, “Called to dinner” (Figure 14), presents Japan as a greedy mouse rushing to dine on China’s misfortunes. The large fork and spoon give Japan the appearance of a tiny, opportunistic power joining the feeding frenzy. Others present Japanese figures struggling to put on the appearance of westernization on the world stage offered by the Boxer crisis. “Will their personalities be compatible?” (Figure 15) shows a small Japanese gentleman leading an elegantly dressed European lady. While the gentleman wears a slimy grin, the lady seems bemused.

¹¹⁵ “Chto delat’ v Kitae dal’she?,” *Novoe vremia*, June 26, 1900.

¹¹⁶ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, July 28, 1900.

¹¹⁷ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 12, 1900.

Others, such as “In Step!” (Figure 16) and “Ugh, civilization is heavy!” (Figure 17), focus on Japan’s aspirations to martial prowess. The first depicts skinny-legged soldiers exaggeratedly goose-stepping at their officer’s command. The second offers a similarly slight trooper laboring under a heavy backpack that represents Japan’s responsibilities if it wants to be counted among the world’s great empires. Both of these illustrations show Japan trying and failing to show off in front of Europe.

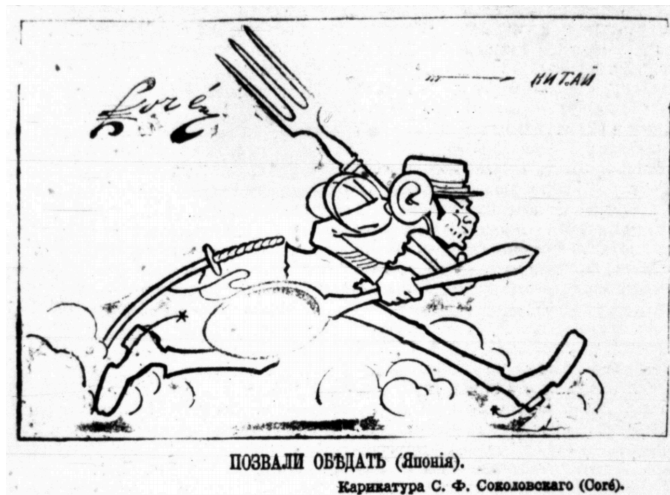


Figure 14. “Called to dinner (Japan).”



Figure 15. “Will their personalities be compatible? (Europe and Japan).”

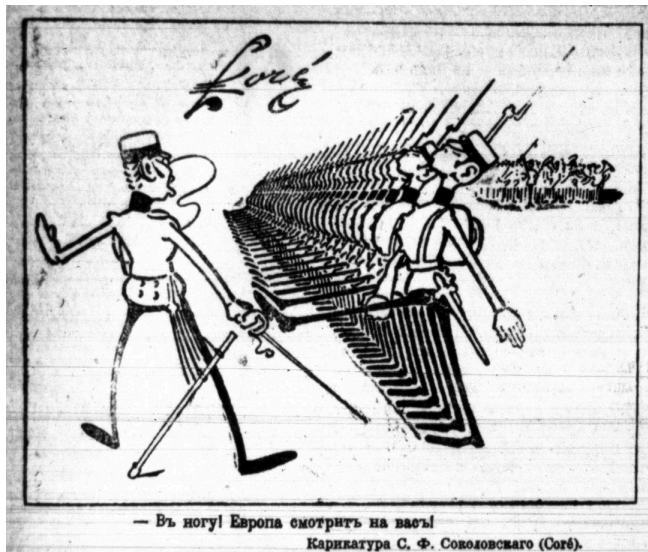


Figure 16. “In step! Europe is watching you!”



Figure 17. “The Japanese.—Ugh, civilization is heavy!”

The physical appearance of the Japanese in Sokolovskii’s work lends them an otherness not unlike his depictions of the Chinese. While not as grotesque as the Boxers in Figures 10 and 11, they have an unpleasant and scrawny look to them. The soldiers in Figures 16 and 17 have enlarged ears and comically thin limbs. Figures 14 and 15 show them as rodent-like and short of stature. The artist would take these themes to extremes as the Russo-Japanese conflict approached a few years later. For the time being, however, his depictions of the Japanese sat on a more general smallness or slowness of body. If Sokolovskii’s Boxers represented primeval Asian rage lashing out against European oppression, his Japanese showed Asians struggling to fit into a European mold. This cumbersome amalgamation of Asian and European features gave shape to *Novoe vremia*’s standing portrayal of Japan’s abandonment of traditional trappings for the outward appearance of European sophistication and culture.

In the end, the empire acted in concert with Japan, Europe, and United States to sign the Boxer Protocol with the Qing in August 1901.¹¹⁸ Along with the elimination of Boxer partisans and sympathizers at the Qing court, the protocol entailed a massive indemnity, 450 million *taels* of Chinese silver currency.¹¹⁹ The figure dwarfed Japan's demands in 1895. Almost a third of the indemnity, a higher percentage than any other power, went to Russia to cover damages to its properties in Manchuria and Liaodong.¹²⁰ Despite its secret alliance with Russia, the Chinese government now had scant reason to count the tsar as a friend.

Bureaucrats and Censors

In the fall 1900, *Novoe vremia* began a series of editorials titled "Russia and Japan" that ran on and off over the next year. The pieces documented the relationship between the two empires and their actions in Northeast Asia.¹²¹ In May 1901, reshuffling in the Japanese Diet brought the hardline Count Katsura Taro to the prime minister-ship, replacing Marquis Ito Hirobumi, who had shown more willingness to compromise over the Manchurian issue.¹²² In June 1901, Lamzdorf saw dealings with the Empire's Eastern rival as entering a crucial phase and worried the "Russia and Japan" series might complicate the situation. Writing to the Chief Bureau for Press Affairs, he asked the paper to suspend the series until a more opportune time. While "not denying the correctness of certain elements" of articles examining the interests the two empires had on the Chinese territory, Lamzdorf deemed Russo-Japanese relations, and especially the "extremely sensitive area of Korean affairs," too volatile a topic for opinion pieces

¹¹⁸ For more on the Boxer Protocol and negotiation see Tan, *The Boxer Catastrophe*, 215-232.

¹¹⁹ The final stipulations are summarized in *Ibid.*, 233-236.

¹²⁰ Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 219.

¹²¹ "Rossiia i Iaponiia," *Novoe vremia*, October 31, 1900.

¹²² Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 183; Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869-1942* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 62.

in the popular press. A “frank discussion” of relations with Japan should wait for “more favorable circumstances,” he concluded.¹²³ The chief bureau relayed the message to *Novoe vremia*’s assistant editor, Feodor Il’ich Bulgakov, who agreed to halt the series and not address the topic so directly.¹²⁴ Given the delicacy of the situation, the new foreign minister did not want a paper with the readership and provenance of Suvorin’s interfering with the empire’s diplomatic endeavors.¹²⁵

This was not the first time the Foreign Ministry had attempted to regulate *Novoe vremia* through the censors. During Murav’ev’s tenure (1897-1900), the ministry had contacted the chief bureau a handful of times regarding the paper. Soon after Murav’ev assumed the minister’s portfolio, Lamzdorf, in his capacity as deputy minister, wrote to draw attention to a February 1897 article about the Swedish military’s positions near the Russian border.¹²⁶ As a recent study has shown, Lamzdorf’s fastidiousness and Murav’ev’s aloofness meant that the deputy minister handled most day-to-day activities.¹²⁷ The Russian envoy in Stockholm noted that this “belligerent” piece had made a poor impression in ruling circles there, and Lamzdorf asked the bureau to prevent such articles from appearing in the future.¹²⁸ In this way, the paper’s disposition toward virulent Russian nationalism, while patriotic, had a tendency to contradict the Foreign Ministry’s diplomatic aims.

¹²³ Lamzdorf to Durnovo, June 22, 1901, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 166.

¹²⁴ Durnovo to Lamzdorf, June 23, 1901, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 167. Lamzdorf, upon learning that only one article in the series remained, allowed *Novoe vremia* to print it. Lamzdorf to Durnovo, June 24, 1901, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 168.

¹²⁵ Lamzdorf was an extremely knowledgeable and efficient worker, and thus, the majority of incoming and outgoing documents at the foreign ministry passed across his desk. Loshakov, “*Graf Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf*,” 24.

¹²⁶ “Usilenie Shvedskikh stragicheskikh pod”ezdov k granitsam Rossii,” *Novoe vremia*, February 9, 1897.

¹²⁷ Loshakov, “*Graf Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf*,” 30.

¹²⁸ Lamzdorf to Goremykin, February 18, 1897, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 442, l. 125.

In October 1898, the article “The European Concert, Russia, and the East” obliged the deputy minister to write again.¹²⁹ The editorial attacked the idea of a concert of the European powers and suggested Russia act independently to resolve issues relevant to its global interests.¹³⁰ This not only contradicted current policy, but also threatened to undermine the ministry’s efforts in these regards. European politicians believed *Novoe vremia* a semi-official tsarist organ whose contents received prior approval, Lamzdorf explained. He, therefore, asked the bureau to take measures to “avert suspicion” and clarify that the article in no way represented Russian policy.¹³¹ Despite blackmailing China in order to lease the Liaodong Peninsula only seven months beforehand, Murav’ev’s ministry sought to uphold Russia’s image as an upstanding member of the international community.

Murav’ev himself finally contacted Interior Minister Ivan Logginovich Goremykin (whose ministry oversaw the censorship bureau) a few months later to complain about the continued appearance of these types of articles in the paper. He protested that *Novoe vremia* had ignored the ministry’s earlier requests to refrain from publishing “belligerent” articles on foreign policy topics. Citing a recent leading article that seemed to threaten Britain’s possessions in Asia should it ever come to blows with Russia’s French allies, he called the paper’s sentiments “in complete contradiction to the peaceful orientation of Russian politics.”¹³² The imperial government was “primarily concerned” with “maintaining peaceful relations with all powers,” he wrote, and “thus, newspaper articles of our press [that] are belligerent in nature, ... may lead to false interpretations of Russia’s intentions.” Given the newspaper’s repeated flouting of the

¹²⁹ “Evropeiskii kontsert, Rossiia i vostok,” *Novoe vremia*, October 12, 1898.

¹³⁰ In particular, the article highlighted the situation of Armenians in Anatolia and Slavic nations under Ottoman dominion in the Balkans.

¹³¹ Lamzdorf to Baron Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Iksul’ fon Gil’denbandt, October 12, 1898, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 442, l. 162.

¹³² “S. Peterburg, 10 ianvaria,” *Novoe vremia*, January 11, 1899.

foreign ministry's wishes, and the censorship bureau's seeming inaction on relaying their seriousness, Murav'ev requested that Goremykin make a "strict suggestion [*strogoe vnushenie*]" to its editor to stop printing such ideas in its articles.¹³³ The Interior Minister consented and a week later informed Murav'ev that he had "made the proper suggestion about the need for greater caution in the opinions of this newspaper on foreign policy issues."¹³⁴ Thereby, *Novoe vremia* had not particularly ingratiated itself to the current foreign ministry by 1900.

As noted, Suvorin had little regard for Murav'ev as both person and politician. In a conversation with a censor at the chief bureau in February 1900, the publisher got the impression that the foreign minister had it out for him. "Murav'ev... surely wants *Novoe vremia* punished for not sharing his policies," he wrote in his diary. This "idiot" clearly wished the bureau to make the press bow to his every whim.¹³⁵ With Witte still the dominant figure in Russian politics this could not come to pass, however. Moreover, Count Murav'ev passed away in early 1900 and the Witte's close ally, Lamzdorf, assumed control of the foreign ministry by the onset of the Boxer crisis.

Lamzdorf and Suvorin apparently did not share any particular amity. The two do not appear to have corresponded, and said rather unpleasant things about each other in their respective diaries.¹³⁶ Lamzdorf had a negative predisposition to the press and, as noted, had a history of writing to the chief bureau to complain about *Novoe vremia*.

For his part, Suvorin, though one of the autocracy's staunchest supporters in the press, saw the censorship regime as an unwelcome intrusion into his patriotic and loyal newspaper's

¹³³ Murav'ev to Goremykin, January 11, 1899, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 442, l. 196.

¹³⁴ Goremykin to Murav'ev, January 19, 1899, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 442, l. 197.

¹³⁵ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 363-364.

¹³⁶ No letters exist between the two in either of their personal collections at RGALI (Suvorin, fond 456) or the Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiskoi Federatsii (GARF) (Lamzdorf, fond 568). Both make only brief mentions of each other in their diaries, in most instances insults. For example, Lamzdorf referred to *Novoe vremia* as one of the Empire's most "vile" newspapers and "worthy of disdain," while Suvorin made derogatory accusations about the count's reputed homosexuality. Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf, *Dnevnik*, 35, 124; Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 468.

operations. For instance, he chaffed at a chief bureau circular that warned the press against discussing the arrival of a Boer delegation in Russia in August 1900.¹³⁷ The directive “obviously” came from Lamzdorf, he complained, and he cursed the government’s prohibitions on useful knowledge of interest to the Russian public.¹³⁸ Suvorin and his newspaper may have more or less shared Lamzdorf’s deference to Witte’s policies at this point, but this did not guarantee harmony between *Novoe vremia* and the Foreign Ministry.

At the outbreak of the Boxer crisis, the chief bureau delivered a number of circulars to the press about the mobilization of the Russian forces. Citing the strategic need for secrecy, it barred the publication of telegrams or articles on troops movements in the Far East.¹³⁹ A separate circular hoped for “prudence and patriotism” in the press regarding the conflict, but gave a directive:

Noting the appearance of completely false information from the theater of war in the Far East in newspapers, and recognizing that the publication of such news cannot be tolerated, [the Interior Ministry] wishe[s] to command that the editors of periodical publications observe special care while printing the aforesaid news and articles relating to the conflict with China, and not publish unchecked alarming rumors which can disturb the public.¹⁴⁰

The imperial government recognized the power of the press to sway public opinion about Russia’s role in the Boxer conflict. Its proclamations of Sino-Russian friendship clashed with its invasion of Manchuria and participation in the Eight-Nation Alliance—not to mention the strong-armed lease of Port Arthur—, making diplomacy in the region a delicate balancing act.

The circulars also instituted preliminary censorship on telegrams about the conflict. Periodicals now needed approval from General Staff Headquarters before they printed any wires

¹³⁷ Tsirkuliar, Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pečati, August 2, 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 34, d. 17, l. 240.

¹³⁸ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 395.

¹³⁹ Tsirkuliar, Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pečati, July 4, 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 34, d. 17, l. 231; Tsirkuliar, Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pečati, July 16 1900, f. 776, o. 34, d. 17, l. 236.

¹⁴⁰ Tsirkuliar, Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pečati, July 11, 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 34, d. 17, l. 234.

from the front.¹⁴¹ *Novoe vremia* promptly petitioned the chief bureau about this provision. The paper's workers already had strict daily deadlines for getting each edition to print, it argued, and the extra step of obtaining General Staff approval before publishing telegrams from the front put undue stress on the daily printing timeline. Further, it was "in the interests of the public" to receive news about the Boxer conflict as quickly as possible. The appeal, thereby, asked the chief bureau to consider relaxing the rules for official approval of telegrams.¹⁴² That *Novoe vremia*'s editorial office felt comfortable making such a suggestion shows a measure confidence about the paper's standing in Russian officialdom. It sided with the government's stance on the war and ran patriotic articles professing Russia's friendship and benevolence toward China throughout 1900. In addition, Suvorin's circle of friends included Prince Nikolai Vladimirovich Shakhovskoi, the current head of the chief bureau.¹⁴³ Nonetheless, the petition received no response.

On August 30, *Novoe vremia* ran a telegram from Blagoveshchensk about a corps of Russian soldiers encamped in Manchuria.¹⁴⁴ These troops were on the southern bank of the Amur River, just across the border between the two empires. According to the report, an archpriest led the troops in a prayer service wherein he erected a cross and consecrated the riverbank as Russian land. The telegram quoted an officer as saying that "Murav'ev foresaw that sooner or later this shore would be ours."¹⁴⁵ Similar reports claiming that Russian troops had annexed the southern bank of the Amur appeared in the Blagoveshchensk newspaper *Amurskaia gazeta* [*The Amur Gazette*] on August 12 and were soon reprinted by the prominent St.

¹⁴¹ The circulars of July 4 and 11, 1900, presented this as not only protecting the public from the abovementioned rumors, but also keeping sensitive information about troops deployments and supply lines out of the press. Ibid.

¹⁴² "Dokladnaia zapiska Redaktsiia gazety Novoe vremia o tsenzure telegramm," addressed to Prince Nikolai Vladimirovich Shakhovskoi, July 27, 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, lls. 71-72.

¹⁴³ Suvorin called Shakhovskoi a "very nice and intelligent man" and spoke with him frequently during his various appointments at the chief bureau in 1900, *Dnevnik*, 363.

¹⁴⁴ They held this position because of the Blagoveshchensk incident described in footnote 104.

¹⁴⁵ Telegram, *Novoe vremia*, August 30 1900.

Petersburg journal *Russkoe bogatstvo* [*Russian Wealth*].¹⁴⁶ On August 25, Lamzdorf had attempted to dispel these rumors by issuing a circular to his counterparts among the other members of the Eight Nation Alliance officially disavowing any claim to Chinese territory in the Manchurian invasion.¹⁴⁷ As it turned out, *Novoe vremia*'s editorial office had had similar qualms about the August 30 telegram, and published it only after submitting it to the General Staff for preliminary consideration and approval.¹⁴⁸ Still, this telegram seemed to contradict Lamzdorf's circular and gave the public, and the foreign minister's peers in Europe and Japan, conflicting information about Russia's intentions in Manchuria.

This quickly caught Lamzdorf's attention. In his memorandum to the Interior Ministry he highlighted its contradiction of Russia's stated policy regarding the preservation of China's territorial integrity. As in 1898, he cited *Novoe vremia*'s reputation among foreign diplomats and wanted swift action to stop the press from publishing reports that contradicted official diplomatic policy.¹⁴⁹ No matter what the plan for Russia's withdrawal from Manchuria might end up being, the empire's chief diplomat did not need foreign or domestic audiences thinking Russia was already going back on its promises. In his reply, Deputy Interior Minister Durnovo informed Lamzdorf that the report had in fact passed censors, but nonetheless promised to instruct the editors of the capital's periodicals to avoid publishing reports or articles inconsistent with the official line on the situation in China.¹⁵⁰ From here, the bureau contacted War Minister

¹⁴⁶ *Amurskaia gazeta*, August 12, 1900; *Russkoe bogatstvo*, No. 9, (1900): 224; Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904: With an Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958), 141-142, 291fn.

¹⁴⁷ The circular is in "Bokserskaia vosstanie," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 14 (1926): 28-29.

¹⁴⁸ Censors at General Staff HQ had already doctored the telegram greatly. The original version named the Russian general at the service, gubernator Konstantine Nikolaevich Gribskii, and quoted him explicitly proclaiming the south bank of the Amur as Russian land and parceling out the occupied areas to Cossacks and settlers. The censors removed Gribskii's proclamations of annexation and land distribution. The final version only noted the General's presence at the service. *Korrespondentsiia Novogo vremeni*, undated 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 79.

¹⁴⁹ Lamzdorf to Petr Nikolaevich Durnovo, September 2, 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 78.

¹⁵⁰ Durnovo to Lamzdorf, September 5, 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 80.

Kuropatkin and asked the censors at General Staff Headquarters to take extra care not to approve telegrams that controverted official policy.¹⁵¹ Kuropatkin consented, and in his reply wrote that he shared Lamzdorf's concerns about "attract[ing] the attention of foreign governments and giv[ing] them additional reason to suspect us of self-serving schemes."¹⁵²

Official policy and rhetoric offered the only assurance to Russia's peers that it would not attempt to occupy Manchuria permanently. Less prestigious newspapers, such as *Novosti*, could support the annexation of the Chinese bank of the Amur, but Russian diplomacy ultimately required the empire's actions to appear to line up with its stated policies.¹⁵³ If belligerent or contradictory language about foreign policy was a nuisance in *Novosti*, it was wholly inappropriate in institutions of *Novoe vremia*'s provenance. Ultimately, the issue was not the facts, but how the press presented the Manchurian occupation. In Lamzdorf's calculations, the Foreign Ministry's work would be infinitely easier if official and semi-official rhetoric about the situation remained consistent.

That December, Kuropatkin himself contacted the chief bureau about the newspaper, requesting Suvorin and one of his writers immediately stop publishing articles about the French military. The offending articles covered the administration of France's current war minister, General Louis André, and the propensity of inter-party conflicts in the French Third Republic to affect its military considerations.¹⁵⁴ Citing "serious military considerations," Kuropatkin asked *Novoe vremia* (and the rest of the press, for that matter) to refrain from raising doubts about the battle-readiness of Russia's ally. His memo to the chief bureau included clippings of French

¹⁵¹ Adikaevskii to Kuropatkin, September 6, 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 82.

¹⁵² Kuropatkin to Dmitrii Sergeevich Sipiagin, September 7, 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 83.

¹⁵³ Eskridge-Kosmach, "The Boxer Rebellion and the Standpoint of the Russian Press," 11.

¹⁵⁴ The war minister had in mind P. Vozhin, "Armiia Frantsia," *Novoe vremia*, December 4, 1900, and Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, December 20, 1900.

newspapers reporting on *Novoe vremia*'s statements. The chief bureau called Suvorin to its office, where it relayed the message and he agreed to drop the subject.¹⁵⁵

None of these incidents resulted in disciplinary action against *Novoe vremia*. Official sanction remained a real possibility, however, despite the paper's reputation and connections.

During this period, on two different occasions the chief bureau exercised its right to temporarily ban the newspaper's sale. In 1898, the St. Petersburg governor wrote Interior Minister Goremykin to request action for a series of articles that he claimed defamed the city's police force.¹⁵⁶ As the governor argued, though generally "conservative," the paper occasionally used its "privileged position" to print dangerous ideas. In this case, it insinuated corruption and abuse of power by the Petersburg police.¹⁵⁷ In response, Goremykin had the chief bureau ban *Novoe vremia*'s street sales for ten days.¹⁵⁸ The other instance occurred on May 11, 1901, in reaction to the article "Regarding worker disorders."¹⁵⁹ The new interior minister, Dmitrii Sergevich Sipiagin, seized this opportunity and banned sales for violating a circular prohibiting the press from reporting on strikes and riots among workers.¹⁶⁰ At the advice of Shakhovskoi, Suvorin called on the minister later the same day to make his case against the ban. He explained that the article had taken a cautious and loyal approach to the topic. After an impassioned speech about the financial damage the ban would cause, Sipiagin gave him only a curt, negative response. Suvorin believed the ban was retaliation for a "Little Letter" that implied Sipiagin had

¹⁵⁵ Kuropatkin's memo to the chief bureau, including newspaper clippings and an analysis of the offending articles is in RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, lls. 108, 109a, 134-143. A brief statement from the War Ministry requesting a halt to the articles and including Suvorin's signature to verify delivery of the message is War Ministry Memorandum to the Chief Bureau of Press Affairs, December 24, 1900, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 109b.

¹⁵⁶ The articles were "Gde komissii—V komissii ili v predsedatel?" parts I, II, and III, in *Novoe vremia*, October 29, 30, and 31 1898, and "Etiudy LXXXV," in *Novoe vremia*, November 1, 1898.

¹⁵⁷ Nikolai Vasil'evich Kleigel's to Goremykin, November 2, 1898, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 442, l. 167.

¹⁵⁸ Chief bureau of Press Affairs internal memorandum, November 3, 1898, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 442, l. 177.

¹⁵⁹ A. P. Nikolskii, "Po povodu rabochikh bezporiadokov," *Novoe vremia*, May 4, 1901.

¹⁶⁰ Chief Bureau of Press Affairs internal memorandum, May 11, 1901, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 157.

not had a program for the interior ministry when he entered office.¹⁶¹ Observers at the time saw the ban as an excessive move by the new minister designed to show that even conservative newspapers needed to watch their words about social and political issues.¹⁶² Commentary on domestic issues was, therefore, far more likely to provoke punitive action than international relations, at least for the time being.¹⁶³

Regardless, the close attention these ministries paid to *Novoe vremia* showed their respect for its influence among readers at home and abroad. As one of the empire's largest news outlets, its extensive reportage and opinions about international politics reached a large audience. Ministers could not afford to ignore its reputation as a government mouthpiece. Thus, when the Manchurian occupation strained Russo-Japanese relations in 1901, Lamzdorf felt the newspaper a prominent enough voice of Russian Empire that he attempted to manage its content. In this way, *Novoe vremia* wielded a measure of influence over not only its readers, but over the imperial government as well.

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China offered a unique venue for imperial brinkmanship in 1900. By the end of the nineteenth century, foreign treaty ports, concessions, and spheres of influence pockmarked the Qing Dynasty's lands. Major Chinese cities contained large quarters where half a dozen or more foreign imperial powers owned or leased properties and exercised extraterritoriality. Here, these countries' interests, as well as their troops and representatives, all existed in tight quarters. The

¹⁶¹ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 413-414; "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, October 25, 1899.

¹⁶² Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhitsa*, 263-265.

¹⁶³ This perhaps also had to do with the social and political tensions that would culminate in the Revolution of 1905, covered in passing in Chapter Four and specially in Chapter Five.

outbreak of Boxer violence and the marshaling of the Eight Nation Alliance offered a stage for empires on which to demonstrate their might and prestige as imperial powers in front of their peers.

The summer of 1900 provided *Novoe vremia* an opportunity to campaign on Russia's behalf in this contest of empires. It launched a nationalistic defense of Russian imperialism in Northeast Asia through its coverage of the Boxer conflict. The Russian government may have severely dampened China's favor with the coerced lease of the Liaodong Peninsula and the Manchurian occupation, but newspapers like *Novoe vremia* could deploy a constant smokescreen of moralizing rhetoric that justified the empire's actions. Suvorin and his employees wrote platitudes about Russia's fraternity with its fellow Asian monarchy *ad nauseum*. They ridiculed Europe's voracious designs on China and its resources in articles and political cartoons. As we have seen, these sentiments largely fit with those of the majority of the Russian press. It was beside the point that Suvorin himself had a lukewarm attitude toward projects in East Asia. His newspaper already had a well-tested vocabulary for describing the major players in the region and their interests. The Chinese were sympathetic but backward relics, the Europeans greedy hypocrites, and the Japanese a frightening amalgamation of the worse aspects of both. *Novoe vremia* gave its readers an image of Russia as an upstanding member of the international community. Its actions in Beijing and Manchuria set it apart from its European and Japanese peers, it argued. In this way, the Boxer Uprising gave the newspaper a chance to demonstrate that Russia's geography as a partly Asian country and mutual relations with China made it a different kind of empire.

As the files of the Chief Bureau of Press Affairs and Suvorin's personal accounts show, important figures in the government were paying attention to how *Novoe vremia* depicted Russia

in international politics. Russian readers, but also foreign and domestic diplomats and politicians, kept abreast of its attitudes because of its believed connection to the highest circles of Russian power. At sensitive junctures, the foreign ministry, and Lamzdorf in particular, saw the newspaper's nationalistic and chauvinistic tone as a potential liability to the empire's diplomacy. As the Manchurian occupation dragged on, much of this rhetoric continued to take aim at Japan and its soon-to-be ally, Great Britain. For this reason, Lamzdorf's ministry kept a careful watch on the newspaper's words while Russia and Japan edged slowly toward war.

Chapter Three

An Imperial Mouthpiece?: *Novoe Vremia* and the Outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War

In the summer of 1902, Finance Minister Witte visited the Russian Empire's possessions in Northeast Asia. He drew "very sad conclusions" about the situation there.¹ His country's supposedly temporary occupation of China's Manchurian provinces during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 was now in its second year. Despite a recent agreement with the Chinese government to withdraw troops in six months, this evacuation did not appear forthcoming.² Though a leading advocate of Russian economic expansion in the region, Witte feared war with Japan. In his report to the tsar upon his return he insisted that a "normal [and] peaceful condition" could only exist between Russia and Japan if the former honored its commitments and focused on economic—rather than military—development in the region. Witte's influence at the imperial court had entered a period of decline, however, and Nicholas paid little heed to his suggestions.³

Published extracts from Witte's report in the official newspaper *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik* [*Government Herald*] in early 1903 aroused Suvorin's attention. In a "Little Letter" on February 22, 1903, he expressed skepticism about Russian investment in Port Arthur and Dal'nii. A large portion of society remained "perfectly indifferent" to the Far East, he explained. Petersburgers often referred to the city as not Dal'nii, but *Lishnii* [extra, superfluous]. "It is necessary to postpone extensive plans in the Far East from time to time," he argued, and asserted that Russia had more pressing concerns in its heartland west of the Urals, where tax money would be better spent. Besides, the "hearts and minds" of the Russian people gravitated more toward immediate

¹ Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 307.

² On March 26, 1902, the Russian envoy to Peking signed an agreement with the Chinese government that set a timeline for Russia's withdraw from Manchuria that would see an end to Russian occupation by March 26 of the following year. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 186.

³ Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 307.

issues, he argued. Returning a favorite topic, Suvorin suggested these issues included access to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles and redressing the 1878 Congress of Berlin.⁴

Suvorin's words showed his view of the Far East in the context of Russia's international prestige. Historians such as Bernard Porter have argued the most of the British public was "perfectly indifferent" to their own government's colonies overseas.⁵ Imperial projects themselves were not irrelevant to *Novoe vremia* and its readers, however, as the experience of the Russo-Japanese War would show.

Novoe vremia would play a key role in stoking the flames of patriotism during the Russo-Japanese War's early stages. From the outset, however, Suvorin saw the conflict as more fundamentally tied to his nation's status as a global great power than any specific rivalry with Japan. Much like the Boxer Uprising, this war was a test of Russia's mettle before its European peers. Indeed, in its coverage of the lead up to and outbreak of hostilities the newspaper presented Great Britain as Russia's enemy as much as Japan was. When Suvorin spoke of war in the East he invariably tied it to Russian prestige in the West. Given this focus, his bluster necessarily entailed insecurity about Russia's international position. For this reason, despite *Novoe vremia*'s chauvinism towards Japan and the West, the newspaper's rhetoric often contained an undercurrent of doubt regarding Russia's status in relation to its European and Asian imperial rivals.

After the war began in January 1904, *Novoe vremia* became one of its strongest proponents in the Russian press. As before, this led to increased governmental scrutiny. Ministers such as Witte, Foreign Minister Lamzdorf, and Interior Minister Viacheslav Konstantinovich von Pleve saw *Novoe vremia* as an important venue through which to gain

⁴ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, February 22, 1903.

⁵ This is the thesis of Porter's book, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*.

public support for their policies in 1903 and 1904. As the files of the Chief Bureau for Press Affairs show, the paper's coverage of the events in Manchuria made it a battlefield for ministerial infighting.⁶

The beginning of hostilities between Russia and Japan also brought increased interest in *Novoe vremia* from the Russian reading public. This attention was manifested in a reader donation campaign geared toward rebuilding and expanding the Russian navy after its early defeats at the first Battle of Port Arthur in 1904. This effort gained so much momentum that the emperor soon created a special committee to oversee its actions. The war also saw the beginning of a major influx of letters from readers that felt compelled to write Suvorin personally and comment on his newspaper's contents and express their hopes and fears about the conflict.

Historians have paid much attention to the diplomatic causes of the Russo-Japanese War, yet the public sphere's opinion of and influence on the machinations of Russia's policymakers remains under-examined.⁷ This chapter explores one facet of this connection by placing *Novoe vremia* and Aleksei Suvorin at the center of discussions between Russian officialdom and the reading public regarding the nature of Russia's Manchurian occupation and the early stages of the Russo-Japanese War. As the voices of caution in the government increasingly lost out to those of jingoism, Suvorin and his newspaper heightened their already chauvinistic rhetoric. Using its cache of racial and national stereotypes, *Novoe vremia* again painted Russia as the sole moral nation among barbarians in both the East and West. While Japan represented "Asian"

⁶ The censorship bureau's file on *Novoe vremia* is in RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 438-449.

⁷ A few important works that focus wholly or in part on the origins of the war include: Schimmelpenninck's *Toward the Rising Sun*; S. C. M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals*; David MacLaren McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992); R. K. I. Quedsted, *Matey Imperialists?*; and Boris Aleksandrovich Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria, 1892-1906*. Works that touch on the war in the public sphere include Stephen M. Norris' examination of popular prints in *A War of Images* and Rosamund Barlett, "Japonisme and Japanophobia: The Russo-Japanese War in Russian Cultural Consciousness," *The Russian Review*, 67 (January 2008), 8-13. Louise McReynolds devotes a chapter to the press' reaction to the war in her *The News Under Russia's Old Regime* and Sun Zhingching touches on it briefly in *Kitaiskaia politika Rossii*.

treachery in all its glory, Great Britain typified the European greed and hypocrisy that had laid low Russia's erstwhile Chinese allies under unequal treaties and economic oppression. Suvorin never directly made the case for war before the attack on Port Arthur, yet his newspaper clearly presented Japan as an adversary in Russia's attempts to pursue peaceful relations with China and exert a positive influence in Northeast Asia. Ultimately, his newspaper's coverage of the events of 1903-1904 presented images of Russia's march into the region that stirred both the pride and anxiety of its readers.

* * *

After meeting the first deadline of the 1902 agreement by evacuating its troops from the southern portion of Manchuria in September, Russia's decision-makers wavered on whether to implement the next stages of their withdrawal. Witte pushed for military de-escalation. He continued his argument for the informal expansion of Russia influence through financial ventures like the Chinese Eastern Railway. By his reasoning, Russia was unprepared to fight a war in Northeast Asia, especially against the increasingly ascendant Japanese Empire.⁸ For these reasons, he had opposed not only the Manchurian occupation but also the lease of Port Arthur and Dal'nii in 1898.⁹

Minister of Foreign Affairs Count Lamzdorf and Minister of War Kuropatkin sided with Witte in pushing this less aggressive stance. Lamzdorf adhered to Witte's policies so steadfastly during this period that many in the government viewed the two ministries as effectively

⁸ Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 366.

⁹ Ibid., 274-275; Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 393-394.

merged.¹⁰ Kuropatkin initially supported the Manchurian occupation but by early 1903 his worries about the logistical demands of a war with Japan pushed him to support Witte's line. In exchange, Witte agreed to his demands for increased garrisons along the CER and South Manchurian Railways. By January 1903, the ministers of Finance, Foreign Affairs, and War more or less joined in their attitudes toward the occupation.¹¹

A hawkish group had gained Nicholas' ear, however, and gradually swayed the tsar to a more hardline position. Foremost among this group were new Interior Minister Pleve and Admiral and soon-to-be Viceroy of the Far East Evgenii Ivanovich Alekseev. Convinced that Japan would not dare attack, they stoked Nicholas' ambitions and dismissiveness toward Japan's requests for Russia to abandon the occupation. A flamboyant businessman and former guards captain named Aleksandr Mikhailovich Bezobrazov also belonged to this group. As a favorite at Nicholas' court, Bezobrazov could wield considerable influence over the impressionable autocrat. As Schimmelpenninck van der Oye has shown, however, historians and contemporaries alike have tended to overestimate the captain's role in pushing Russia toward war.¹² Bezobrazov's advocacy for a heightened military presence in the Far East was merely indicative of the broader hardline sentiment of Alekseev, Pleve, and Nicholas himself.¹³ In their view, the Russian occupation ought to continue for the foreseeable future to guarantee the empire's dominance in the region.

¹⁰ McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia*, 19.

¹¹ Ibid., 28; Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 190-191.

¹² Indeed, Bezobrazov's adventurism and support for the expansion of Russian authority into Korea via a logging concession south of the Yalu River was a relatively minor part of Russian policy. Moreover, it caused little alarm in Tokyo. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 190.

¹³ Ibid., 187-189. In their memoirs and later writings, both Witte and Kuropatkin held Bezobrazov primarily responsible for the outbreak of war. See, specifically, *The Memoirs of Count Witte* and Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army and the Japanese War*, trans. A. B. Lindsay (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1909). A discussion of the historiography of the origins of the Russo-Japanese War can be found in *Toward the Rising Sun*, 5-8.

The hardliners predicated their argument on the belief that Japan would not resort to war. Alekseev, the commander of the Pacific fleet, shared Bezobrazov's jingoism and obsequiously supported Nicholas the further the tsar leaned in this direction.¹⁴ Pleve's motives were likely more complex. As a talented and intelligent administrator, his ascent to minister of internal affairs in 1902 immediately set him against Witte. Though not as dynamic or ambitious as his rival, he wielded immense power in the tsarist government and quickly became one of Witte's most influential opponents.¹⁵ Pleve viewed Witte's effort at rapid industrialization and modernization of the Russian Empire as fundamentally wrongheaded. As a proponent of slow, calculated reform, he saw Russia as, at base, an agrarian society best served by bolstering the role of the *soslovie* estate system and landed nobility.¹⁶ Witte later alleged that Pleve favored the hard line because he believed "a little victorious war" might deflect attention from the empire's domestic turmoil.¹⁷ This often-quoted passage is a paraphrase from Kuropatkin's diary, which Witte used to compile his memoir. The diary does not contain these exact words and in fact states that Pleve simply "had not objected" to a diversionary war with Japan.¹⁸ In the end, Pleve likely supported the hard line as a way to best Witte and not run afoul of a tsar seemingly taken with notions of imperial glory in East Asia.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid., 198; John W. Steinberg, *All the Tsar's Men: Russia's General Staff and the Fate of Empire, 1890-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 119, 320-321 fn16.

¹⁵ In his biography of the interior minister, Edward H. Judge calls him "a man of narrow scope and limited vision," who "suffered from bureaucratic myopia," *Plehve: Repression and Reform in Imperial Russia, 1902-1904*, (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1983), 33.

¹⁶ McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia*, 38-39.

¹⁷ Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 369.

¹⁸ Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 44. See also, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 781 fn22; A. N. Kuropatkin, "Dnevnik A. N. Kuropatkin," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 2, (1922): 5-112.

¹⁹ Judge argues that Pleve saw the rise and fall of imperial favorites like Bezobrazov as a natural, if irritating, feature in an autocracy. Pleve felt that ignoring or opposing favorites ran the serious risk of offending the tsar, who, as an autocrat, ruled at his own prerogative. *Plehve*, 163-164, 174; Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 209-210.

Debate between the two sides carried on for months.²⁰ Intelligence citing Russian troop deployments on the Liaodong peninsula and supply stockpiles at Port Arthur offered little reassurance to the Japanese government.²¹ In July 1903, Nicholas gave a strong signal of support for the hardliners by appointing Alekseev to the newly created position of Viceroy of the Far East. The decisive blow to the voices of restraint fell on August 15, however, when Nicholas removed Witte from authority by promoting him to the essentially powerless position of Chairman of the Committee of Ministers.²² The finance minister's influence with the young tsar had waned since 1902 for a number of reasons, but the defeat of his position on de-escalating the situation in the Far East showed his insecurity. Witte firmly believed he had lost the tsar's favor "principally because of [his] implacability concerning our Far Eastern policy."²³ He even claimed that on the night before his "promotion" he had decided that he "could not continue as Minister of Finance" since that would entail "accept[ing] responsibility for all the consequences... of a war with Japan."²⁴ Either way, his removal from the finance ministry left Lamzdorf and Kuropatkin without their strongest ally in advocating the softer line. Witte had assumed that his protégé Lamzdorf would share his fate or resign, but both he and Kuropatkin remained at their posts.²⁵

Witte saw himself as unique among his peers not only because of his broad influence over government policy but also his attention to his role as a public figure. As he explained,

²⁰ A summary of the back and forth can be found in *ibid.*, 191-194

²¹ R. M. Connaughton, *The War of the Rising Sun and the Tumbling Bear: A Military History of the Russo-Japanese War 1904-05* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 10.

²² Under Russia's autocratic system all ministries reported to the tsar individually, rendering the Chairmanship largely symbolic.

²³ Witte, *Memoirs*, 313, 315.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 314.

²⁵ Kuropatkin considered resigning but decided to stay on. Lamzdorf had already attempted to quit over the debacle in the Far East once before but Nicholas had refused his resignation. Schimmelpenninck, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 194; Dennis and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise: A History of the Russo-Japanese War* (New York: Charterhouse, 1974), 152-153.

while other ministers might excuse the disastrous results of their policies by saying they had simply followed the tsar's orders, "public opinion would not accept such a justification from me, for Russia already knew my character, my decisiveness, my firmness too well to believe that I stayed on [as finance minister]... only because I was bowing to the inevitable."²⁶ Indeed, he had worked tirelessly to shape his reputation and promote his policies to the public through the empire's popular press, paying particular attention to *Novoe vremia*. Lamzdorf maintained this concern for public opinion and maintained a specific interest in the press at outbreak of the war. Even after Witte's dismissal he kept a close eye on *Novoe vremia* and sought to use its reputation as a mouthpiece for government policy to his advantage.²⁷ Promoting the soft line through the empire's Chief Bureau of Press Affairs proved difficult though, since Interior Minister Pleve held sway over the empire's censorship apparatus.²⁸ As would become clear, while Pleve took little particular care to craft his own image through the press, he was not above using it to thwart his adversary at the foreign ministry.²⁹

"In a Hundred Ways We Repeat that Russia Does Not Want War"

Throughout 1903 *Novoe vremia* and Suvorin excused Russia's hesitance to fulfill the evacuation agreement by highlighting what they saw as the intransigence and saber-rattling of Japan and Europe. To do this, the newspaper relied on its collection of stock characters to explain the situation to its readers.

²⁶ Witte, *Memoirs*, 314.

²⁷ Anton Fedyashin, "Sergei Witte and the Press," 519-520.

²⁸ Though the Chief Bureau of Press Affairs had its own head, it was contained within the Ministry of the Interior, and therefore, ultimately deferred to the minister's authority regarding Minister Lamzdorf's frequent requests for action against perceived slights in *Novoe vremia*'s pages during this period.

²⁹ Judge, *Plehve*, 37.



Figure 18. "A triple alliance"



Figure 19. "Be bold! You won't fall, I'm watching you. (John Bull and Japan)."

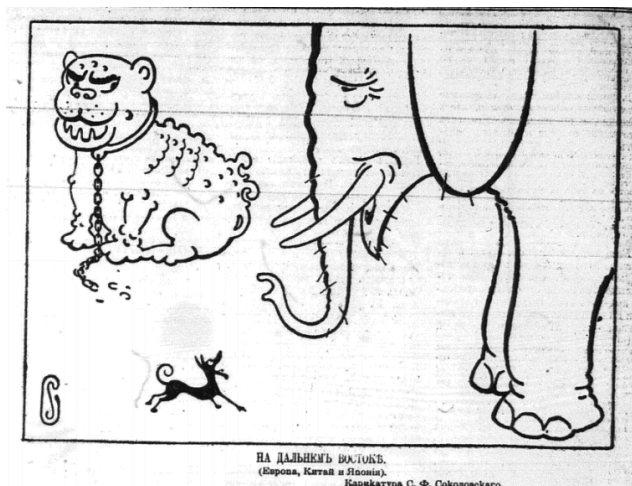


Figure 20. "In the Far East. (Europe, China, and Japan)"



Figure 21. "The English press.—There's nothing back there. (John Bull and Japan)."

While not uniformly hostile, depictions of Japan and the Japanese in *Novoe vremia* in the months before the war maintained the unflattering tone they had adopted during the Boxer Uprising. *Novoe vremia*'s readers saw duplicitous representations of the Japanese and their intentions in the Far East. A pair of articles in early July 1903 noted that though a young nation, Japan's military had performed outstandingly in the Sino-Japanese War. Regarding the Manchurian question, certain parts of Japanese society shared Russia's "peace loving" attitude.³⁰ At the same time, Japanese "chauvinists" had sought to expand their nation's influence in Asia by any means, even concluding an alliance with Great Britain in 1902 expressly for this purpose.³¹ A caricature by Sokolovskii depicts this two-facedness (Figure 18). In this image, a Japanese figure is literally split in two. On the left side in he wears European military garb and hooks elbows with John Bull, who shakes his fist at a distant Chinese soldier. On the right he wears traditional costume while joining arms with a Chinese man facing a European soldier. The Japanese figure smirks deviously, coyly acknowledging that he is playing both sides. In his "Little Letter" columns, Suvorin spoke to this perceived untrustworthiness more directly. "The yellow-skinned gentleman threatens [us] with his military," he explained, "and speaks with the language of a drunken sailor."³² Russia had "never faced such an impudent [*naglyi*] enemy as the Japanese," he asserted, noting that Japanese newspapers had enflamed their nation's chauvinism with false allegations of Russian intransigence in Manchuria.³³

The Russian mass-circulation press did not exactly share Nicholas' opinion of the Japanese as "short-tailed monkeys," and largely refrained from judging them fundamentally

³⁰ "Kashmar voiny s iaponom," *Novoe vremia*, July 3, 1903.

³¹ "Na dal'nem vostoke," *Novoe vremia*, July 4, 1903.

³² Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, December 23, 1903.

³³ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, January 23, 1904.

inferior.³⁴ While *Novoe vremia* may have noted Japanese martial prowess and abstained from using the word *makaki* [monkeys] in print, it nonetheless frequently presented the Japanese as diminutive in both physical stature and international esteem.³⁵ Two Sokolovskii cartoons illustrate this tendency. In Figure 19, Japan appears as a featherless newborn bird attempting to fly at the urging of an owl labeled “J.B.” for John Bull. Figure 20 takes the size metaphor further, representing Japan as a tiny dog next to an amused Chinese canine. It barks ferociously at an enormous elephant, representing Europe. Suvorin’s views often vacillated, even within the same article. A few lines after calling Japan the “most impudent enemy” Russia had ever faced, he stated “nowhere in the Russian press can be found an attitude of disdain toward the Japanese people [*narod*] or army.”³⁶ Similarly, Suvorin said that while he did not doubt the strength of the Japanese army and navy, the “Russian mind” could not “fathom the idea that Japan could defeat Russia, even in alliance with England and the United States.”³⁷ These themes of Japanese “smallness” and disbelief in the possibility of Russian defeat colored its depictions of Japan throughout the war.

To *Novoe vremia*, Japan’s alliance with Great Britain had enflamed its jingoism and pushed it toward conflict with Russia. References to Great Britain’s meddling in the East Asia abounded in the prewar period and played an important role in crafting the image of an adversarial European imperialism seeking to thwart Russian interests at every turn. Two Sokolovskii images from this period set the tone for his depictions of Britain during the conflict. In Figure 19, it perches as an owl above the newly hatched Japanese chick saying: “Be bold! You won’t fall, I’m watching you.” Japan appears not only small, but also totally unprepared for the

³⁴ McReynolds, *The News Under Russia’s Old Regime*, 193, fn193.

³⁵ For more on simian depictions of Japan and the Japanese in Russia during the war see Norris, *A War of Images*, 112-114.

³⁶ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 23, 1904.

³⁷ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, November 18, 1903.

task that lies ahead. The owl has two possible meanings: Britain has given birth to Japanese chauvinism, or, more ominously, it has urged Japan toward war so it can swoop in to prey on the smaller island nation when it inevitably fails. In Figure 21, he draws Japan as a literal façade for John Bull to stand behind and manipulate. A duck representing the British press reassures the viewer that “there’s nothing back there.” Either way, *Novoe vremia*’s visual representations of Japan identified it as a tiny and arrogant nation, the puppet of its stronger European allies.³⁸

Suvorin also took aim at Europe and Britain, but with a more somber tone that highlighted what he saw as the increased isolation of the honorable Russian empire in an immoral international environment. “We are now as alone as we were in [1812], at Sevastopol, in the Turkish war,” he mourned. Russia only sought to defend its legitimate interests in Manchuria, and yet Europe and the United States labeled them warmongers. Meanwhile, Japan had bought numerous military vessels from Europe and “only one Italian socialist call[ed] this inappropriate.” If the English could remain in their Chinese fortress of Weihaiwei and the Germans in Jiaozhou, then why should Russia alone cede its legitimate territories on the Chinese mainland?³⁹ Since the Sino-Japanese War, *Novoe vremia* had cultivated the moral stereotype of European nations as greedy and deceitful in their dealings with Russia and the countries of the Far East.⁴⁰ In Suvorin’s eyes this remained the case, as European condemnation of Russia and praise of Japan laid bare its hypocrisy.

Suvorin wrote that Russia was pure and justified in its actions in Manchuria. Reiterating his words during Germany’s seizure of Jiaozhou Bay, he argued that unlike distant European empires, such as Britain or Germany, Russia contained “a piece of Asia” in its contiguous

³⁸ Norris notes the image of Japan as a puppet as well in *A War of Images*, 118-119.

³⁹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, December 28, 1903.

⁴⁰ Covered in dissertation Chapter One.

borders and was bound to the continent in a way these other empires were not. Quoting the famous Russian historian Vasilii Osipovich Kliuchevskii, Suvorin explained,

Historically Russia, of course, is not Asia; but geographically it is not completely Europe. It is a transitional country, the mediator between two worlds. Culture inextricably linked it with Europe; but nature imposed a particularity and influence on it that always drew it towards Asia or drew Asia towards it.⁴¹

As such, Russia had become “the most advanced country in Asia,” and must retain a “leading role” there.⁴² For Suvorin, this did not figure in the avaricious calculations of Russia’s competitors. In a “Little Letter” column the day before Japan’s attack on Port Arthur he went so far as to wonder whether Europe and the United States had pushed Russia and Japan toward war in hopes of removing two regional rivals.⁴³

As noted, Suvorin had many misgivings about the Manchurian venture. His editorials interspersed staunch defense of Russian interests in Northeast Asia with ruminations on the necessity of the region to Russia’s domestic and international future. In February 1903, he implied that Witte had invested a fortune in the Far East while ignoring more immediate needs in central Russia.⁴⁴ In an editorial responding to Witte’s removal from office he mildly criticized his friend by saying, “Those who do nothing make no mistakes. He did much and naturally made mistakes.” His personal interests—an allusion to the Trans-Siberian Railway and ambitious industrialization programs—had “fascinated and carried him away.” Now Russia needed to rest and reflect.⁴⁵ Besides, the wounds to Russian pride incurred at the Congress of Berlin still held Suvorin’s attention, and these centered on the Near, rather than Far, East.

⁴¹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 12, 1904.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 25, 1904.

⁴⁴ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 22, 1903.

⁴⁵ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 29, 1903.

In November, Suvorin reminded readers that during Russia's involvement in the Boxer Rebellion he had questioned whether it needed to occupy Manchuria in the long term. Always conscious of shifts in governmental attitude, he now changed his tune.⁴⁶ In a "Little Letter," he explained that whether or not he supported the initial move, the fact remained that Russia had "tossed hundreds of millions" at the region in the form of economic development and military occupation. It thus had a vested interest in keeping Manchuria in its sphere of influence.⁴⁷ A few weeks later he spoke more bluntly, saying, "If [Russia] really needs Manchuria [...] then take it and be done with all this." Neither Russia, nor China, nor Japan knew to whom the territory belonged, he argued. If Manchuria became a Russian province "all would know what to do and what to defend." Though outright annexation would "injure" China, Russia's supposed ally, he posited that the Russian Empire's "dominance in Asia" rested on its hegemony in Manchuria.⁴⁸ Outwardly, Suvorin presented the situation as a forgone conclusion. Russia did not necessarily need to maintain the occupation after 1900, but it had, and therefore ought to make the best of the situation.

Privately, Suvorin had even deeper misgivings about his country's domestic issues and handling of the conflict with Japan. In a diary entry from October 1903 he reiterated his earlier thoughts and worried, "Russia is falling apart. Witte exhausted it with his audacious financial reforms and taxes."⁴⁹ Witte's direct role in the domestic issues Russia faced at the time is the subject of some debate,⁵⁰ but as historian Abraham Ascher has noted, Russian society was indeed

⁴⁶ Fedyashin, "Sergei Witte and the Press," 531.

⁴⁷ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, November 18, 1903.

⁴⁸ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, December 23, 1903. Schimmelpenninck argues that the Sino-Russian alliance effectively ended even earlier with the coerced lease of Port Arthur and Dalnii, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 155-156.

⁴⁹ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 455

⁵⁰ Largely positive appraisals of Witte's policies include Theodore H. Von Laue, *Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) and Francis W. Wcislo, *Tales of Imperial Russia: The Life and Times of Sergei Witte, 1849-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). The most

fragmented by late 1903.⁵¹ Beset by labor unrest, peasant land hunger, and calls for political reform, the tsarist state faced many internal issues that, together with the disastrous first year of war, led to revolution in early 1905.

The sovereign's vacillations regarding the Manchurian question also troubled Suvorin. Referencing an assassination attempt on Nicholas during a tour of Japan in 1891, he wrote, "A Japanese man struck him in the head with a saber when he was heir; now the Japanese beat him on the head and he doesn't know what he can or should do."⁵² With the appointment of Alekseev as viceroy of the Far East and removal of Witte, Nicholas seemed to have settled on an uncompromising stance toward Japan on the occupation. Like Witte, Suvorin hoped to avoid war with Japan. Despite their vilification of Russia's rivals, Suvorin and his newspaper never openly called for warfare before Japan's attack on Port Arthur in January 1904. *Novoe vremia*, rather, continued to present Russia as China's friend and the only trustworthy empire in Northeast Asia. In response to supposedly "sensational" headlines in the British press about the slow departure from Manchuria, the paper's leading articles insisted Russia "had no intention" to back out of the March 1902 agreement. Rather, the transfer of military control of a territory as large as Manchuria was simply a complicated matter. Those portraying Russia as dragging its feet were trying to push for a war that Russia did not want.⁵³ Besides, it argued, Russia had the "full confidence" of the international community, whose governments were "firmly convinced" that Russia would completely fulfill its commitments.⁵⁴ As an upstanding member of this community, Russia sought to diffuse tensions while pursuing its lawful interests.

extensive and even-handed treatment of Witte is B. V. Anan'ich and R. Sh. Ganelin, *Sergei Iul'evich Vitte i ego*, (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1999).

⁵¹ Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 11-42.

⁵² Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 454.

⁵³ "Rossiia i Manchzhuriiskii vopros" *Novoe vremia*, April 16, 1903.

⁵⁴ "Rossiia i derzhavy na Manchzhuriiskii vopros," *Novoe vremia*, April 20, 1903.

This stance did not necessarily mean *Novoe vremia* always found favor among the voices of caution in the government. Though friends, Suvorin did not always praise or even agree with Witte in print, especially after his fall from power.⁵⁵ In the heat of the argument over Manchuria, the paper's reputation among readers also heightened Foreign Minister Lamzdorf's attention. As noted, Lamzdorf sought to rein in and shape *Novoe vremia*'s rhetoric regarding the Far East from nearly the beginning of his tenure as foreign minister in late 1900. He had a history of distaste and concern for the newspaper's belligerent words toward other powers even while deputy minister. Yet, his intervention against the series of articles "Russia and Japan" in 1901 did not meaningfully change the newspaper's coverage of international affairs.

Lamzdorf twice contacted the Interior Ministry regarding *Novoe vremia*'s bellicose opinions on foreign politics during 1902. In September, he reported an "extremely aggressive" editorial in the paper that suggested Russia take a tougher, and even offensive, line toward its access to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.⁵⁶ Given ongoing negotiations with the Ottomans about this issue, the appearance of these opinions in *Novoe vremia* might make Istanbul suspicious of Russia's intentions. As before, he asked the interior minister to take action to prevent similarly "aggressive" language toward other countries from appearing in the press, and *Novoe vremia* in particular.⁵⁷ Pleve agreed and instructed the chief bureau to call the editors of major Petersburg and Moscow papers to its offices and deliver the message.⁵⁸ Lamzdorf made another commotion two months later regarding an article on Russia's role in the recently concluded Boer War.⁵⁹

Pleve heeded the foreign minister's request to again warn the paper about printing articles

⁵⁵ Anton Fed'yashin articulates a few more of their differences in "Sergei Witte and the Press."

⁵⁶ The editorial appeared in *Novoe vremia*, September 7, 1902.

⁵⁷ Lamzdorf to Pleve, September 7, 1902, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, lls. 366-367.

⁵⁸ Pleve to Lamzdorf, September 9, 1902, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 369. See also RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, lls. 368 and 370 for the chief bureau's message to *Novoe vremia* and Petersburg and Moscow newspapers.

⁵⁹ Lamzdorf to Pleve, November 9, 1902, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 273. The article was Pavel Tolstoy, "Rossiia i Anglo-Burskaia voina," *Novoe vremia*, November 9, 1902. On the end of the Boer War see Judd and Surridge, *The Boer War*, 269-297.

aggressive toward Russia's rivals, in this case Great Britain. Though offering the paper's editor,⁶⁰ Fedor Il'ich Bulgakov, a stern notice that punitive action would follow if this continued, he refrained from any official sanction. Such action was "undesirable" and counterproductive, he explained, because it would give the article undue attention.⁶¹ These interactions set a pattern for communication between the two ministers regarding *Novoe vremia*.

In the heightened tensions of 1903, Lamzdorf's office became more pointed in its attempts to manage Suvorin's paper's narrative of the brewing Russo-Japanese conflict. On June 28, the minister contacted Pleve in a huff about a recent article titled "Reforms and Foreign Policy."⁶² He took specific issue with how the article presented Russia's actions in Manchuria. The article described the empire's participation in quelling the Boxer Uprising as partly motivated by the desire to gain a "concession" in Manchuria like the Germans had in Jiaozhou Bay. Further, it presented Russia as acting in full accord with the European powers of the Eight Nation Alliance in quelling the uprising. In a letter attached to Lamzdorf's memorandum, the foreign minister's clerk noted that this not only depicted Russia in an unflattering light, it also distorted the facts. Contrary to the article's statements, Russia had never sought a concession from China. Though it joined the Eight Nation Alliance, it never ceased to conduct itself "in a completely independent manner."⁶³ Lamzdorf himself called the article's stance "extremely inappropriate." He thus asked Pleve to "take steps to [...] prevent the appearance" of "such tendentious and biased" statements from appearing in the St. Petersburg press.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Suvorin had stepped down as managing editor in early 1901, but retained the title of publisher and considerable influence at the newspaper.

⁶¹ Pleve to Lamzdorf, November 19, 1902, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 443, l. 275.

⁶² "Reformy i vneshniaia politika," *Novoe vremia*, June 27, 1903.

⁶³ Shchekin to Lamzdorf, June 28, 1903, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 52.

⁶⁴ Lamzdorf to Pleve, June 28, 1903, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 53.

Lamzdorf's objections skirted a line between honesty and artifice. The foreign ministry had a point about the misrepresentation of Russia's involvement in the Boxer Rebellion. As we have seen, the tsarist government, and *Novoe vremia* itself, had gone to great lengths to separate Russia and its forces from the other empires that had banded together to protect their economic interests in the Chinese mainland. Its affront at the newspaper's use of the word "concession" to describe Russia's involvement in Manchuria is more dubious. Despite governmental proclamations to the contrary, the tsar's possessions in Manchuria prior to the rebellion—the vast swaths of territory surrounding branches of the Trans-Siberian Railway that cut through Manchuria and included the cities of Harbin, Port Arthur, and Dal'nii—dwarfed British, French, and German holdings along the Chinese coast. Indeed, the Chinese Eastern and South Manchurian Railways, which connected these possessions with Vladivostok, constituted the first and second largest concessions of Chinese land to foreign powers by square mileage.⁶⁵ Furthermore, Russia exercised extraterritorial jurisdiction over the railways, the surrounding lands, and important junction cities, such as Harbin.⁶⁶ The fact that Russia's concessions in China were, thus, actually very similar to those of other European powers remained beside the point. Witte's policies sought economic, rather than territorial, ends precisely because the finance minister had hoped Russia would appear benign in the region.

Lamzdorf's entreaties did not particularly move the interior minister. Pleve had a number of motives for again denying Lamzdorf's requests. He had no particular knowledge of or interest in Manchuria or the Far East as such.⁶⁷ Despite *Novoe vremia*'s pro-government stance and seeming agreement with his belief in a gradualist and agrarian approach to the Russian economy,

⁶⁵ The Chinese Eastern cut a thousand miles across Manchuria to connect Chita and Vladivostok. The South Manchurian line ran 700 miles north to south. S. C. M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 187.

⁶⁶ For law in CER and SMR regions, which leaned more toward outright Russian governance than simple extraterritorial jurisdiction, see Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 117-120.

⁶⁷ Judge, *Plehve*, 159.

he had also threatened to take punitive action against it on his own initiative in the past.⁶⁸ As a proponent of a more muscular position in the Far East, however, he likely saw little need to circulate a memorandum splitting semantic hairs over the Manchurian occupation. His rivalry with Witte made such intervention to support the image of Russian *pénétration pacifique* in the region even less probable.

In his response, Plevé explained that *Novoe vremia* had agreed to print a correction regarding its misrepresentations of Russia's dealings with China during the Boxer war. As for Lamzdorf's request that he move to prevent these views from spreading amongst the capital's press, Plevé again balked at any definitive measures. This would require the bureaucratic hassle of issuing an official circular to the press on the issue, he explained. Calling this "hardly convenient or appropriate," he offered to personally warn the editors of Petersburg newspapers about printing these types of articles on an as-needed basis.⁶⁹ This half-hearted response likely did nothing to allay Lamzdorf's fears. Increasingly powerless in face of the hardliners, the Count's attempts to preclude a Russo-Japanese conflict ultimately came to naught.

With the imperial government backing away from the evacuation agreement *Novoe vremia* began to drop the language about international law and instead focused on Russia's supposed benevolence. Its troops had remained in Manchuria as a "guarantee of peace" that would secure the "prosperity of our distant territories and the adjacent countries," it argued.⁷⁰ As autumn stretched toward winter the newspaper still believed the two countries could reach an amicable agreement.⁷¹ "All Russia calmly watches the Russo-Japanese conflict," Suvorin wrote,

⁶⁸ Upon ascending to the interior ministership in 1902, Plevé had issued circulars outlining forbidden topics for the press. In his interactions with Suvorin and other monarchists, such as *Sankt-Peterburgskaia vedomosti's* A. A. Stolypin, he made it clear he would not hesitate to take action against ostensibly "loyal" publications, regardless of their reputations. *Ibid.*, 200.

⁶⁹ Plevé to Lamzdorf, July 3, 1903, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 55.

⁷⁰ "Rossiia i kitai," *Novoe vremia*, September 28, 1903.

⁷¹ "Sostoianie del," *Novoe vremia*, October 8, 1903.

but “does not believe in war or want it.” If Japan desired war, though, Russia would “put everything at stake” and fight in a way that honored its “glorious ancestors.”⁷² In an allusion to Trubetskoi’s worries of a “yellow peril” during the Boxer Uprising, he reassured readers that though the “ghosts of an invasion of the yellow races frighten us,” the spirit of the *bogatyr*’ [legendary hero] still lived in the Russian soul and would ride to battle if necessary.⁷³

Suvorin’s hyperbole reached a peak a week before the outbreak of war. “In a hundred ways we repeat that Russia does not want war,” he exclaimed. But “if war comes,” he continued, “[Russia] will need to fight with a revulsion to the war, with a revulsion to its enemy, but still fight, sparing neither its own life nor the life of its enemy. [...] A tragedy, such a tragedy...” Neither he, nor the government hardliners, nor even Nicholas expected Japan to resolve the issue with force. Nonetheless, Suvorin’s worries bled through into his articles. On January 25, he lamented, “It was a feat, connecting Europe to the Eastern Ocean and opening up new markets there. And for this feat, the feat of the youngest, but strongest, sisters of European Enlightenment, [Russia] is judged and condemned.” Despite *Novoe vremia*’s blustering about morality and the malevolence of Russia’s rivals, the newspaper painted the conflict as an unfortunate aberration and the prospect of war its tragic consequence. “Who knows what lies ahead?” Suvorin asked. He did not know, but concluded “it will be something great and terrible.”⁷⁴

Suvorin could not have known that by the time his audience read these words Japan had already launched its ships to attack Port Arthur. Regardless, on the eve of war he and his newspaper told their readers that Russia had acted entirely within its legal and, more importantly,

⁷² Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, November 18, 1903.

⁷³ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 12, 1904. Norris notes similar imagery in a popular print during the war titled “The Russian *Bogatyr*’ in the East: The *Bogatyr*’ and the Yellow Dwarves” in *A War of Images*, 121-122.

⁷⁴ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 25, 1904.

moral rights in continuing its “peaceful” occupation of its Chinese neighbor’s northeast provinces. Japan, whether because of its own chauvinism or the prodding of its nefarious British allies, had escalated a simple territorial dispute into a conflagration. European newspapers had heaped scorn on Russia’s actions while ignoring Japan’s own posturing. *Novoe vremia* portrayed Russia as backed into a corner.

Novoe vremia Mobilizes for War

In the early morning hours of January 27 Japanese ships under the command of Vice-Admiral Togo Heichahiro attacked the Russian squadron anchored at Port Arthur. Though Japan had formally severed diplomatic ties with Russia three days earlier over its refusal to evacuate Manchuria, the Russian government and the commanders at the fortress itself remained unconcerned. The strike caught them completely off guard. The initial raid lasted barely an hour but damaged the Russian battleships *Retvizan* and *Tsesarevich* and the cruiser *Pallada*.⁷⁵ Russian forces experienced only light casualties, but the surprise attack rattled the garrison and put the fleet on the defensive for most of 1904.

Just two days prior, *Novoe vremia* had assured its readers that Russia would not flinch in the face of Japan’s diplomatic “bluff.”⁷⁶ With war now underway, it quickly turned to rally public support for the new crusade in the East. Exclaiming that “Asians always behave treacherously,” it guaranteed that Japan would “pay dearly” for every single Russian soldier or sailor that “died on the field of honor” at Port Arthur. Though the war would prove “a crucible of suffering,” and Russia would be on the defensive until it could deliver its troops to the theater,

⁷⁵ Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 186-195; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 108.

⁷⁶ “Bluff,” *Novoe vremia*, January 25, 1904.

the nation would nonetheless emerge from the experience “cleansed and strong.”⁷⁷ Suvorin spoke similarly in the wake of the attack: “In my life I have never experienced such a day! Here it is, merciless, grim, bloody war. War with real Asians, with pagans who have their own morality, their own rules.” Maintaining his somewhat somber tone, he described reports of the attack as evoking “cold horror” among the public. Yet he had no doubt that the Russian sailors fought bravely and attempted to comfort his readers by arguing that their nation’s response would be “worth more than a thousand years of Russian history, during which there were not only days, but years [that were] much more terrible.”⁷⁸ With war a reality, Suvorin and his writers needed to change their focus from simple self-righteousness to uniting their audience behind the national cause.

Mockery of Japan remained a part of *Novoe vremia*’s repertoire but now shifted to highlighting the alleged grotesqueness of the alien enemy. In addition to allegations of “Asian treachery,” it sought to dehumanize them by doubling down on stereotypes used during the Sino-Japanese War and Boxer Uprising. For example, a series of Sokolovskii cartoons in the first half of 1904 continued to push the idea of Japan and its people as puny in strength and stature. In his illustrations, Japanese figures’ height ranged from dwarfish (Figure 22), to knee-high (Figures 24 and 25), to mouse-like (Figure 23). The images also gave them misshapen and, in the case of Figure 23, animal facial features that exaggerated the sense of otherness. In his writings, Suvorin referred to Russia’s adversaries as “yellow Lilliputians” and as “devils [*diavoly*]” with tails, horns, “lying tongues,” and “crooked eyes” that “glowed with green flame.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ “Segodnia,” *Novoe vremia*, January 29, 1904.

⁷⁸ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 28, 1904.

⁷⁹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, March 19, 1904; “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 12, 1904.

These kinds of characterizations put *Novoe vremia* on the extreme end of the empire's major newspapers in terms of vitriol towards the enemy. While fellow conservatives may have spoken likewise, a major part of the press largely refrained from insulting Russia's enemy. *Birzhevye vedomosti* [*The Stock Market Gazette*], for example, published a regular article with impressions of the front from returning wounded soldiers, many of whom expressed very positive impressions of the Japanese as soldiers and people. Moscow's *Russkoe slovo* [*The Russian Word*], the empire's highest-selling newspaper by the end of the war,⁸⁰ opposed it from the outset and its top writers spoke of Japan's venerable civilization in much the same way Suvorin had written about China in 1895 and 1900.⁸¹ It also ran a series of articles, but theirs featured interviews with and descriptions of Japanese soldiers, which left a good impression of them as well.⁸² Of the top-selling newspapers of the day, *Novoe vremia*, thus, emerged as one of the strongest voices actively supporting the war and denigrating Russia's foe.



Figure 22. “The English Press”

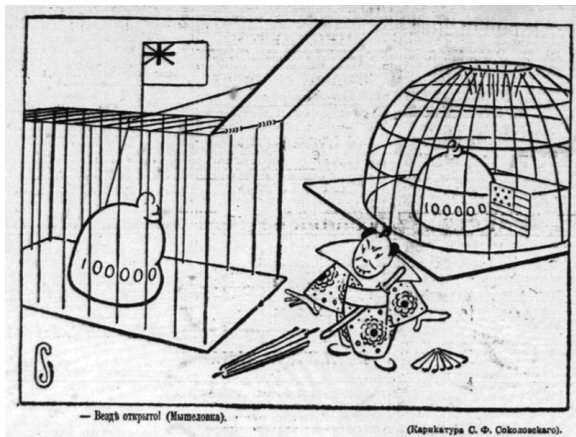


Figure 23. “They’re all open! (The Mousetrap)”

⁸⁰ By December 1904, it circulated 117,000 copies daily. Ruud, *Russian Entrepreneur*, 69.

⁸¹ McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 187-189, 190; Ruud, *Russian Entrepreneur*, 69.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 69-70.



Figure 24. “John Bull: Soon you can carry this yourself, I’m already tired.”

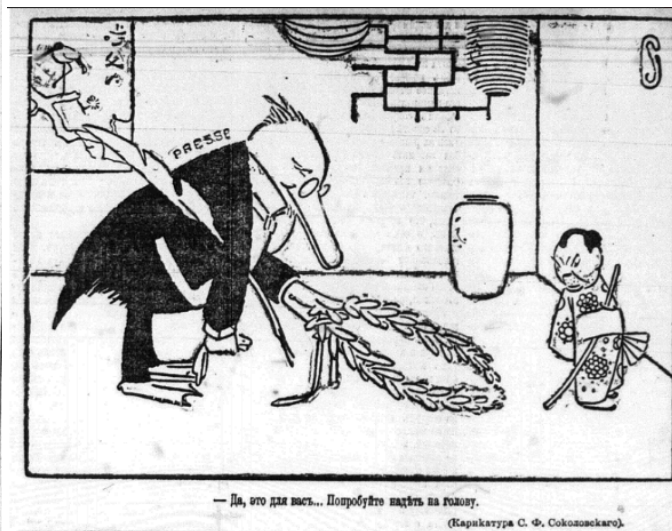


Figure 25. “Yes, this is for you... Try to put it on.”

After the strike on Port Arthur, Britain remained an important villainous persona in the paper, at times even descending to the level of the Japanese themselves. In the above cartoons, the character of Britain or the British press remains prominent, even if implied. As before the war, *Novoe vremia* consistently blamed British journalists for giving Japan an inflated sense of self-importance. In Figures 22 and 25, as in Figure 21, the British press takes the form of a duck in a well-tailored suit. In the first, it walks behind a proud, but dwarfish, Japanese figure holding its parasol. In the second, it presents a comically large crown of laurels to a doll-like samurai. In both instances, the British press appears overly smug in its praise of the Japanese and their exploits. Soon after hostilities began, *Novoe vremia* published an article titled “An Open Letter to the ‘Times’” accusing the London newspaper of anti-Russian “propaganda” for questioning

discrepancies in the Russian government's reports about the attack at Port Arthur.⁸³ "The English press [...] will stop at nothing to harm the Russian name," Suvorin stated in a "Little Letter" a few weeks later. He asserted, "Japan would not dare violate all sorts of international rules" if it was not "confident in the support of the public opinion of England."⁸⁴ Figure 24 accurately sums up *Novoe vremia*'s thoughts in this regard. Japan, a tiny, second-rate power, had marched to war only at the goading and praise of Russia's chief imperial rival in Asia—Great Britain.

Suvorin and his employees put even more effort into marshaling reader support for the war effort. In the critical counterpart to demonizing the motherland's enemies, they sought to bolster national pride and enthusiasm for the task ahead. "European public opinion," obviously excluding that of the British, "is overwhelmingly on our side," *Novoe vremia* exclaimed in reaction to Japan's attack before a formal declaration of war. "The Japanese have embarked on a mindless adventure, and Russia, to protect her vital interests, will show them the strength of the northern giant," it continued. Russia had drawn its sword and would not return it to its sheath until it was safe from a repetition of such "predatory attacks."⁸⁵

This type of romantic imagery figured prominently alongside references to historical feats meant to inspire and failures that Russia might now finally rectify. Suvorin's columns did not mince words about Russia's mission in the war and its historical importance. "Let the new Sevastopol await us," he thundered; "the comparison cries out involuntarily, let it lift our spirit and our efforts."⁸⁶ The defense of Port Arthur was a central aspect of the war, and the allusion to the similarly focal defense of a Russian fortress in Crimea offered the opportunity to amend the

⁸³ "Otkrytoe pis'mo k 'Times,'" *Novoe vremia*, February 5, 1904.

⁸⁴ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, February 23, 1904.

⁸⁵ "Chto dumaet evropa o konflikte?" *Novoe vremia*, January 30, 1904.

⁸⁶ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia* January 30, 1904.

past.⁸⁷ The Japanese mistakenly believed that they now faced “the same society and people the British met during the Sevastopol campaign.” Instead, it faced a different, stronger Russia, with a passionate sense of national identity, he put forward. Forged by the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, the Russian national sentiment now manifested its “sincere and deep patriotism not in words,” but in military feats.⁸⁸ As Suvorin rattled, the “agitation” and “outrage” of Russian people at the Japanese attack surpassed that of 1877, when “the Russian *bogatyr* [...] arose in all his mighty invincibility” to face the Turks on the Balkan Peninsula. Since then, the nation had continued to grow “mentally, morally, and financially.”⁸⁹

For Suvorin this was not merely a skirmish on the empire’s distant borders. He may have privately disagreed with Witte’s Far Eastern projects, but Russia now had a chance to demonstrate its national and martial prowess on an international stage that had long denigrated it as inferior and backward. The war with Japan presented a unique moment for Russia to fulfill its destiny by strengthening its role not just in East Asia, but the world. Before them stood a “great task that must complete [its] history,” he argued.⁹⁰ Russia had finally realized its potential in the decades since Sevastopol and the Turkish war, and sought to rectify its losses. “Enough humiliation,” he cried. “Russia demands to be treated as an equal” by the great European powers—“treated honestly and directly.”⁹¹ In another piece, he exclaimed: “a wave of Russian feeling, and intellect, [...] will rise to defend the global significance [*znachenie*] of Russia in Europe and Asia.”⁹² Suvorin’s diary shows that he took these sentiments very seriously. “This is my swan song,” he wrote in late February. He was as inspired with patriotic spirit now as he had

⁸⁷ *Novoe vremia* made the connection to Sevastopol throughout 1904, even before the proper siege of Port Arthur began in August.

⁸⁸ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 23, 1904.

⁸⁹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 30, 1904.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 23, 1904.

⁹² Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 3, 1904.

been 1877 and feared his “nerves [wouldn’t] hold out long enough” to complete his duty. For Suvorin, Manchuria was much more important as an idea than as a territory. The war there had arisen from the same international hostility that had twice besmirched Russian prestige in the nineteenth century. Victory in this region would redress these insults.

Speaking in less abstract terms, *Novoe vremia* also rallied public support for the cause by exalting the empire’s military leaders. Before the death of Admiral Stepan Osipovich Makarov at the end of March, War Minister Kuropatkin held perhaps the highest esteem in the papers’ pages. When the tsar appointed him commander of Russia’s army on February 8, *Novoe vremia* exploded with jubilation and praise. In the days following it printed a large photograph and a laudatory biography that painted him as a brilliant strategist and a dedicated leader.⁹³ A long article praising his military service in Central Asia soon appeared as well.⁹⁴ Suvorin claimed that his appointment spoke to the heart of every Russian, providing exactly the kind of “Russian talent” the empire needed. He called Kuropatkin “a Russian person in the full sense of the word,” who had risen owing to “his talents and hard work” and “proven his courage and brilliant mind in battle.” Acknowledging that Russia had no illusions about quick success in the huge mission that now lay before it, he nonetheless noted that the war minister’s name “stood alone” in both military and public opinion. Kuropatkin’s appointment, thus, provided a tremendous boon to the war effort.⁹⁵

Suvorin’s hyperbole aside, Kuropatkin did enjoy widespread support among both the military and the popular press in early 1904. A veteran of numerous battles in the empire’s colonial wars in Turkestan and architect of the invasion of Manchuria in 1900, he had written

⁹³ *Novoe vremia*, February 10, 1904; “Gen.-Adjutant A. N. Kuropatkin,” *Novoe vremia*, February 9, 1904.

⁹⁴ Turkestanets, “Iz proshlogo A. N. Kuropatkina,” *Novoe vremia*, February 25, 1904.

⁹⁵ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 9, 1904.

several articles and books on military subjects and war experiences.⁹⁶ Apparently aware of the extent of the fanfare in *Novoe vremia*, before departing for the front he wrote Suvorin a letter to offer his “heartfelt thanks” for the way he appeared in the newspaper.⁹⁷ As Witte would argue, the war minister owed his appointment to the paper’s efforts, rather than Nicholas’ favor, since he had disagreed with the tsar on the Far East question.⁹⁸ The fact that *Novoe vremia*’s intense praise of Kuropatkin began only after his appointment to command of the army, however, makes John W. Steinberg’s argument—that the tsar saw this more as an opportunity to remove him from the ministry—more plausible.⁹⁹ Regardless, Kuropatkin enjoyed *Novoe vremia*’s favor for the rest of 1904. As an acquaintance of the newspaper’s owner and editor, this would not be the last time the general reached out to Suvorin regarding his representation in it.¹⁰⁰

A third way *Novoe vremia* sought to mobilize its readers proved the most practical, but also the most extemporaneous. On February 2, the newspaper printed a brief “letter to the publisher” from a Prince L. M. Kochubey. The prince, seemingly of his own accord, inquired if the paper might collect public donations to help fund the inevitable costs the navy would incur in the war. To this end, he offered ten thousand rubles of his own money.¹⁰¹ The next day in a “Little Letter,” Suvorin informed his readers that donations had started coming in from across the empire, including another ten thousand rubles from a Bessarabian landowner named G. V. Kalmutskii. He acknowledged that voluntary donations would probably yield a relatively small sum, but maintained that the important thing was Russian society “coming to the aid of the government.” National feeling [*narodnoe chuvstvo*] drove these donations, Suvorin argued, and

⁹⁶ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 87, 89.

⁹⁷ RGALI, fond. 459, o. 1, d. 2178, l. 1.

⁹⁸ Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 266.

⁹⁹ Steinberg, *All the Tsar’s Men*, 274.

¹⁰⁰ See RGALI f. 459, o. 1, d. 2178, lls. 4-8, examined in further detail in Chapter Five.

¹⁰¹ “Pis’mo k izdateliu,” *Novoe vremia*, February 5, 1904.

he called upon his audience to send what they could.¹⁰² The article “A Billion from Kopecks” put forward an even more optimistic platform. If every one of the empire’s one hundred and forty million subjects donated a sum that they could afford, they could raise hundreds of millions. While peasants and workers might only manage a few kopecks, the wealthy, such as prince Kochubey, could more than pick up the slack, it argued.¹⁰³

The idea had parallels to the so-called “Volunteer Fleet” established during the Russo-Turkish War thirty years prior. In 1878, a similarly spontaneous public donation campaign had arisen in the two capitals and had funded the purchase and outfitting of a few merchants ships for service as privateers and auxiliaries to the Black Sea Fleet. By the end of 1878, the fleet had three steamers. It remained under the Naval Ministry’s authority after the war, where it received a yearly subsidy from the government and grew to two-dozen vessels by 1900.¹⁰⁴ Though this idea did not originate in its pages, *Novoe vremia* supported it vigorously. It ran front page articles and calls for donations throughout much of 1878 as a part of its larger campaign in support of the Turkish War.¹⁰⁵

By February 4, 1904, the paper again contained a daily section supporting a donation campaign. Titled “The strengthening of our fleet through donations,” it listed benefactors, their contributions, and the occasional brief letter explaining their donations. Three days later, Suvorin printed a far more hopeful article chastising members of the press, specifically *Grazhdanin* [The Citizen]’s Prince Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii, for depicting the donations as an overzealous waste of money. He countered that while donations would not “instantly build a fleet,” they

¹⁰² Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 3, 1904.

¹⁰³ E. Leskoi, “Milliard iz kopeek,” *Novoe vremia* February 5, 1904.

¹⁰⁴ A concise, but thorough, account of the Volunteer Fleet’s inception and history before the Russo-Japanese War is S., “Dobrovol’nyi flot,” *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar F. A. Brokgausa i A. Efrona* tom 10 (St. Petersburg: Brokhaus and Efron, 1890), 818-819. See also, David Woodward, *The Russians at Sea: A History of the Russian Navy* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 117. The name originated from its funding through voluntary donations.

¹⁰⁵ Ambler, *Russian Journalism and Politics*, 160-161. For more on *Novoe vremia* and Suvorin’s support for the Russo-Turkish War see *ibid*, 155-166.

would certainly speed the timeframe of the empire's naval armament. Besides, he countered, "sacrifices to the fatherland" in the form of monetary contributions gave every Russian the chance to be part of something bigger than themselves. In a postscript to the article Suvorin excitedly announced that on February 6 the tsar "had 'in his perpetual desire to meet the Patriotic and good initiative of the Russian society,' ordered the establishment of a committee to strengthen the navy and to allow the widespread collection of donations."¹⁰⁶ The tsar's brother-in-law, Grand Prince Alexander Mikhailovich, chaired the newly christened Special Committee for Strengthening the Fleet by Voluntary Donation, which also included wealthy Russian industrialists and high-ranking naval officers and administrators, such as Vice Admiral Lev Alekseevich Brusilov and Admiral Fedor Vasilievich Dubasov.¹⁰⁷ The committee raised a quarter of a million rubles in early 1904. Within a year sixteen million rubles filled its coffers. It ultimately ordered four submarines, eighteen destroyers, and a cruiser in 1905 before it suspended its meetings because of the revolutionary situation that fall.¹⁰⁸ *Novoe vremia* began to regularly report on the committee's activities in its "The strengthening of our fleet through donations" section.

Unpublished letters to the editor offer a chance to gauge the ways the newspaper's readers responded to *Novoe vremia*'s donation campaign. Some of the letters join the chorus of voices appearing in the newspaper's "The strengthening of our fleet by donations," section and applaud the notion of public funding for the navy. One letter from February 5 excitedly joined the cause, sending 25 rubles. "Unite this small sum to the tens of thousands already collected by

¹⁰⁶ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, February 7, 1904.

¹⁰⁷ J. N. Westwood, *Russian Naval Construction, 1905-45* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 10-11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.; Peter Gatrell, *Government, Industry, and the Rearmament of Russia 1900-1914: The Last Argument of Tsarism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 73-74; R. L-n., "Komitet po usilenie voennogo flot na dobrovolnye pozhertvovaniia," *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar: Dopolnitel'nyi Tom tom 2* (St. Petersburg: Izdatelstvo Brokgausa i Efrona, 1905), 934.

the [...] true Russian people,” the writer exclaimed. Mirroring *Novoe vremia*’s words, he continued: “Let their good idea spread and unite us all in friendly efforts to repel the enemy. Let the Russian people know that from a few kopeks and rubles come millions.” The letter concluded with slight anxiety about who would handle the funds and how to assure they went to the right place. This issue required “serious discussion.” Presaging the tsar’s announcement, the writer suggested forming a committee to handle fund “organization and distribution.”¹⁰⁹

Other readers had different ideas about the venture. One letter, signed “*patriotka* [a female patriot],” responded to the previously mentioned article “A billion from kopecks” with some trepidation. “Yes! I am sure that every poor man will give his kopeck to protect the motherland,” she wrote, “but... not everyone knows where and to whom this ‘kopeck’ goes.” In her opinion, the nation’s clergy were best suited for this task: “If sacred servants came to the aid of the holy cause they would all agree to say warm words to their flock and take collections for the construction of military ships to protect the holy motherland.”¹¹⁰ Another letter expressed even more concerns about the donations. “*Shkval* [Squall],” reacting to the announcement of the creation of the Special Committee for the Strengthening of the Fleet by Voluntary Donations, argued that as a “governing body of public opinion,” *Novoe vremia* ought to examine all sides of the issue and reassure the public that the committee knew what it was doing. “We are so poor, [and] we have so many unmet needs that money requires careful treatment,” he opined, noting the immense cost and man-hours required to build even a small cruiser. Though not wholly opposed to the idea, the writer worried about its realism: “It would be a shame if Japan and other foreign countries laughed at our stupid and impractical use of money.”¹¹¹

Throughout the war, readers contacted Suvorin with personal insights about naval

¹⁰⁹ “Kapitan” to Suvorin, undated 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 28.

¹¹⁰ “Patriotka” to Suvorin, February 5, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 29-30.

¹¹¹ “Shkval” to Suvorin, February 6, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 32.

warfare and the condition of the fleet. At the outset a few offered their opinions or expertise on the kinds of vessels in which Russia ought to invest.¹¹² One reader wrote to offer dismaying inside information regarding the construction of new ships for the conflict in the Baltic. The breakneck pace of manufacture led to poorly equipped, unstable vessels, she explained. Sending these ships to war would mean certain doom for their crews. Besides, the “Japanese are not so stupid as to wait for them,” she continued, citing rumors that Japan had chartered commercial ships to sneak into the Baltic and preemptively sink these vessels. She implored Suvorin to use his stature in the press to “make the true situation known,” and prevent the deaths of brave sailors from “negligence and poor ship construction.”¹¹³ Readers that contacted him regarding the condition of the Baltic fleet, thus, often had fears about not only its efficacy, but also its safety.

These differing opinions on one of *Novoe vremia*’s earliest, and most successful, attempts to mobilize the reading public provide a helpful corollary to the newspaper’s overall optimism. Though only a handful of the paper’s readers, their opinions help illustrate an important trend of distrust and worry about their government’s ability to wage war. This apprehension about bureaucracy would become more prevalent as the tide of war turned relentlessly against the tsarist regime. While these readers shared Suvorin’s view of the war as an opportunity to prove Russia’s mettle as a great power and empire, they worried it might prove an embarrassment.

Suvorin also had the ear of the empire’s most important newspaper reader. On February 22, he related in his diary that Pleve had chosen him to meet with the tsar as one of a handful of representatives from the empire’s press. As in his support for Bezobrazov in 1903, the interior minister again seemed to be playing to the tsar’s favorites:

¹¹² See for example RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, lls. 31-32, 55, 57, 64, 130-136, among others in this delo.

¹¹³ “Zhena moriaka (A)” to Suvorin, April 6, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, lls. 47, 48.

[Sergei Spiridonovich] Tatishchev came to me from Plevé. The sovereign agreed to receive a deputation of journalists on three conditions: 1) and 2) that they were not *zhids* [kikes], and 3) that Suvorin was included. “The tsar has fallen in love with you,” Tatishchev said. He reads you. You touched his heart. The empress also reads [you], and Plevé echoes the sovereign. There is talk about rewarding you. They want to give you the order of St. Vladimir.”¹¹⁴

Suvorin resolved to politely decline the order if the tsar ever offered it but felt overjoyed by the attention. “Until this day I never thought anyone liked [*Novoe vremia*],” he swooned.¹¹⁵ The audience occurred on February 25 and ultimately consisted of just Suvorin and one other journalist, A. A. Stolypin of *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*. After Suvorin presented a brief patriotic statement the tsar thanked the press for its support of the motherland during this trying time. Nicholas seemingly thought so highly of Suvorin that he chose him to receive this gesture of gratitude on behalf of the entire press.¹¹⁶ As his private writings show, Suvorin did not always have the most faith in this particular tsar as a person but nevertheless held the throne in utmost respect. He seems to have maintained the tsar’s favor well into the autumn of 1904. On October 7, Suvorin recounted a conversation where the writer A. A. Shirinskii-Shikhmatov mentioned meeting with the tsar, who, leaning his elbow on a copy of *Novoe vremia*, called Suvorin’s “Little Letters” “delightful.”¹¹⁷

High-level imperial officials’ regard for *Novoe vremia* was not unanimous, though. Opinions about the international situation and attempts to mobilize Russian society again brought the newspaper to the attention of Count Lamzdorf and the Foreign Ministry. The paper’s wartime relations with the foreign minister did not get off to a good start. On February 1, it ran the leading article “Empty words are a noble affair.” Following its standard line, it blamed British

¹¹⁴ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 460.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ After hearing their address, the tsar did not permit any meaningful dialogue. He merely expressed gratitude for their patriotism and desire that the press continues to “speak the truth.” Olga Makarova, “A. S. Suvorin v dnevnikakh S. I. Smirnovoi-Sazanovoi. Chast’ II,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 1 (2015): 172. See also, McReynolds, *The News Under Russia’s Old Regime*, 192.

¹¹⁷ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 474.

intrigue for the outbreak of the war. Referring to the raid on Port Arthur, the piece ended by saying that “our dear sailors paid for their trust in diplomacy’s sweet assurances that the peace would not be broken and that war would not happen.”¹¹⁸ Lamzdorf took this as an affront to his personal honor as the empire’s chief diplomat.

In an animated memorandum to Pleve, he protested against the newspaper’s “unfounded and insulting insinuations.” This article “blamed the heroic deaths of our sailors on the shortsightedness of ‘diplomacy’” and tainted the entire ministry. Moreover, he explained, he could not shoulder blame since he was simply executing the orders of the tsar, who did not want war. Finally, diplomatic authority regarding the Far East technically lay with Viceroy Alekseev. In the concluding paragraph he noted that this “slander [*kleveta*]” proved all the more worrisome because it came from *Novoe vremia*, a popular newspaper whose readers took everything it printed “on faith.” In demanding the paper print a formal retraction he hinted at his desire for additional penalties by saying this incident could not pass “without consequences.”¹¹⁹ For Lamzdorf, this seemed a cruel joke—he had consistently sought to prevent this war and now he was being publicly blamed for it.¹²⁰

In his answer, Pleve explained that upon conferring with the editorial office of *Novoe vremia*, he learned that the article had inadvertently omitted a word in the sentence in question. It should have read, “our dear sailors paid for their trust in *European* diplomacy’s sweet assurances...”¹²¹ The newspaper had already printed a correction and explanation for the mistake

¹¹⁸ “Pustye slova—doblestnye dela,” *Novoe vremia*, February 1, 1904.

¹¹⁹ Lamzdorf to Pleve, February 1, 1904, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l 118-119.

¹²⁰ For his exasperation at the outbreak of the war, see Loshakov, “*Graf Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf*,” 36-37.

¹²¹ My emphasis.

on the day of Pleve's response. Lamzdorf, either accepting this rationalization for the article or simply too busy at his post, did not reply.¹²²

It did not take long for Suvorin to arouse the count's ire again. In a "Little Letter" from March 19, Suvorin summed up many of the prevailing themes that colored his paper's reportage and commentary on the war so far. In his usual language, he wrote, "two hundred years of tough military schooling has tempered the Russian soldier and given him confidence in his invincibility," so that even in defeat he died "as [a] hero and a Christian." He questioned why Japan thought it could defeat such a foe, explaining, "England and America persuaded Japan that he was David and Russia was Goliath." Japan had slung a stone and struck the motherland with a "spectacular blow" at Port Arthur. The immediate shock caused anguish on the streets of St. Petersburg, but Russia had since regained its footing. He ended by—as always—returning to the Congress of Berlin. The "wound" the congress inflicted had not only not healed, but had reopened. The "root of this war" lay in the congress, he asserted, insinuating Britain and America's supposed intrigues represented just one more instance where the great powers sought to contain Russia and rob it of its legitimately won prestige. He further feared that Europe would again intercede to mitigate any territorial gains the empire might make upon victory over Japan.¹²³ In this editorial, Suvorin hinted at many of his private worries. He viewed the current war through the lens of 1878, seeing it as a conflict with not just Japan but Europe as well.

Lamzdorf had a number of issues with the article. First, Suvorin had highlighted the unexpectedness of the attack by noting he would "never forget the day" he saw Admiral Alekseev's dispatch about the attack in the government's official newspaper, *Pravitel'stvennyi*

¹²² Pleve to Lamzdorf, February 3, 1904, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 120.

¹²³ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, March 19, 1904.

vestnik, near a dispatch from Count Lamzdorf that seemed unaware that war had begun.¹²⁴ The foreign minister first exonerated himself by calling the appearance of his earlier announcement next to Alekseev's report of the attack an unfortunate coincidence. The tone this passage set caused him more discomfort, however: "It is impossible to ignore the constant desire of [this] newspaper to inflame passions and prepare society to be dismayed at the government's actions." References to the Congress of Berlin proved even more inappropriate. While he could not rule out a "repetition" of the congress, he still felt the press should avoid sharing Suvorin's predictions that "Russia will be 'forced' to abandon the fruits of its victories." He went on to propose a more proper rubric for the press regarding the war:

The press should, on the contrary, inspire confidence that Russia, occupying a quite impeccable political position and based on its undeniable rights, can smoothly conduct [the war] to its end [...] In order to avoid possible misunderstandings and unwelcome outside interference it seems necessary to send our press exactly [this message], in order to avoid such premature, tactless, and biased conjecture about a particular outcome of the war. The press should present the idea that Russia is clearly aware of what it wants and what it is able to do [...]¹²⁵

Pleve again responded to Lamzdorf's outrage with the bare minimum of administrative action. In a brief response, he informed him that the chief bureau's head had contacted *Novoe vremia*'s editorial office and relayed the foreign minister's message.¹²⁶ For one, the interior minister's attention gravitated elsewhere. Representatives from the empire's local governmental bodies (known as *zemstvos*) were attempting to form a national *zemstvo* organization to help coordinate popular aid to the war effort. Long a bugbear of the autocracy, any coordination between provincial *zemstvos* required strict supervision.¹²⁷ The interior ministry's primary concern for the press during the war was to keep details regarding troop movements and supply

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Lamzdorf to Pleve, March 20, 1904, RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, lls. 137-138.

¹²⁶ Pleve to Lamzdorf, March 22, 1904, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 139.

¹²⁷ Judge, *Plehve*, 210-211.

lines out of the headlines. It had already instructed the chief bureau to issue circulars requiring preliminary approval for bulletins on the war's events and forbidding discussion of specific troop concentrations or maneuvers or the cargo on the Trans-Siberian Railway.¹²⁸ Suvorin had not violated any of these circulars.¹²⁹ Furthermore, Suvorin's audience with the emperor in February demonstrated Nicholas' favor towards the paper. As in the case of Bezobrazov, Plevé strategically avoided denigrating the tsar's favorites. Finally, the incident also offered him the opportunity to snub a weakened rival.

* * *

After an initial burst of patriotism, public support began a long spiral downward as Russian forces proved unable to win a single significant battle in the campaigns of 1904. By the end of the year *Novoe vremia* stood virtually alone among the mainstream Russian press in its continued advocacy for the war.¹³⁰ As the regime's fiercest enthusiast in the media this is perhaps not surprising. Yet Suvorin had harbored a number of worries about the prospect of war, going so far as calling it a potential tragedy for all involved.¹³¹ *Novoe vremia*'s rhetoric in some ways drew certain anxieties out from both Suvorin and the upper and lower tiers of his readership. Unpublished letters show that some of his readers shared his deep concerns about the Russian government's ability to prosecute the war and its repercussions for Russia's position among the European powers. Some even questioned the benefit of donating a few rubles to the

¹²⁸ Tsirkuliar, Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pechati, RGIA, f. 776, o. 34, d. 17, lls. 435-437.

¹²⁹ A copy of the primary circular (RGIA, f. 776, o. 34, d. 17, l. 436) that laid out rules for what could and could be published, as well as procedures for receiving permission to print information on military activity appears in Suvorin's personal collection at RGALI, seemingly indicating that he was well aware of its dictates, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 695.

¹³⁰ McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 189.

¹³¹ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, January 23, 1904.

war effort if this government managed the funds. Suvorin had had his start as a decidedly liberal journalist during the Great Reforms of the 1860s, an era that saw a relaxation of censorship and subsequent explosion in the number of periodicals.¹³² As one biographer has noted, he maintained a certain liberal unease and skepticism about the imperial government even after his ideological shift to the right in the 1870s.¹³³ Pointed criticism of the top echelons of government still remained off limits for *Novoe vremia*, yet the uncertainties expressed in Suvorin's diary and in these letters began to creep into its pages as 1904 progressed.¹³⁴ At this early point in the war, however, overall enthusiasm and romantic imagery remained the order of the day.

Minister Lamzdorf's dealings with *Novoe vremia* further illustrate this mixture of pride and uncertainty. In 1903, the Count attempted to curtail the paper's nationalist bluster about Russia's ability to project its power into Northeast Asia. With war simply a prospect, he felt compelled to closely monitor *Novoe vremia*'s content to ensure it never advanced from exuberant nationalism to warmongering. As we have seen, Suvorin's paper never quite crossed this line. Ultimately, the ghosts of Berlin served as a constant reminder of the stakes for such a war and the potential of European intervention. The Japanese attack on Port Arthur in early 1904, therefore, necessitated a kind of volte-face for Lamzdorf. The minister zeroed in on Suvorin's fears of a new Congress of Berlin as a means of not only saving his own reputation, but also as an attempt to push these apprehensions about the outcome of the war from a press that he now needed to support the war effort. The Count's dictate that the press "inspire confidence" in Russia's diplomatic and military prowess spoke directly to these undercurrents of doubt. Though Pleve balked at taking any punitive or administrative action, he and his successors did

¹³² For more on Suvorin's early career see Ambler, *Russian Journalism and Politics*.

¹³³ Ibid., 175.

¹³⁴ See, for example Mikhail Osipovich Men'shikov's "Esli u nas flot?" *Novoe vremia*, July 25, 1904, examined in Chapter Four.

forward Lamzdorf's messages to *Novoe vremia*'s editorial offices. Thus, the two carried out a kind of discussion regarding these images that would continue until the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905.

Suvorin's newspaper spoke the language of national and ethnic stereotypes in its coverage and analyses of the events in East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century. In this way, it continued its narrative of the moral battle between upright and treacherous nations. By its depiction, Russia stood in stark contrast to both the perfidious and diminutive Japanese and their disingenuous British allies. Though *Novoe vremia*'s writers may have worried about the war's diplomatic repercussions, they saw no reason to doubt the strength of the "Russian spirit." Eruptions of popular enthusiasm for the war effort, such as the spontaneous emergence of the donation campaign and its enormous early successes, only stoked these sentiments.

In its capacity as a meeting point for voices of public and official opinion, *Novoe vremia* served as a sounding board for its readers on all levels of Russian society. When Japanese relations took a final sour turn in late 1903 it upped its rhetoric in accord with the prevailing opinions of the post-Witte imperial government. When readers pushed to contribute to the war effort it gave them a voice in its pages. It went back and forth with the empire's chief diplomat over how much anxiety or pomposity it could express regarding Russia's position as a global empire in competition with powerful rivals. In this way, it encapsulated many of the hopes and anxieties of a cross-section of Russian society at the beginning of what would become a truly disastrous war.

Chapter Four

The Empire Has No Clothes: *Novoe vremia* and the Military Failures of 1904

Suvorin barely slept the night of August 8. In the past ten days, Japanese forces had nullified the Russian navy in the Pacific and laid siege to Port Arthur. When sleep did come it offered only frightening visions. He saw Japanese soldiers “overrunning” Vladivostok. He heard Russian sailors at the recent Battle of the Yellow Sea cry out bitterly, “God is merciful: they killed [Rear Admiral] Vitgeft, but that idiot [Vice Admiral] Ukhtomskii is unharmed.”¹ Unfortunately, the morning brought little solace from these nightmares. *Novoe vremia* had offered almost unrelenting support to the war effort, but this enthusiasm did not appear to be making any difference. Russia had failed to achieve any significant gains in seven months of combat. Indeed, the only news from the front seemed to be of Russian failures. To make matters worse, the empire’s leaders appeared to be at a loss as well. Far Eastern Viceroy Alekseev and army commander Kuropatkin pursued contradictory military strategies, the construction of a second Pacific fleet continued haphazardly, and Nicholas kept dithering on important issues. Suvorin had not wanted war with Japan, but he could not have imagined it would go this poorly.

The events of 1904 brought Russia to the brink. In addition to the string of military failures—punctuated by the fall of Port Arthur on December 21—it saw the murder of one of its most powerful politicians and the growth of a revolutionary movement that would explode in the first weeks of 1905. Interior Minister Pleve’s assassination in July robbed the empire of one of its most capable administrators. Though widely hated for his staunch conservatism and heavy-handed approach to labor disturbances, he had been a skillful and decisive leader—something Nicholas had in short supply. The empire’s glaring shortcomings in every aspect of the

¹ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 469. Vitgeft died at the Battle of the Yellow Sea on July 29, 1904, and Prince Ukhtomskii’s decisions as acting commander in his stead trapped the fleet at Port Arthur.

confrontation with Japan undermined public confidence in not just the war, but also the government itself. By the morning of the Bloody Sunday Massacre on January 9, 1905, tens of thousands of workers were already on strike and the liberal press had begun open calls for governmental reform.²

In this atmosphere, *Novoe vremia* struggled to maintain a positive outlook. It had a bag of familiar tropes to rely on when reporting about the empire's enemies, but the unbroken chain of Japanese victories necessitated some changes in strategy. Praising the valor of Russian soldiers could only go on for so long if these heroes did not start winning. Similarly, demeaning the physical prowess of an enemy backfires if you cannot beat them in battle. Throughout 1904, the newspaper, therefore, began to emphasize the treachery and moral duplicity of Russia's foes. From this angle, Great Britain emerged as perhaps Russia's true adversary in the conflict. In September, *Novoe vremia* told its readers to "remember that Russia is not in one war, but two—one of combat in Manchuria, another of diplomacy in Europe."³ Britain represented all the forces in the West that wanted Russia to either lose the war on the battlefield or lose the peace at the negotiating table. By the end of 1904, it more or less explicitly questioned Britain's neutrality. These accusations again brought it to the attention of Foreign Minister Lamzdorf, who remained wary of the newspaper's rhetoric. Anglo-Russian relations experienced considerable strain during this period, and an incident in the North Sea in October almost brought the two empires to war.

The mixture of defeat abroad and intransigence at home frustrated Suvorin and *Novoe vremia*'s writers to the point that they began to make implicit reproaches against the government themselves. The paper began lobbying for the military to take specific actions and appoint

² McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 202.

³ "Dva voiny," *Novoe vremia*, September 16, 1904.

specific commanders. It called into question the condition of the Russian navy and offered suggestions for how to remedy it. Suvorin's interactions with the empire's leaders left him exasperated, and he began to have major doubts about the imperial government's abilities and intentions. Moreover, reader correspondence gave him a near constant flow of information and opinions from the public. These letters expressed a variety of concerns about the war and Russian life but had one unifying thread—the belief that Suvorin could, and in fact *should*, do something about the troubles the motherland faced. Whether expressing support or opprobrium, they saw Suvorin as their lifeline to the powers that be. By the end of the year, their voices urged him to act. Suvorin and *Novoe vremia* still viewed themselves as the government's champion, but what could they do if this government seemed to be failing?

This chapter continues the narrative of Chapter Three, and follows *Novoe vremia* through the lows of 1904. As the empire's leading conservative media outlet navigated the flood of bad news from the Far East, it again served as a focal point for discussion of Russia's place in the international system of global empires. It continued to use racist and moralist language to describe events to its readers. As this failed to accurately explain the realities in Manchuria its focus gradually shifted inward. The tsarist system broached no dissent, complicating any of *Novoe vremia*'s attempts at constructive criticism, no matter how loyal or well intentioned. As one of the tsar's favorite newspapers it possessed a certain degree of freedom from punitive action. Yet, the imperial government made it clear this remained a subordinate relationship regardless of national or international crises. In this situation, Suvorin and his newspaper began to experience distance from the government they usually so staunchly supported.

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After the surprise attack on Port Arthur the next major blow to Russian forces came at the end of March in a clash near the fortress. Following its initial raid, the Japanese navy set up blockades and minefields around Port Arthur and Vladivostok, the empire's two most important Pacific naval bases. With its fleet divided and confined to port, naval maneuvers in February and March consisted of brief skirmishes at the blockade line. On March 31, the fleet's newly appointed commander, Vice Admiral Stepan Osipovich Makarov, took part in one such sortie on the cruiser *Petropavlovsk*. After a brief encounter with Japanese ships, the *Petropavlovsk* struck a mine and sank, taking Makarov and almost his entire staff with it.⁴ The appointment of Makarov, widely viewed as the empire's most competent naval commander, had raised hope that Russia's fleet might break the blockade and regain the initiative. His death, though heroic, ended these chances. The Japanese navy would successfully rebuff the last major attempt of the remaining Port Arthur squadron to break free and link up with ships from Vladivostok at the Battle of the Yellow Sea in August. From this point onward the weakened Pacific squadron remained confined to its ports, awaiting ships from the other side of the empire.⁵

The tsar's armies fared little better. General Kuropatkin employed a cautious strategy of slow retreat until he could marshal enough troops to overwhelm the Japanese with brute force. The single track Trans-Siberian Railway meant that transport occurred only gradually. Despite Viceroy Alekseev's pressure to go on the offensive, Kuropatkin spent most of 1904 stalling. As Japanese troops advanced up Korea and into Southern Manchuria, his forces continually withdrew deeper north towards important strongholds and supply depots at Mukden and Harbin.

⁴ A full account of Makarov's death appears in Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 48-50.

⁵ A concise summary of the naval actions of the war appears in Ian Nish, "The Clash of Two Continental Empires: The Land War Reconsidered," in *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-05: Centennial Perspectives*, Rotem Kowner ed. (Kent: Global Oriental, 2007), 71-73.

The first setback came at the Battle of the Yalu River on April 17 and 18. Here, the Japanese outmaneuvered Lieutenant General Mikhail Ivanovich Zasulich's corps, forcing them to retreat. This opened a route for the Japanese army to leave Korea and begin marching on the Liaodong peninsula and, ultimately, Port Arthur. Though a relatively minor loss, the Battle of the Yalu proved the first in a long string of defeats that undermined already waning public confidence in the war effort.⁶

A Stiff Upper Lip

Makarov's death shocked the Russian press, which immediately beatified him as the war's first true hero.⁷ On April 1, *Novoe vremia* accompanied telegrams reporting his death with a long article relating the circumstances. Though he died early in the war, he had led the Russian navy in attempting to reassert itself after Japan's surprise attack in January, it explained.⁸ The next day its tribute continued with pictures of the *Petropavlovsk* and other ships damaged in the skirmish, as well as a large portrait of the fallen admiral. "Let the universal recognition of [Makarov's] merit, talent, [and] energy" remain "in the hearts of our seamen, giving faith and hope for better days for our fleet," it proclaimed somberly.⁹ Suvorin joined the chorus, commending the Admiral's brave death and heartening his readers that Russia could steadfastly meet any "bitter" news from the front. The war inevitably required sacrifices that tested even the strongest hearts, he reassured. How the motherland responded to these sacrifices would ultimately reveal "the full force of the Russian soul [and] the entirety of Russian energy."¹⁰ This

⁶ Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 52-55.

⁷ As Norris has noted, since Makarov's death occurred so early he remained untainted by the ignominious string of defeats that followed, thus allowing him to become "the Russian hero of the war," Norris, *A War of Images*, 120.

⁸ "Smert' Makarova," *Novoe vremia*, April 1, 1904.

⁹ "Dan' uvazheniia russkomu talantu," *Novoe vremia*, April 2, 1904.

¹⁰ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, April 2, 1904.

theme of resilience became especially important to Suvorin's vocabulary as Russia's military fortunes spiraled ever downward.

Novoe vremia tried to downplay the extent of Japanese victory and look instead toward future triumphs. The article "Victors and vanquished" suggested the Japanese army had overextended itself and their victory at the Yalu had become a strategic defeat. Neither side had experienced heavy casualties and Zasulich's only slightly damaged army eagerly sought retribution, it asserted. The enormous task of taking both the Liaodong peninsula and the fortress at Port Arthur now lay before Japanese troops. With this necessity in mind, which side had been "truly defeated?"¹¹ Next it began a rallying cry that would define the paper's attitude for the rest of 1904. "Russia must live as one, with only one thought—the Russian flag must not fall from Port Arthur," said the following day's leading article. The soldiers at Port Arthur could rest assured that "Russia would fulfill [this] duty."¹²

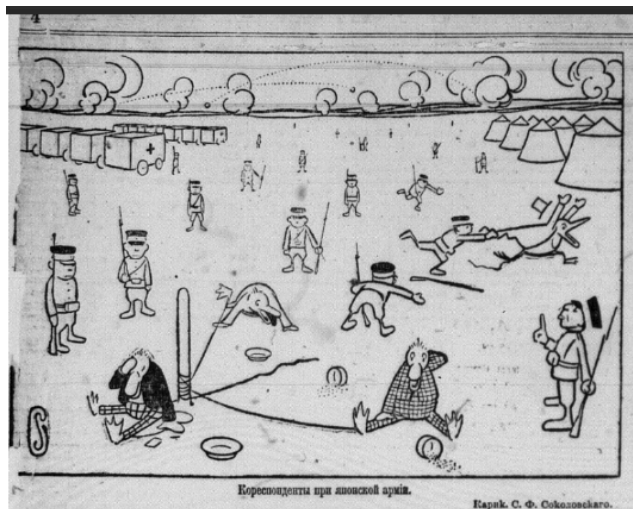


Figure 26. "Correspondents with the Japanese Army"

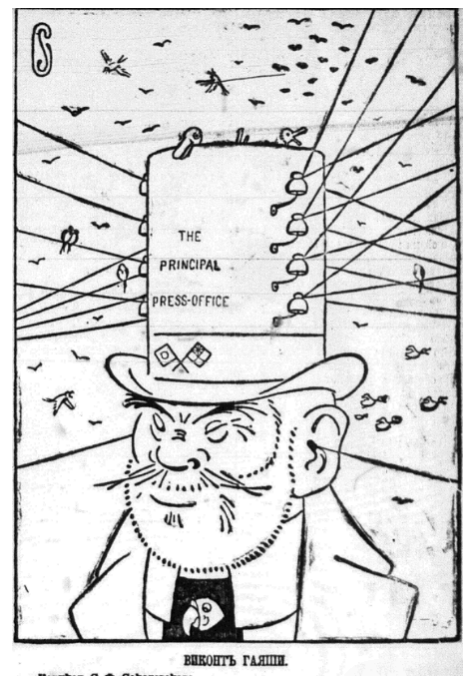


Figure 27. "Viscount Hayashi"

¹¹ "Pobediteli i pobezhdennye," *Novoe vremia*, April 23, 1904.

¹² "Port-Artur," *Novoe vremia*, April 24, 1904.

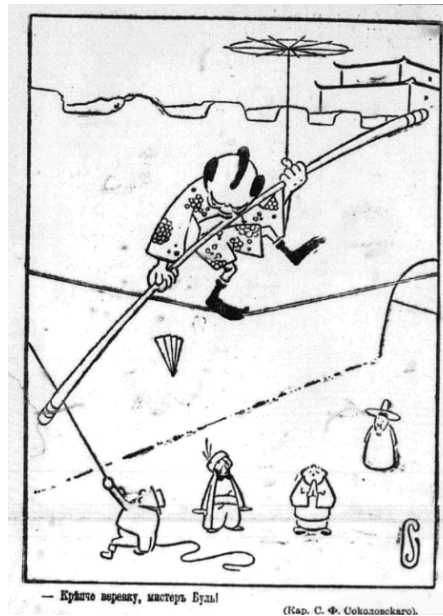


Figure 28. “Pull the rope tighter, Mr. Bull!”

Novoe vremia used a mixture of old and new tactics to continue its unwavering support for the war and explain away defeats. Suvorin continued his rhetoric about noble sacrifice and the difficulty of the task before the motherland. He added that Zasulich’s men had faced numerically superior forces, yet fought with a courage that “swells the chest of the Fatherland.”¹³ Meanwhile, Sokolovskii added a few new elements to his ridicule of the empire’s adversaries. While he persisted in presenting Japan and the Japanese as physically small, he also heightened his focus on their perceived treachery and dependence on their British allies. As in previous images, Sokolovskii drew the British press as Japan’s greatest enthusiast. Figures 26 and 27 take this further by transferring some of the responsibility to Japan’s own agents. In Figure 26, foreign correspondents embedded with the Japanese army languish as prisoners, their positive depictions of Japanese military power clearly written under duress. Figure 27 moves to Britain, insinuating that Japan’s envoy, Viscount Hayashi Tadasu, played a major role in his nation’s

¹³ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, April 21, 1904.

positive coverage in London. Sokolovskii showed Japan's military successes at the Yalu and other smaller battles as equally misleading. In Figure 28, a small Japanese figure walks a tightrope anchored by John Bull. As the figure wobbles, he calls out for Bull to pull the rope tighter to steady his gait. In this way, Japan's victories appear as a delicate balancing act, entirely dependent on British support. In the aftermath of the army's first loss to a people it had so recently ridiculed, *Novoe vremia* shifted the blame to extenuating circumstances.

Early defeats clearly shook some of these readers' faith, though private letters to Suvorin from this period continue to show a modicum of belief in Russian resilience. Many letters from this collection express "anxiousness and exhaustion" over the misfortunes that had befallen Russia or "inexpressible grief" about the loss of Makarov and sailors "so close and dear to all of our hearts."¹⁴ While some parroted Suvorin's words about the spiritual "test" that these tragedies laid before the motherland, others seem less optimistic.¹⁵ Much like the letters sent at the outbreak of the war, reader correspondence from spring 1904 shows particular worry about the condition of the military and Russian society in wartime. In addition to concerns about the poor state of military equipment and infrastructure, these letters began to traffic in conspiracy theories to explain these problems. A few joined *Novoe vremia* in haranguing the "duplicitous neutrality of 'friendly powers,'" while others more often viewed the empire's own ethnic minorities, such as Jews and Poles, as Japan's primary partners in undermining the Russian effort.¹⁶

Russia's early defeats and the death of Makarov led many letter writers to employ Suvorin's and *Novoe vremia*'s characterizations of Japan and its people. They continued to call

¹⁴ "Zhena moriaka (A)" to Suvorin, April 6, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 47; Anonymous to Suvorin, undated 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 62.

¹⁵ K to Suvorin, April 4, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 36.

¹⁶ "Blagodarnyi poklonik" to Suvorin, undated 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 74.

the Japanese “treacherous,”¹⁷ and repeated the newspapers’ assertions that the sneak attack on Port Arthur in January had shown the true nature of Asian “civilization.”¹⁸ The writer “A Southerner” called Japan’s victories “fool’s luck” and explained the surprise attack on Port Arthur as evidence that they lacked the courage to face Russia directly and honorably. In ironic foreshadowing of the events of 1905, this reader also claimed that the Japanese were “counting on a revolution in Russia” to distract the empire’s attention from the war.¹⁹ Another reader, fearing sabotage, mentioned rumors of Japanese spies on ships near the Russian Baltic naval base at Kronshtadt. She asked Suvorin to use his role on the committee that collected for and managed the fleet donation campaign to have it invest in counterespionage and reconnaissance equipment, such as hot air balloons, for each cruiser.²⁰ Another suggested Suvorin call for the creation of an “auxiliary partisan army” to defend the home front.²¹ One letter even associated the war with the highest designs, explaining the present “struggle between the yellow and white race[s]” as preordained by the Book of Revelation.²²

Others letter writers took a more practical approach. “A Russian” repeated a fear *Novoe vremia*’s had expressed during the Sino-Japanese War by worrying that if Japan gained a permanent foothold in Korea, passage through the Korean Strait would become an issue for Russia on a par with the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. The reader further fretted that such a position on the Asian continent might cause Japanese penetration into Russian areas, where they would join the ranks of suspicious non-Russian ethnicities, such as the “*zhidy* [kikes], Armenians, and [...] Germans.”²³

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ L. K. to Suvorin, April 12, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2 d. 673, l. 58.

¹⁹ “Iuzhanin” to Suvorin, April 7, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2 d. 673, l. 50.

²⁰ “Zhenia moriaka (B)” to Suvorin, undated 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2 d. 673, l. 72.

²¹ “Blagodarnyi poklonik” to Suvorin, undated 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2 d. 673, l. 74.

²² “‘Slovo’ iz Kusta Ternovogo” to Suvorin, April 2, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, lls. 34-35.

²³ “Russkii” to Suvorin, April 26, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 61.

These internal enemies figure prominently in a number of letters. “A Southerner,” for example, ranted at length about the Jews’ negative effects on domestic morale. Writing from Nikolaev (now the south Ukrainian city of Mykolaiv), he recounted hearing local Jews “openly gloating and wisecracking” to each other about the Russian navy’s losses “in kike-ish [*po-zhidovski*].” Suvorin seems to have taken the southerner’s words to heart, as the letter bears the publisher’s characteristically sloppy pencil marks underlining this anecdote and the author’s exhortation for the Russian press to “make Russia great in the full sense of the word.”²⁴ Neither seems to have considered whether these Jews could have been speaking to each other in Yiddish about a wholly different topic.²⁵ “A Russian” similarly blamed “Ishmaelites” for spreading the rumor that Russian officials were “plundering” the *narod*’s donations to the Red Cross.²⁶ Even insufficiently patriotic ethnic Russians could earn reader disdain. “M. Vesets,” writing from Nizhnii Novgorod, expressed disgust at a local newspaper for its attitude toward the recent clashes. The paper had not shown proper reverence to the Russian dead, he explained, and had even praised Japan’s Admiral Togo for his martial prowess. While all Russia languished in “unspeakable sorrow” and “universal grief” these “degenerates” denigrated their own motherland by not fully supporting the war, he raged.²⁷ Such domestic issues, thus, seem to have weighed rather heavily on readers’ minds as the military faltered in the Far East.

Russian government and bureaucracy were as a source of worry, as well. A common topic from this period of Suvorin’s reader correspondence remained the technical and logistical hurdles of building and supplying ships and materiel to the Pacific theater. Though some feared

²⁴ “Iuzhanin” to Suvorin, April 7, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2 d. 673, l. 51.

²⁵ For Jews and anti-Semitism in Russia during the imperial period, see Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). For anti-Semitism in *Novoe vremia* in the years surrounding the Revolution of 1905, see Balmuth, “Novoe Vremia’s War Against the Jews,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 35, no. 1 (June 2005): 33-54.

²⁶ “Russia to Suvorin, April 26, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 61.

²⁷ M. Vesets to Suvorin, April 2, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2 d. 673, lls. 39-40.

Japanese sabotage, concerns more often centered on the shortcomings of Russian equipment and infrastructure. One writer, for example, contacted Suvorin hoping that the publisher might use his “large circle of friends” in the government and stature as “the head of the press” to support the war effort. In addition to urging a cautious naval strategy for the Pacific fleet, the writer hoped Suvorin might bring light to an overall lack of materiel, staff, and engineers within the naval infrastructure. Systemic inefficiencies in the Naval Ministry’s Department of Shipbuilding and Logistics had left Russian naval construction “severely hobbled [*sil’no khromaet*],” the reader explained. The department’s shortfalls lay in its ill-timed orders for new ships and reliance on poorly supplied government factories.²⁸

Others took a less delicate view of structural issues within Russian society and the imperial government. The “upper classes” remained entirely self-interested, one letter exclaimed. Nobles and bureaucrats had used neither their “means nor their strengths” for the benefit of the motherland and their status shielded them from criticism.²⁹ Another letter used a line from one of Suvorin’s articles to further illustrate this divide. The “Little Letter” from April 21 had told readers to have faith in the Russian spirit to withstand even the deepest tragedies, exhorting them to “Remember, we are Russians.”³⁰ The author angrily asked, “WHO IS THIS WE?!” Was it the nobles who sat on pointless committees in the capital, skimping on quality gunpowder for naval armaments and lacking the desire “to do anything useful”? Or perhaps they were the ministers and military commanders with German and Finnish surnames who seemed equally disconnected.³¹ The letter went on to highlight various other government malfeasances and

²⁸ Anonymous to Suvorin, undated 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 65.

²⁹ K to Suvorin, April 4, 1904, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 37.

³⁰ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” April 21, 1904.

³¹ The Russian Empire’s expansion into the Baltic regions in the eighteenth century resulted in its absorption of the German nobility that had governed local populations there since the Northern Crusades of the Teutonic Knights in the Middle Ages. Many of these noble families adopted Orthodoxy and the Russian language, but retained their German surnames. Several Russified Baltic Germans reached high positions in the Russian government and military

inefficiencies.³² For these readers, the imperial government seemed the greatest hindrance to their motherland's martial prowess.

In the wake of the war's first clashes, many *Novoe vremia* readers turned to the newspaper's chief as perhaps their closest link to the powers that be. In this way, these readers saw letters to *Novoe vremia* as a chance to make their patriotic sentiments heard. They clearly viewed Suvorin as a powerful figure and thus a way to effect change in an autocratic system that denied them meaningful input. As the rest of 1904 shows, he took this to heart. He attempted to fulfill this duty in both his writings and actions on the Special Committee for Strengthening the Fleet by Voluntary Donation, albeit with varying degrees of success. Still, *Novoe vremia*'s role in publicizing the fleet donation campaign and Suvorin's position as a member of the Special Committee the tsar appointed to oversee the campaign's efforts made the newspaper a logical place for readers to vent such frustrations.

A Summer of Discontent

Novoe vremia maintained a brave front as Japanese forces slowly encircled Port Arthur, inflicting a series of small defeats against Kuropatkin's forces in May and June. In a "Little Letter," Suvorin explained that Russia fought to ensure that no power could harass them in the Far East. They had entered the region peacefully, and unlike the Japanese, had gained territories there without war against China. This was, therefore, ultimately a war to preserve the peace, he

during the late imperial period. Witte and Lamzdorf are primary examples, as well as a few generals during the Russo-Japanese and First World Wars. For more on Baltic Germans in late imperial Russia, see Willard Sunderland, *The Baron's Cloak: A History of Russia in War and Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 25-43.

³² Anonymous to Suvorin, April 28, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 3, d 677, lls. 46-47.

contended. In contrast to this noble prospect, he implied, Japan fought the war for the sake of expansion.³³

In a leading article from June, the newspaper depicted Japan as both malicious in its actions and rhetoric against Russia and double-dealing in its relations with Europe and Asia. In a sentiment harkening back to Sokolovskii's cartoon "A triple alliance,"³⁴ it noted that Japan told European empires in the West that it posed no threat to their interests, while simultaneously proclaiming the idea of "Asia for Asians" to the East. Indeed, Japanese envoys in Europe said they represented a "completely trustworthy ally," while asserting, "There is no 'yellow peril,' only a 'white' one, originating from Russia."³⁵ For this reason, Russia entered the war without expecting any help from Europe. This "yellow people" had "incorporated European culture not for peace, but for war," it put forward, repeating its standard depiction of Japan's incomplete westernization.³⁶ Suvorin spoke similarly, writing, "the Japanese are brave no doubt," but they could never truly defeat the "white tribes." He bristled, "all these Kuroki, Oku,³⁷ and whatever they're called, will never be able to take over Asia and strike fear in Europe." War with these "yellow-skinned barbarians" would not spell the end of Russia. "The mighty Russian branch of the Slavic tribe will remain strong and resilient no matter what," he wrote.³⁸ In the aftermath of the Battle of the Yalu, *Novoe vremia* increasingly stood apart from the rest of press in its continued use of this kind of rhetoric.³⁹

³³ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, June 26, 1904.

³⁴ Figure 18.

³⁵ For more on European Russophobia during this period see Troy R. E. Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril: Education, the Public Sphere, and National Identity in Imperial Germany, 1890-1914* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010) and J. H. Gleeson, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain: A Study of the Interaction of Policy and Public Opinion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950).

³⁶ "Belye i zheltые," *Novoe vremia*, June 8, 1904.

³⁷ He refers here to Japanese Generals Kuroki Tamemoto and Oku Yasukata.

³⁸ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, July 2, 1904.

³⁹ McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 189-191.

With the Pacific squadron weakened and pinned down, Suvorin began lobbying for the tsar to send the empire's Baltic fleet to the Far East so that it might swing the maritime situation back in Russia's favor. Nicholas had put forward this intention in early April, when he named Rear Admiral Zinovii Petrovich Rozhdestvenskii commander of the "Second Pacific Squadron" following Makarov's death.⁴⁰ Still, Suvorin grew impatient. In a feuilleton on June 21, he recalled reading a collection of letters from soldiers at Port Arthur. These letters gave him the impression of the "utmost sincerity" with which these brave Russians "longed for the Baltic squadron" to arrive in the Yellow Sea and relieve them. This notion of soldiers "longing" for the squadron apparently deeply touched him. "When will the Baltic squadron arrive? Will it depart? Is it preparing to depart?" he asked. Despite its siege during the Crimean War, Sevastopol had remained attached to the Russian mainland. Conversely, he explained, Port Arthur now stood as a virtual island, completely surrounded by hostile forces.⁴¹ Victory on land required naval support, so the arrival of the Baltic squadron could play an enormous role in Russia's "future fate." In this vein, he even dreamed of the ships delivering a ground force of "more than a hundred thousand" to tip the scale back in the empire's favor. He vaguely claimed to hear this sentiment "expressed continually" and hoped that public fervor for the project among might propel it toward victory.⁴² This call continued in *Novoe vremia*'s pages with greater enthusiasm as the Japanese army approached Port Arthur.

Privately, Suvorin was considerably less optimistic. As a member of the Special Committee to Strengthen the Fleet by Voluntary Donations, he had a direct line to some of the

⁴⁰ Pertti Luntinen and Bruce W. Manning, "The Russian Navy at War, 1904-1905," in *Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, ed. John W. Steinberg et al. (Boston: Brill, 2005), 237.

⁴¹ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, June 21, 1904.

⁴² Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, June 26, 1904.

empire's most powerful leaders. His experience on the committee seems to have severely damaged his faith in the government.

In a diary entry from June 15, he related a particularly disheartening exchange. The meeting, Suvorin's first, included Grand Prince Alexander Mikhailovich, Admiral Dubasov, and Admiral Rozhdestvenskii. The chief matter concerned the delivery of destroyers and whether to construct these vessels in St. Petersburg or Vladivostok. During the discussion, Rozhdestvenskii made a comment about the Nevskii shipyard's poor condition and equipment that piqued Suvorin's attention. He had received numerous reader letters expressing exactly this concern. By using this moment to speak about the problems with Russia's military infrastructure, however, he fell into an argument with Dubasov. Suvorin recalled the conversation:

Admiral Dubasov protested, saying that he had been informed that the Nevskii shipyard worked very well, and if the parts for destroyers ended up not fitting it was only because they were poorly packed and damaged during delivery. Rozhdestvenskii remained quiet. I asked [the Grand Prince] why we had no good equipment when it exists in Germany, etc. but also in Japan; could the committee take up this matter and help in any way to determine the condition of this equipment[?] Admiral Birilev answered that we had good equipment, but no casings for it because we lagged behind Germany by 200 years. I said that it was necessary to catch up to [Germany] and then elaborated in general about our backwardness. Whereupon Admiral Dubasov began: "Mr. Suvorin not for the first time says that this or that thing of ours is bad, that our sailors, our equipment, etc. are bad. This insults our sense of patriotism" [...] I replied that neither a barometer nor thermometer measures patriotism, that everyone has their own, that it was inappropriate to raise the question of patriotism in the Committee and stood, saying "I ask of your highness permission to leave," and I left.⁴³

Returning home, he wrote the Grand Prince a letter apologizing for the outburst but defending his position. He noted that patriotism did not preclude Russians from "being conscious of Russian weaknesses," and mentioned he had received many letters from readers that shared his opinions. His country's flaws profoundly pained him, and he had drawn attention to them from a place of deepest devotion to the empire. Dubasov had insulted his "best feelings and intentions"

⁴³ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 460-461.

and he had only replied in the same tone.⁴⁴ To Suvorin, the leaders of his motherland had done him the huge honor of asking for his views on the war effort. Birilev's statement about Russia lagging behind Germany by two hundred years was certainly an exaggeration, but Suvorin had latched onto it to urge those in power to rectify these failings. Informed by his own observations and those of his readers, he had offered constructive criticism about the situation. When confronted with his words, however, committee members like Dubasov responded by questioning his patriotism and making excuses.

Suvorin's overall opinion of the empire's leaders reached a new low during this period as well. Viceroy Alekseev had fled Port Arthur to Mukden soon after Admiral Togo's raid. From this safe position, however, he now pushed Kuropatkin to act. In June, he urged the general to relieve the increasingly isolated fortress. Kuropatkin, incorrectly believing Port Arthur's defenses and supplies could handle a long siege, responded by sending as few troops as possible toward the base in hopes of simultaneously maintaining his cautious strategy and satisfying the Viceroy's demands. This led to a number of small defeats for Russian forces.⁴⁵ Suvorin maintained faith in his friend Kuropatkin and instead blamed Alekseev's overly aggressive orders for the dismal military situation. "Alekseev is Russia's evil demon [*zloi demon*]," he grumbled in a diary entry from July 16. Furthermore, the capricious and weak-willed tsar continued to enable him. Nicholas kept him as commander-in-chief of Russian forces in the Far East simply because he did not want to offend the Viceroy, Suvorin argued. The sovereign, he contended, seemed to care more about his personal relationship with a single commander than his country.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 461.

⁴⁵ J. N. Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 59-60.

⁴⁶ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 463.

Suvorin had equally poor things to say about his friend Witte, despite the latter's current lack of meaningful influence over policy. During a visit, he recounted the chairman of the committee of ministers' shared dismay at their troops' performance. Russia only showed its true strength when an enemy "invaded its heart," Witte offered, "not the outskirts, but the heart." Suvorin agreed, but spitefully wrote that while a smart man, Witte had said and done many "harmful and stupid" things to lead to the current predicament. He had wasted tremendous time and money in the Far East that Russia could have used to gain access to the Bosphorus and redress the Congress of Berlin.⁴⁷ Suvorin had had these thoughts before the outbreak of hostilities, but the shadow of war now brought them to the forefront of his mind.

Meanwhile, Suvorin saw the situation in Petersburg go from bad to worse. After defeating Witte with the Far Eastern question in 1903, Interior Minister Pleve had largely turned his attention to the growing labor issues in the capital. Whether or not he truly believed in the idea of a "short victorious war" to stem the tide of revolution, the conflict with Japan was not serving this purpose, as strikes and disturbances persisted.⁴⁸ In a portentous decision, Pleve approved the formation of mutual aid associations among workers in early 1904 in hopes of quelling worker unrest and socialist agitation. This entailed giving his blessing to the "Association of Factory-Plant Workers of the City of St. Petersburg," the brainchild of an orthodox priest and labor organizer named Georgii Apollonovich Gapon. On the heels of a failed experiment in police-run labor unions the previous year,⁴⁹ support for this ostensibly pro-tsarist association, and ones like it, offered Pleve one of the few remaining avenues to pacify the

⁴⁷ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 464. For more on Russia and the Turkish straits see Ronald P. Bobroff, *Roads to Glory: Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish Straits* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

⁴⁸ See Chapter Three for more on this famous quote.

⁴⁹ For more on the police union movement or "Zubatovshchina," see Iu. F. Obchenko, "Istoricheskie portrety. Sergei Vasil'evich Zubatov," *Voprosy istorii* 8 (August 31, 2005): 47-67, and Jonathan W. Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia, 1866-1905* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998).

empire's cities. Gapon proved less docile than expected, however, and by June began to expand his organization and encourage labor movements to distance themselves from the authorities, much to the minister's chagrin.⁵⁰ The dismal position of the Russian military that summer only furthered this atmosphere of uncertainty.

Pleve never lived to effectively deal with the nascent revolutionary movement, however. On July 15, a small group of terrorists belonging to the Socialist Revolutionary Party assassinated him while he was on his way to meet with the emperor.⁵¹ *Novoe vremia* responded by decrying the murder of "[u]ndoubtedly... one of the most balanced and committed supporters of order" in the empire. The backdrop of war made this act even more detestable, it continued. Pleve was a man of great ability, and only true enemies of Russia could commit such a deed when the motherland most needed both its material and spiritual strength.⁵² Suvorin repeated these sentiments in his feuilleton from July 16, explaining, "murder in the name of freedom kills that same freedom." He also took this opportunity to hint at his own frustrations. Pleve was a "certainly intelligent and extremely active" man who had faced a truly monumental task as interior minister, he said. In a reiteration of his statements to Admiral Dubasov, he further claimed that Pleve "well understood the shortcomings of Russian life."⁵³ Suvorin had had little personal contact with the interior minister, but resented his heavy-handed approach to the press.⁵⁴ Regardless, he mourned the loss of an able and active minister. His experience on the

⁵⁰ Judge, *Plehve*, 195-196. For more on Gapon and his organization see Walter Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday: The Role of Father Gapon and the Petersburg Massacre of 1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 85-118.

⁵¹ A detailed account of the plot and assassination itself appears in Judge, *Plehve*, 232-237.

⁵² "S. Peterburg, 15 iulia," *Novoe vremia*, July 16, 1904.

⁵³ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, July 16, 1904.

⁵⁴ Suvorin later told a friend that during his audience with the tsar in February, he had looked at Pleve when the tsar mentioned his wish that the press "speak the truth." He apparently wished he had had the courage to tell the tsar that Pleve actively prevented the press from doing so. Makarova, "A. S. Suvorin v dnevnikh S. I. Smirnovoi-Sazanovoi," 172. During a visit with Witte, the two spoke at length about Pleve's assassination. Witte called the late

Special Committee had shown him that many in the government preferred to ignore their nation's shortcomings rather than take any meaningful action.

Novoe vremia's pro-war stance set it apart from many of Petersburg's other major dailies, such as *Russkie vedomosti* [*The Russian Gazette*] or *Birzhevye vedomosti*, which had abandoned any enthusiasm soon after the initial spike of patriotism surrounding the raid on Port Arthur.⁵⁵ After Pleve's assassination, some of these sentiments finally bled through into its pages. Doubts in *Novoe vremia* appeared as calls to redouble efforts and fix the flaws that prevented Russia from mobilizing its full strength. The most critical of these pieces, Prince Mikhail Osipovich Men'shikov's "Do we have a navy?," asserted that the poor condition of the fleet was the root of Russia's failures in the war so far.

The July 25 article recounted the creation of the navy under Peter the Great in the eighteenth century, and traced the many ways Peter's accomplishments had receded. The great tsar had considered the navy Russia's "left hand," Men'shikov explained, and treated it with the appropriate regard. By the late nineteenth century, the government had paid less and less attention to its needs. At the present time, he argued, the navy severely lacked the proper comportment of officers, ships, and equipment to effectively prosecute the war. "Maybe I'm wrong," he offered, "but to me it seriously seems that we don't have a navy." Pre-emptively addressing any counter arguments, he asked for evidence of the navy's major role in the Napoleonic, Crimean, or current war. Noting its lack, he suggested that Russia had devolved to its navy-less, pre-Petrine condition. To win the war, Russia needed to embark on an effort of historic proportions to recapture the passion and industriousness of Peter and regain its naval strength. The diatribe ended with a call to arms. The motherland must rebuild its navy with such

minister a sycophant and yes-man. In response, Suvorin expressed exasperation with the imperial government overall. "God knows how we govern anything," he exclaimed. Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 465.

⁵⁵ McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 186, 188.

speed and dedication that Russians will look back upon their efforts in reverence and awe.⁵⁶

Despite its entreaties to deepen support for the war cause, the article's criticisms were glaring—particularly when compared to *Novoe vremia*'s usual support of the tsarist regime and its institutions.

Recognizing the explosiveness of these allegations, Suvorin soon responded to “Do we have a navy?” in a “Little Letter” on July 28. While he praised Men'shikov's enthusiasm, he drew attention to the latter's caveat “maybe I'm wrong.” He then purported to clarify the prince's views for *Novoe vremia*'s readers. These statements sought not to denigrate Russia but glorify and strengthen it. “Mr. Men'shikov surely believes [our navy] exists,” Suvorin explained. He merely wanted it to be a truly fearsome, overwhelming force, and for “Russia to employ all of its strength for naval construction.” Men'shikov in fact expressed the general patriotic desires of the “Russian heart and mind”: to strengthen the Empire's military in the face of recent setbacks.⁵⁷ He went on to firmly assert that the Russia *did* have a navy.

Nonetheless, the article offered Suvorin another chance to vent his exasperation. He praised Men'shikov for loving his motherland enough to point out its flaws. He wrote a defense of his employee that doubled as a forceful response to Admiral Dubasov's doubts of his patriotism. Suvorin railed that zeal [*revnost*] for one's homeland included acknowledging its weaknesses, arguing “We chide our motherland [*rodina*]... not because we wish it evil, but because we wish it the best, [wish it] perfection.” Such rebukes came from this passion, and showed a holy “desire to be useful, and to excite all with a zeal for work” for the motherland. He further supported this kind of talk by including an un-cited quotation from Nicholas, stating the

⁵⁶ Mikhail Osipovich Men'shikov, “Esli u nas flot?” *Novoe vremia*, July 25, 1904.

⁵⁷ Suvorin, “Malen'koe pis'mo,” *Novoe vremia*, July 28, 1904.

tsar's "wish for the press to speak the truth."⁵⁸ Suvorin stopped short of openly criticizing the state of the Russian navy in his own public writings, but he betrayed his private doubts about Russia's ability to wage war in the Far East. In his diary, he fully endorsed Men'shikov's harsh critique. Here, he again quoted Nicholas, and resolved that the article "Do we have a navy?" indeed "spoke the truth."⁵⁹

Men'shikov's editorial quickly caught the attention of Nicholas's uncle, General-Admiral of the Navy Grand Prince Aleksei Alexandrovich.⁶⁰ As titular head of the Imperial Navy, the Grand Prince apparently took great umbrage at the piece and brought it to the tsar's attention. Nicholas read the article and instructed the acting minister of internal affairs, Petr Nikolaevich Durnovo, to prepare a report to the censorship bureau.⁶¹ The memorandum related that the "inappropriate" article had caused the tsar "dissatisfaction," though he did not sanction any punishment. Suvorin noted in his diary that the tsar was surprised the article made it past the censors but ultimately viewed reprimand as unnecessary. Nicholas' enjoyment of *Novoe vremia* and Suvorin's writings seemingly inclined him to have Durnovo merely offer "the strictest suggestion" that the newspaper refrain from printing similar articles in the future.⁶²

In his journal, Suvorin thanked the tsar for his indulgence, but remained disconcerted by the weaknesses Men'shikov had highlighted. Nicholas had deigned to excuse *Novoe vremia* from possible reprimand but still appeared oblivious to the poor state of his own forces. Furthermore, Nicholas' insouciance over the ineffectiveness of his military infrastructure remained cause for real concern. Suvorin quipped in the same entry: "I'm reminded of the Christian-Anderson story

⁵⁸ Ibid. Here, Suvorin quotes the tsar's words during his audience with representatives of the press in February. Makarova, "A. S. Suvorin v dnevnikakh S. I. Smirnovoi-Sazanovoi," 172.

⁵⁹ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 465.

⁶⁰ General-Admiral was a ceremonial position usually reserved for members of the royal family.

⁶¹ For more on Durnovo and his later importance as minister of internal affairs (October 1905-April 1906) see Dominic Lieven, "Bureaucratic Authoritarianism in Late Imperial Russia: The Personality, Career and Opinions of P. N. Durnovo," *The Historical Journal* 26, no.2 (Jun., 1983): 391-402.

⁶² Durnovo to Avelan, July 28, 1904, RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 168.

about the emperor that walked around naked, imagining he was in wondrous clothing because of his courtiers' admiration."⁶³

The Downward Spiral Continues

The summer of 1904 ended with a sequence of significant military defeats. First, Japanese forces reached artillery range of Port Arthur on July 26 and began shelling the fortress. By mid-August a siege was in place. Almost simultaneously, at the Battle of the Yellow Sea, acting commander of the Port Arthur squadron Vilgelm Karlovich Vitgeft led a last ditch attempt to break the blockade and link up with the ships of Vladivostok. On July 28, his ships fought Admiral Togo to a standstill but failed to break out. After Vitgeft died in the battle, Vice Admiral Ukhtomskii took over and rather than keep pushing through ordered the ships to return to the port. This ensured that it would become completely trapped, and possibly destroyed, once the Japanese siege was in place. At the same time, the fleet at Vladivostok made a similarly unsuccessful attempt to break free. By August 1 the empire effectively had no navy in the Pacific.

Two weeks later, the army suffered defeat at Liaoyang, a city in Port Arthur's northern environs. This first truly massive clash of armies took place between August 12 and 23, with Kuropatkin's force of one hundred fifty thousand defending against the attack of Field Marshal Oyama Iwao's corps of one hundred thirty thousand.⁶⁴ Russian troops performed adequately, but once Oyama gained the tactical advantage Kuropatkin ordered retreat. Each side suffered about twenty thousand casualties. Upon his arrival in Mukden, Kuropatkin tried to frame the battle as

⁶³ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 465. He refers to the story "The Emperor's New Clothes," first published in 1837.

⁶⁴ A good account of the battle is Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 357-372. For its strategic significance, see Steinberg, *All the Tsar's Men*, 134-138 and Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 65-70.

more of a draw, and reported to Alekseev that his troops were in good spirits. In outward appearances, however, the retreat was yet another embarrassing defeat.

Privately, the events rattled Suvorin. As the nightmares recounted at the beginning of this chapter show, his diary gives invaluable insight into the publisher's mindset during this period of the war. On August 6, he briefly recounted the Chief Bureau of Press Affairs calling newspaper editors to its office, asking them to prepare the public for the inevitable battle at Port Arthur. Such "heavy days" and "dreadful anticipation," he lamented. The birth of a long-awaited *tsesarevich* [heir apparent] had coincided with the naval defeats and deflected much public attention. *Novoe vremia* usually reveled in good news about the royal family, but this distraction from the war now made Suvorin feel sick. On such holidays, Russian "misfortune and losses are not recognized," he wrote. As the country's leaders celebrate in their palaces and manors, "what are Russian misfortunes to them?" The government and its administrators had done little to win back Suvorin's confidence after the contentious Special Committee session in June.

The news of General Kuropatkin's loss at Liaoyang hit even harder. Referencing the climactic battle of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), Suvorin called the battle "Russia's Sedan." He passed the day of the defeat "as in a fever." "The company is finished. The navy is destroyed, the army is partly destroyed," he repeated. The tsar had not truly committed to fighting, and now Russia might have to sign a "shameful peace [*pozornyi mir*]." He and some of his staff stayed in *Novoe vremia*'s offices until four o'clock in the morning poring over maps and worrying out the fate of Kuropatkin and his troops. Suvorin did not sleep that night.⁶⁵ *Novoe vremia* largely refrained from this kind of overt pessimism in print, however.

After Liaoyang, "Little Letters" ardently defended Kuropatkin. In fact, the battle actually brought him higher praise. As a friend and longtime champion of the General, Suvorin presented

⁶⁵ Ibid., 470-471.

Kuropatkin as the hero Russia needed to win the war. In his diary, he admitted frustration at the General's retreat from the battle, but admired that he had "stood... like a stone wall."⁶⁶ Yet his articles showed little equivocation. He (incorrectly) asserted that Kuropatkin had faced a superior force, and thus, had done quite well against the "yellow tribe" that now tossed Russia about like a "hurricane."⁶⁷

On September 17, Suvorin called for Kuropatkin's promotion to supreme commander of all forces in the Far East, a position Viceroy Alekseev still held. Contemporaries and scholars alike have noted the negative influence the viceroy had on Russian performance during the war.⁶⁸ Alekseev's stubborn insistence on going on the offensive had directly opposed the General's defensive philosophy. This conflict prevented a unified military strategy and resulted in field commanders often receiving contradictory orders. Suvorin found the viceroy's incompetence and obstinacy infuriating, but he did not name him in his call for Kuropatkin to assume full command. He instead resorted to the same hyperbolic language he had used to celebrate the General's assumption of the role of land commander in February. Kuropatkin's failures on the battlefield came not from absence of talent, but from a lack of unified control over his forces, Suvorin explained. As leader of the army, he took the blame for all mistakes, whether deserved or not. Finally, Suvorin drew a historical parallel with the Patriotic War of 1812. Field Marshall Kutuzov gave up Moscow to the invaders and withdrew at the Battle of Borodino to preserve his army and later chase Napoleon back to France. Kuropatkin's calculations would clearly pay off soon. He concluded by explaining that the motherland's soldiers loved

⁶⁶ Ibid., 471.

⁶⁷ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 28, 1904. It is unclear whether this was an intentional distortion of the facts. Conflicting reports and rumors about the details of battles sometimes appeared in the press for several days to a week before definitive numbers on troop deployments and casualties emerged.

⁶⁸ Witte characterized Alekseev as incompetent, and more a careerist than a soldier or sailor. Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 385. In his criticism of Kuropatkin's failures as land commander during the war, John Steinberg shows Alekseev's ill-informed meddling as an important contributing factor. Steinberg, *All the Tsar's Men*, 274-275.

Kuropatkin and “all Russia wishe[d] from its very soul” that he be appointed commander-in-chief of all the forces in the Far East.⁶⁹ Despite Kuropatkin’s less than stellar record so far, disencumbering him from Alekseev’s meddling seemed a step in the right direction.

Reader correspondence gave Suvorin an important resource for gauging public support for Kuropatkin. In an article on September 27, he wrote that this enthusiasm exceeded his hopes. Russians from all social classes wrote to him, he explained, displaying the general’s “great popularity” and “unwavering” public support.⁷⁰ Between August and October numerous readers did in fact write him to voice this opinion. They asked Suvorin to defend Kuropatkin’s reputation and cheer him on.⁷¹ Many wrote in direct response to his feuilleton of September 17, offering their sincere thanks for his words about the general and about the importance of placing him at the head of the military.⁷² Suvorin “clearly and passionately presented what Russian people [*russkie liudi*] think and feel” about Kuropatkin, one exclaimed.⁷³ Another reader wrote with an “unwavering sense of respect, love, gratitude, and dogged confidence” in the “patient, firm, and experienced” commander.⁷⁴ “Kuropatkin and only Kuropatkin” could lead Russia to victory, yet another contended. The general was “of the Russian people,” and thus, “answerable to all of us.” He even seconded Suvorin’s approval of Kuropatkin’s strategy, explaining that the commander merely took the Russian proverb “measure seven times, cut once” (i.e., cautious planning would yield successful results) to heart.⁷⁵ Such an overwhelming response surely did much to convince Suvorin that he spoke for a large section of the Russian people.

⁶⁹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, September 17, 1904.

⁷⁰ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, September 27, 1904.

⁷¹ Anonymous to Suvorin, July 31, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 57.

⁷² Over a dozen letters to Suvorin on this topic can be found in RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, lls. 57-80, and RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, lls. 87, 107.

⁷³ “Russkie” to Suvorin, undated 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 87.

⁷⁴ “Russkaia zhenshchina” to Suvorin, September 17, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 62.

⁷⁵ Anonymous merchant to Suvorin, September 19, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 64.

The letters offer interesting anecdotes about their respective authors. Letters purporting to originate from soldiers or military personnel show a patriotism and support for Kuropatkin that no doubt solidified Suvorin's convictions. An officer in Odessa related one such story. At dinner on September 19, officers of the Eighth Army corp began toasting Kuropatkin and decided to send him a telegram. As they dictated the telegram there arose a "unanimous demand" that it address him as commander-in-chief. When the scribe mentioned that the commander did not hold this position the mess hall erupted in shouts of "Mistake, mistake" and "Commander-in-chief." The telegram writer was forced to comply. One had to agree that all Russian officers must share the belief that he should be commander-in-chief, the writer posited.⁷⁶ A letter from the Caspian city of Baku boasted the signatures of eight soldiers. In their words, they were but "a small handful of Russians on the peripheries," yet they felt their words and feelings were "also the desires of all Russians." They insisted that "*Admiral* Alekseev cannot be considered a serious *land* commander."⁷⁷ "Let us have a full commander-in-chief in the person of Kuropatkin," the letter continues, a man "we believe in, [and] in whom believes the whole of Russia." They concluded with an exhortation for Suvorin to continue to call for the general's promotion to this rank.⁷⁸ Given this response to his article, it is therefore unsurprising that Suvorin described a "general joyous feeling" spreading throughout the army when the tsar finally promoted Kuropatkin to the position on October 13.⁷⁹

Overall, *Novoe vremia* relied on obfuscation and scapegoating to keep the war drums thumping. The day after the Battle of Yellow Sea, it buried the defeat by beginning its leading article with an account of an incident between Japanese ships and the destroyer *Reshitel'nyi*

⁷⁶ Anonymous soldier to Suvorin, September 20(?), 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, lls.69-70.

⁷⁷ Emphasis in original.

⁷⁸ Nikolai Novikh et al. to Suvorin, September 25, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 65.

⁷⁹ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, October 14, 1904.

[*Resolute*] off the nearby Shandong peninsula. Concurrent to the naval battle, the *Reshitel'nyi* breached the Qing dynasty's neutrality by docking at the port of Chifu (modern Yantai) to deliver military dispatches and reached an agreement with local Chinese authorities to disarm and intern the ship there. Japanese vessels soon entered the harbor. After the *Reshitel'nyi*'s commander, Lieutenant Mikhail Sergeevich Roshchakovskii, ignored their demands for surrender, the Japanese boarded the Russian ship. Roshchakovskii slapped the Japanese commander in the face and in the ensuing struggle the two fell overboard. A brawl followed and dozens of sailors joined their commanders in the sea. The Japanese ultimately seized the *Reshitel'nyi* but international opinion tended to agree with Russian accusations that the ship's capture had violated the norms of naval warfare.⁸⁰

Suvorin and his newspaper ignored the *Reshitel'nyi*'s dubious attempt to use a neutral port for military purposes and instead praised Roshchakovskii's actions as a noble defense of Russian honor in the face of Japanese treachery. *Novoe vremia* called the seizure of the supposedly interned *Reshitel'nyi* a "predatory attack" and a "blatant violation of international law." In a lengthy diatribe that preceded a much shorter account of Russia's defeat on Yellow Sea, the newspaper implicated China as Japan's accomplice in "stealing" the *Reshitel'nyi*. Local authorities had permitted the Japanese to enter Chifu despite its status as a neutral port, thereby inviting them to attack the interned Russia destroyer, it argued.⁸¹ Suvorin chimed in the next day to heap on the hyperbole. "Let [the slap] burn on the Japanese officer's face" in retribution for such "perfect vileness," he exclaimed joyfully. Japan had once again flouted international law and received only meek protestations from the Great Powers. Russia, however, spoke not with words but with action, "and this action was a slap to the face!" In dealing with such perfidy, no

⁸⁰ Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 86-87; "Iaponskii razboi," *Novoe vremia*, August 1, 1904.

⁸¹ Ibid.

“decent person, be he civilian or military, Russian or European” could deny that Roshchakovskii had acted with honor.⁸² In a skillful piece of political spin, *Novoe vremia* took a devastating and embarrassing loss and turned it into a triumph of Russian morality and courage.

Two cartoons by Sokolovskii elaborated on these themes in the following weeks. “The seal is untouched” (Figure 29) played on fears of Chinese involvement in the war by depicting Japan as unleashing China from the constraints Europe had imposed upon it after the Boxer Uprising. In the picture, a stereotypical Chinese figure emerges from a slit in a large bag sealed “Europe, 1900.” A diminutive Japanese figure grins in the distance, holding the scissors that made the cut. Another caricature, titled “International law” (Figure 30), draws Japan as a small dog viciously tearing apart a quilt covered in numbers indicative of articles in a treaty. Both images used the newspaper’s well-established stereotypes of Japanese smallness and duplicity. The persecution of Russia’s enemies could only intensify as the empire’s military continued to offer nothing but defeat and disaster.



Figure 29. “The seal is untouched”

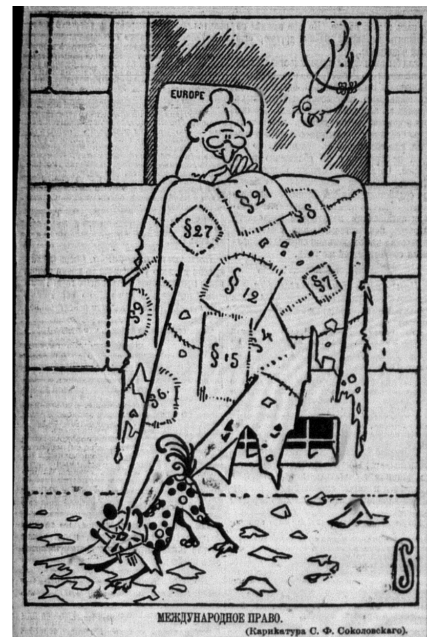


Figure 30. “International Law”

⁸² Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 2, 1904.

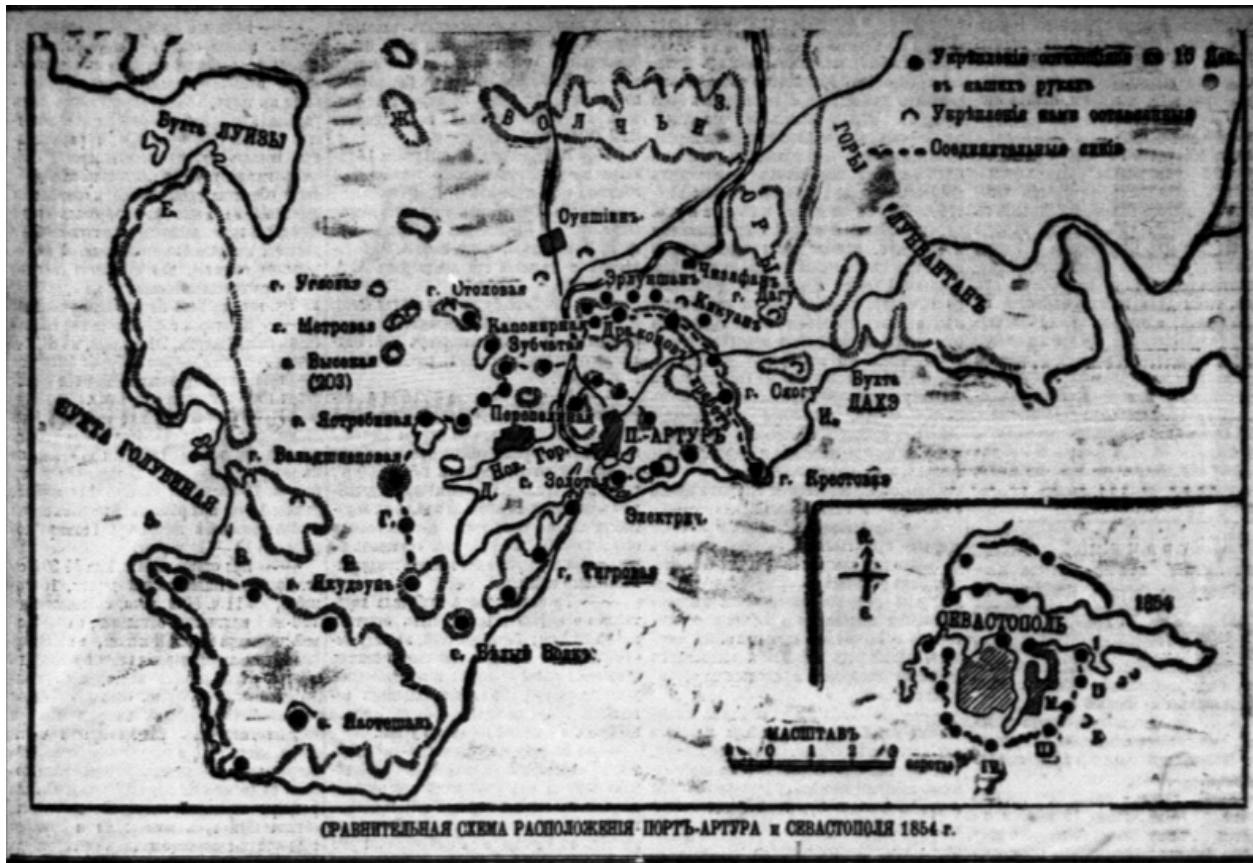


Figure 31. “A Comparative Diagram of the Locations of Port Arthur and Sevastopol in 1854.” Port Arthur is shown in the main picture, Sevastopol in the inset.

Perhaps with this in mind, *Novoe vremia* did not hesitate to play up parallels between the situation at Port Arthur and the famous siege of Sevastopol during the Crimean War fifty years earlier. Offering the new siege as a chance to write a “new glorious page” in Russian history, it spoke of soldiers valiantly defending the fortress from “enemy hordes” as they had in Crimea.⁸³ In his “Little Letters,” Suvorin reassured his readers with a stirring refrain—Port Arthur was “a fortress that could not be taken.” “However the siege... ends, the motherland will consider its defenders heroes,” he continually exclaimed.⁸⁴ The newspaper emphasized this angle repeatedly, publishing maps that set the two sieges side by side, as seen in Figure 31. Though Sevastopol

⁸³ “Port-Artur i Sevastopol,” *Novoe vremia*, August 6, 1904.

⁸⁴ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 4, 1904.

eventually fell to British, its heroic defense stood as a badge of honor for Suvorin and many other Russians. As Suvorin had previously noted, however, while Russian forces could retreat from Sevastopol to their own territory, the geography of Port Arthur would allow no such withdrawal. “We won’t wait for miracles, but instead rely on the courage of our soldiers,” he wrote, acknowledging the difficulty of the situation. Though he declared that Port Arthur did not constitute Russia’s “last hope” in the war, the importance of holding it could not be overstated. Suvorin had publicly and privately questioned the need for Port Arthur and Dal’nii from the start, but present circumstances made protecting these possessions a matter of national honor.

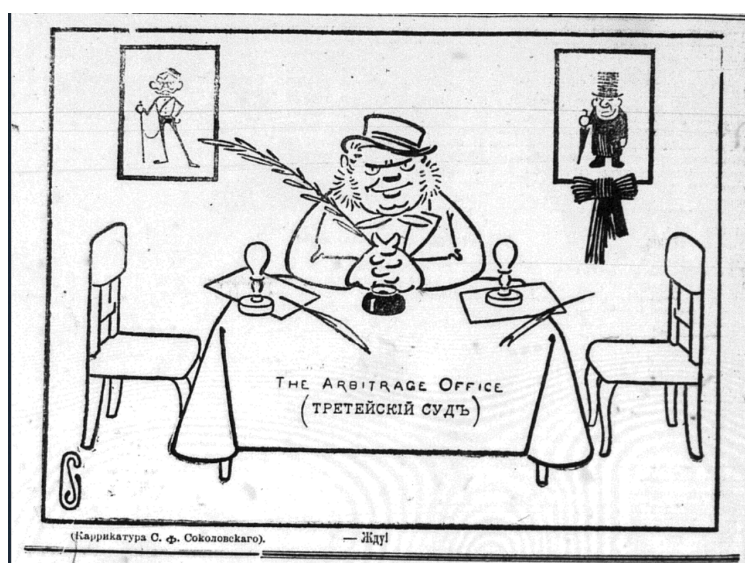


Figure 32. “I’m waiting!”

The Sevastopol comparison also folded nicely into *Novoe vremia*’s attitude toward its former foe in Crimea, Great Britain. After the defeats at Liaoyang and on the Yellow Sea, the paper upped its anti-British vitriol. In articles following the battles, it accused Britain of consistently rebuffing the Russian people and their government’s attempts at cooperation and

peaceful coexistence.⁸⁵ As Japan's ally, *Novoe vremia* had always been suspicious of Great Britain, but it now became a true focus for the newspaper's ire. Suvorin noted that British newspapers were "gleefully" recommending Russia sue for peace, claiming it a logical, honorable action. Russians knew better, he countered, explaining that their international prestige would "fall significantly" if they admitted defeat.⁸⁶ Sokolovskii's cartoon from August 3 echoes this sentiment. In Figure 32, John Bull sits at the arbitration table and sneers, "I'm waiting!" On the wall behind him hangs a portrait of former Boer President Kruger.⁸⁷ Bull clearly has onerous conditions in mind for a Russo-Japanese treaty. The prospect of continuing the war had become a matter of preserving Russia's "national pride" in not only Northeast Asia, but Europe as well.⁸⁸

More pointedly, *Novoe vremia* accused Britain of conspiring to hurt the empire's war effort. This issue appeared most emphatically in regard to the status of the Volunteer Fleet in the Black Sea. As part of a plan to test the possibility of deploying these ships as privateers, the Naval Ministry asked the foreign ministry, with Nicholas' approval, to contact its ambassador in Istanbul. This agent then secured the Ottoman Sultan's special permission for two cruisers from the Volunteer Fleet to pass through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.⁸⁹ Though superficially in line with elements of the Berlin Congress of 1878, the state of war between Russia and Japan complicated things. Both Foreign Minister Lamzdorf and his ambassador in Istanbul well understood that Britain would act to block any attempt by the Russian navy to clear the Turkish

⁸⁵ "Britanskoe usmotrenie," *Novoe vremia*, August 11, 1904.

⁸⁶ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 19, 1904.

⁸⁷ See Chapter Two for more on the Boer War, especially *Novoe vremia*'s use of the conflict as evidence of British untrustworthiness.

⁸⁸ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 19, 1904.

⁸⁹ According to the Congress of Berlin, the straits were, in principle, open to all commercial ships and closed to any military traffic. Because the Volunteer Fleet was somewhere between a commercial and military entity, its passage through the straits remained contingent on special permission from the Sultan and the assurance of the Russian ambassador that the ships were to undertake only commercial activities. Halit Dündar Akarca, "A Reinterpretation of Ottoman Neutrality During the War," in *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, Volume 1: Centennial Perspectives*, 387-388, 392fn.

Straits and advised against the plan. The British government questioned the legality of any component of the Black Sea fleet's passage through the straits.⁹⁰ The two Volunteer Fleet ships then passed through the Suez Canal, and after their crews revealed hidden artillery and hoisted the Russian naval ensign, boarded a handful of British and German commercial vessels on the Red Sea. The British government erupted in protest. Its ambassador in Istanbul quickly warned the Sultan not to allow any further Russian military ships through. Quite aware of British influence in the Ottoman capital, not to mention the difficulty of renegotiating the terms of Russian access to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, the government abandoned the privateering plan and offered the Ottomans a vague assurance that no additional Russian military vessels would attempt pass through the straits.⁹¹

While Suvorin viewed British complaints as one more insult from an ill-wishing rival, an anonymous article titled "Straits Misunderstandings" spoke more bluntly.⁹² It argued that Britain had no right to deny any Russian ship, military or otherwise, passage though the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. By *Novoe vremia*'s understanding, the Berlin agreement forbade military use of the straits only when this use coincided with an armed conflict between any of its European, Russian, or Turkish signatories. Since Russia was not at war with any of these powers it ought to have full access, it contended.⁹³ "Russia is not a vassal state and not limited in its sovereign rights," the article exclaimed, and to interfere with its military deployment was to "deny [Russia's] sovereign dignity." In a sharp jab at Britain, it maintained that "racial hatred, national rivalry, ...[and] greedy businessmen," rather than legal precedent, motivated protests to Russia's

⁹⁰ Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, 243-244.

⁹¹ Ibid; Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 92-93.

⁹² Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 19, 1904.

⁹³ For more on the terms of the strait passage, see Halit Dündar Akarca, *A Reinterpretation of Ottoman Neutrality During the War*, 392fn.

passage.⁹⁴ By accusing it of interfering with Russian deployment, *Novoe vremia* came perilously close to questioning British neutrality.

With Anglo-Russian relations already tense, these insinuations caused a clamor in the foreign ministry. As the war played out, Foreign Minister Lamzdorf had, as usual, kept a close eye on *Novoe vremia* and remained wary of its ability to craft Russia's international image for domestic audiences. The he had last contacted the censorship bureau via the Interior Ministry about this in April. Then, he had complained that the paper's new foreign affairs question and answer section impinged on the role of the government newspaper *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik* as the public's official source for information on such matters.⁹⁵ "Straits Misunderstandings" caused a much more urgent situation in the aftermath of the incident on the Red Sea.

Lamzdorf's ambassador in London, Count Aleksandr Konstantinovich Benkendorff, agitatedly wrote the foreign minister about this article on August 19. It had the potential to cause two major problems, he explained. First, the British public had become accustomed to the Russian censorship regime, and thus, an article that seemed to contradict the empire's official conciliatory stance caused confusion and indignation. The appearance of such bellicose language in a newspaper widely seen—even overseas—as semi-official, might make the British public question not only the reliability of Russia's stated policies but also its national dignity more generally. Second, he argued that such stark contradiction between government policy and the press undermined Russians' faith in their government and the unity of purpose needed during these difficult times. "Straits Misunderstandings" represented not patriotism, Bernkendorff asserted, but "gall," and the words of someone with "sick nerves."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ "Prolivy nedorazumenii," *Novoe vremia*, August 16, 1904.

⁹⁵ Lamzdorf's memo, and Pleve's confirmation of forwarding these concerns to *Novoe vremia*, is in RGIA f.776, o. 3, d. 444, lls. 145-147.

⁹⁶ Benkendorff to Lamzdorf, August 19, 1904, RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 183

Lamzdorf agreed and forwarded a copy of this letter to acting Interior Minister Durnovo. He believed the article might further aggravate relations between Russia and Great Britain, and asked Durnovo to contact *Novoe vremia* to rectify the situation. For Lamzdorf, this article was part of a trend he had seen in the newspaper since the start of the war. In March, he had asserted that in times of war the press ought to “inspire confidence” in Russia’s abilities and position on the international stage.⁹⁷ The language of this article and its incongruity with stated policy undermined this confidence.⁹⁸ Durnovo responded promptly. He met with editor Bulgakov, and told him “in the strictest” terms that such inflammatory articles were unacceptable. Lamzdorf then dropped the subject, and *Novoe vremia* stayed out of the Foreign Ministry’s crosshairs for the next few months.⁹⁹ This restraint would prove aptly timed, as Anglo-Russian relations reached their greatest wartime crisis barely a month later.

The Russian Baltic Fleet set sail for the Far East on October 1, much to *Novoe vremia*’s delight. Preparations for the so-called “Second Pacific Squadron” to depart had proceeded in fits and starts since Makarov’s death.¹⁰⁰ The Battle of the Yellow Sea and the press’ calls for the navy to relieve the siege on Port Arthur finally brought the issue to a head in August, when a government conference convened to set firm plans for the fleet’s departure.¹⁰¹ Even so, Suvorin’s and his readers’ aforementioned worries about the condition of Russian naval construction unfortunately proved all too apt. Hasty workmanship, poor equipment, and an instance of sabotage by a Russian engineer led a number of the new ships in the fleet to suffer numerous structural and mechanical failures. Indeed, even the naval officers and officials at the government conference remained uncertain about the fleet’s prospects for success. Among the

⁹⁷ Lamzdorf to Pleve, March 20, 1904, RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 137-138.

⁹⁸ Lamzdorf to Durnovo, August 26, 1904, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 182.

⁹⁹ Durnovo to Lamzdorf, August 29, 1904, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 185.

¹⁰⁰ Luntinen and Manning, “The Russian Navy at War,” 237.

¹⁰¹ Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 137.

participants, who included Lamzdorf, Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, and Nicholas, only Admiral Rozhstvenskii spoke with conviction about the mission, saying he would fulfill the tsar's orders, however difficult. Those with conflicting opinions apparently held their tongues.¹⁰² To remedy the mechanical issues, and account for the lack of any friendly ports between the Baltic and Yellow Seas, specially purposed repair ships eventually joined the fleet on its journey.¹⁰³

Nonetheless, *Novoe vremia* heaped praise on the departing ships. It arranged to receive regular correspondence from Nikolai Lavrent'evich Klado, a naval commander and academic serving on the Second Pacific Squadron, who published in the paper under the pseudonym *Priboi* [Surf]. Rozhstvenskii had a hard task, *Novoe vremia* admitted, but the fleet was up to the challenge.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps Russia could purchase a port in the Indies to provide a safe haven and refueling station on future trips to the Pacific, it proposed a few days later.¹⁰⁵

On October 8, Anglo-Russian relations took a dangerous turn when the Second Pacific Squadron opened fire on a group of fishing boats near the Dogger Bank sandbank east of the English coastline.¹⁰⁶ Rozhstvenskii and his crew, apparently wary over rumors of Japanese ships in the North Sea, mistook the Russian cruiser *Avrora* [Aurora] and a few English trawlers for a group of Japanese torpedo boats.¹⁰⁷ After a few minutes of "battle," Rozhstvenskii realized his error and ordered a ceasefire, but it was too late. Among the trawlers, one sank, two sustained damage, and a handful of English fishermen died. The *Avrora* lost two crewmen and suffered

¹⁰² Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 418-419; Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 138.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁰⁴ "Vtoraia tikhookeanskaia eskadra," *Novoe vremia*, October 1, 1904.

¹⁰⁵ "Priobretenie porta," *Novoe vremia*, October 4, 1904.

¹⁰⁶ Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, 256-258.

¹⁰⁷ The reports that the British were training Japanese sailors in the North Sea were so widespread that Lamzdorf asked ambassador Benekendorff to investigate. The rumors proved untrue. Loshakov, "Graf Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf," 40.

damage as well.¹⁰⁸ The British public and a few members of its parliament quickly called for revenge, while Russian diplomats scrambled to avoid war.¹⁰⁹ Now actively shadowed by the British navy, Rozhdestvenskii docked his fleet at the Spanish port of Vigo and waited for instructions.¹¹⁰

In the end, cooler heads prevailed. St. Petersburg presented the episode as an honest mistake and quickly entered negotiations. A mixture of Russian contrition, British desire for European stability, and the maneuverings of the tsar's French allies helped resolve the situation by early November.¹¹¹ The French foreign minister, Théophile Delcassé, saw his country's two most important allies edging toward war and worked to convince both sides to agree to an international investigation.¹¹² Four Russian officers remained at Vigo to await the findings of the inquiry. As part of the settlement, the Russian Empire offered a formal apology and compensation, while Britain relinquished its demands to put Rozhdestvenskii on trial.¹¹³ The international commission ultimately accepted the admiral's explanation of the incident, ruled it an unfortunate misunderstanding, and calculated an appropriate monetary reimbursement. The British fleet then left Vigo and allowed the Second Pacific Squadron to depart.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 411-412; Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 140-141; Pleshkov, *The Tsar's Last Armada*, 95-97.

¹⁰⁹ The British press labeled it "The Russian Outrage" or "The Dogger Bank Incident." The latter name has become its common moniker in English. In Russian it is usually known as the *Gull'skii incident* [The Hull Incident], after the British city of Hull, the homeport of the fishing trawlers. Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 413-414; Pleshkov, *The Tsar's Last Armada*, 99.

¹¹⁰ Patrick Beilleval, "Preparing for the Next War: French Diplomacy and the Russo-Japanese War," in *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905 Volume II: The Nichinan Papers*, eds. John Chapman and Inaba Chiharu (Kent: Global Oriental, 2007), 81; Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 415.

¹¹¹ Loshakov, "Graf Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf," 40

¹¹² The Entente Cordiale between France and Britain had been concluded only a few months prior to the incident. The Franco-Russian Alliance was currently in its tenth year. Beilleval, "Preparing for the Next War," 81. Apparently Suvorin's newspaper was becoming a consideration in French diplomatic circles as well. In mid-November, 1904, Suvorin mentioned to a friend that he had recently paid a visit to the French ambassador. He claimed the ambassador had admonished him to be careful with *Novoe vremia*'s rhetoric in the aftermath of the Dogger Bank Incident, lest it enflame British public opinion further and lead to war after all. Makarova, "A. S. Suvorin v dnevnikakh S. I. Smirnovoi-Sazanovoi," 173.

¹¹³ Luntinen and Menning, "The Russian Navy at War, 1904-1905," 248.

¹¹⁴ Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, 258-259.

The squadron then split into two groups. Rozhstvenskii took the majority of the squadron south to round the Horn of Africa, while Admiral Dmitrii Fustavovich von Fel'kerzam took five of the older ships east to pass through the Suez Canal. They would then link back up at Madagascar. This had been Rozhstvenskii's plan even before the recent imbroglio. In addition to the logistics of passing all of his ships through the canal, he had feared passage would leave the entire fleet open to British observation or even interference. In the tense atmosphere after Dogger Bank, these types of precautions likely seemed more than necessary.¹¹⁵

Novoe vremia reported on the incident with restrained bravado. It was "entirely possible" that the Japanese might have ships in the North Sea, it explained, and the fleet should take all necessary measures to protect itself.¹¹⁶ Rozhstvenskii was a good commander simply acting on intelligence about a possible Japanese attempt on his ships, it maintained.¹¹⁷ Suvorin, trying to put a positive spin on the fiasco, presented it as proof of the vigilance and honed reflexes of Russian seamen.¹¹⁸ The admiral had in fact received numerous warnings about just this type of threat from Russian agents along the European coast. The intelligence that precipitated the incident consisted of, however, a paranoid, and possibly drunken,¹¹⁹ radio message a few hours earlier from the captain of the *Kamchatka*, a repair ship on the other side of the fleet. Mistaking commercial ships for Japanese torpedo boats, the *Kamchatka* had begun firing and informed Rozhstvenskii of the threat.¹²⁰ Considering the delicacy of the situation, and perhaps Lamzdorf's recent warning to watch its rhetoric, *Novoe vremia* tried to strike a mostly conciliatory tone toward Britain in the incident's aftermath. It reassured its readers that the

¹¹⁵ Pleshkov, *The Tsar's Last Armada*, 111.

¹¹⁶ "Intsident na severnom more," *Novoe vremia*, October 12, 1904.

¹¹⁷ "Intsident na severnom more," *Novoe vremia*, October 13, 1904.

¹¹⁸ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, October 14, 1904.

¹¹⁹ Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 140.

¹²⁰ Luntinen and Menning, "The Russian Navy at War, 1904-1905," 247; Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 410-411.

British government wanted a peaceful solution to the conflict with only a few minor conditions.¹²¹ Suvorin hoped the two nations “would make every effort to ensure the incident was resolved safely.” Besides, the episode coincided with Kuropatkin’s ascension to commander-in-chief of Russian forces in the Far East. Suvorin advised his readers that this good news should “brush away” any alarm caused by the incident with Britain.¹²² With Port Arthur under siege, the Pacific fleet pinned down, and the army reeling from defeat, Russia did not need an additional war in Europe.

The Bottom Falls Out

The final major blow fell in late December, when Lieutenant General Anatolii Mikhailovich Stessel’ surrendered Port Arthur to Japanese General Nogi. The siege had progressed with various degrees of intensity since August before entering its final stage in November. In trench warfare presaging that of the First World War, the Russian force held out under almost constant artillery bombardment during the last two months. It finally capitulated, however, after Japan captured the strategic fort on 203 Meter Hill, which overlooked the fortress and offered the decisive tactical advantage. Faced with unrelenting Japanese pressure, dwindling supplies, and beleaguered troops, Stessel’ capitulated. On December 20 he sent a letter to Nogi asking for terms, and by December 23, Japan occupied the fortress. Thirty thousand troops became prisoners of war while their officers had the option of returning to Russia on parole. Unlike the massacre that followed Japan’s capture of Port Arthur during the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the surrender proceeded in a more or less orderly and non-violent fashion. The battle

¹²¹ “Intsident s Angliei,” *Novoe vremia*, October 16, 1904.

¹²² Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, October 14, 1904.

had been bloody. Nogi had sustained sixty thousand casualties during the siege. Russian losses reached thirty thousand, a casualty rate of roughly fifty percent.¹²³

The Russian military's position at the end of 1904 was grim. Kuropatkin experienced heavy casualties in a few more clashes as he continued to withdraw toward Mukden after the Battle at Liaoyang.¹²⁴ More importantly, Japanese artillery had destroyed the remaining ships of the squadron at Port Arthur. This finally marked the end of the First Pacific squadron. Additionally, without the fortress, Russia lacked an ice-free port for Admiral Rozhdestvenskii's now-outnumbered ships. Rather than recall the Second Squadron, however, the tsar and Naval Ministry decided to send a third squadron to meet up with Rozhdestvenskii. Due in no small part to the lobbying of Commander Klado—who had returned to St. Petersburg after the incident at Dogger Bank—the Empire now hastily cobbled together a third fleet.¹²⁵ The admiral was to wait for these reinforcements at Madagascar, further delaying his arrival in the theater of battle.¹²⁶ It had been nearly a year of war, and Russia had not secured a single important victory. As 1904 came to a close, it was difficult to find any silver lining.

Novoe vremia struggled to do more than mourn Port Arthur's defenders as martyrs to the Russian cause and push forward. Against overwhelming odds, it reported they fought "bravely and selflessly... for the glory and honor of Russia." The empire's friends and enemies were united in "solemn praise" of these men.¹²⁷ It presented the defeat as the possible spark of a new period of dedication to the war. "The blood of our brothers... must not be wasted," it cried.

¹²³ Warner and Warner offer an extensive account of the last month of the siege in *The Tide at Sunrise*, 427-440. See also, Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 107-108.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 117-119.

¹²⁵ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 478; Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 482-483.

¹²⁶ Menning, "Neither Mahan Nor Molke: Strategy in the Russo-Japanese War," in *The Russo-Japanese War In Global Perspective*, 153-154; Pleshakov, *The Tsar's Last Armada*, 172-173.

¹²⁷ "Posle padeniia Port-Artura," *Novoe vremia*, December 22, 1904.

Russia must prove itself “worthy of such heroes.”¹²⁸ Defeat on the battlefield and rising domestic turmoil had sapped the enthusiasm of every other major daily newspaper by this point, however, leaving *Novoe vremia* virtually alone in this stance.

The fall of the fortress proved the last straw for *Russkoe slovo*, for example. At this point it shifted from mere opposition to the war to overtly calling for peace. Its lead writer, Vasilii Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko, wrote a series of articles titled “The Blind War,” where he indicted the tsarist regime’s handling of the conflict by simply reporting what he saw as a correspondent at Port Arthur and letting the government’s many failures speak for themselves.¹²⁹ *Russkie vedomosti* and much of the rest of the press soon advocated peace as well.¹³⁰

In moving forward with a new phase of the war, *Novoe vremia* argued for closer cooperation between the government and society. In the article “An official assessment of the role of the press,” the newspaper contended that the press needed to “vigorously agitate” the public, so that it might rouse from its apathy and appreciate the importance of the war for Russia’s fate as an international power. The press’s role was not merely to report the facts, but to provide important commentary and rally the public around its government.¹³¹ Self-aggrandizement aside, these types of statements carried an implicit critique of a government that seemed unable to mobilize its population by itself. *Novoe vremia* had consistently supported the war. It spearheaded a naval donation campaign, but also had the courage to print articles, such as Men’shikov’s “Do we have a navy?” that drew attention to the military’s shortcomings. It was doing its part for the Russian cause.

¹²⁸ “Padenie Port-Artura,” *Novoe vremia*, December 21, 1904.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 187.

¹³⁰ McReynolds, *The News Under Russia’s Old Regime*, 189-190. Balmuth, *The Russian Bulletin*, 229.

¹³¹ “Kantseliarskaia otsenka roli pechati,” *Novoe vermia*, December 24, 1904.

Suvorin's "Little Letter" on December 24 took much the same angle. European leaders and their newspapers praised Port Arthur's defenders, but this praise had an underlying refrain: "Russia has lost its meaning in not only China and the East, but in Europe as well," he put forward. They called peace "advantageous" at this juncture, but he knew they really viewed it as "shameful." The situation had become dire and required renewed dedication from the populace and regime. On this point he addressed claims from these same foreign observers that "all Russia want[ed] peace." Suvorin claimed to "not take it upon [him]self to speak for the *narod*," but explained that lone voices against the war did not constitute a unanimous opinion. For this reason, he proposed a different way to know the *narod*'s will and rally his countrymen.¹³²

Russia now faced a major crisis and the autocracy had both old and new methods of working together with the people to solve it, Suvorin put forward. Rather than pointing to the burgeoning *zemstvo* movement, which he viewed with some suspicion because of its liberal tendencies, he instead of spoke of the sixteenth-century court of Ivan IV. He referred here to a medieval consultative body known as the *Zemskii sobor*, or "assembly of the land." Regarding the assembly, Suvorin wrote that it "brought before the person of the sovereign its advice, its sincerity, its intelligence," all in service to Russia. He did not linger on the idea, though, and instead closed the article by praising the garrison at Port Arthur and exhorting action at this "solemn and fateful hour."¹³³ It is clear, however, that Suvorin knew Russia could not continue to prosecute the war as it had in 1904. His diary from November and December shows a notable shift in concern from the war to the revolutionary crisis on the home front.¹³⁴ The combined domestic and international crises were pushing the empire to the edge. His advocacy for a *zemskii sobor* (covered extensively in the next chapter) shows his increasing desperation.

¹³² Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, December 24, 1904.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 475-481.

Suvorin had ample reason to believe his readers felt the same way. Much of their correspondence shared his sense of urgency. He had received numerous letters supporting Port Arthur's defenders and pressing him to continue his backing for the war.¹³⁵ The final stages of the siege and its fall, however, brought emphatic calls for Suvorin to do everything in his power to save Russia from total humiliation abroad and corruption and deprivation at home. "Help our dear motherland, Aleksei Sergeevich," they cried, "you hold all of Russian public opinion in your hands."¹³⁶ While some wrote to inform him that only a handful of people in their country wanted peace,¹³⁷ many others wrote that military defeats and domestic strife now made continuing the war untenable. An anonymous merchant begged Suvorin to petition the government to call for peace. "Rozhestvenskii's squadron should return from Madagascar before it's too late," he urged, because "it's heading to its death." Suvorin was "the most important man among the ...*narod*," the merchant claimed. "Posterity [would] bless" him if he could end the nation's suffering by calling for the *narod* to have a say in improving empire's "incompetent" government.¹³⁸ Voices from Suvorin's window onto Russian society were becoming increasingly desperate and restive.

Crucially, many letters blamed the war's failures on an apathy and inefficiency in the Russian government that Suvorin had seen at the Special Committee meeting, and heard about in rumors from his social circles. He had received letters in this vein since the war's outbreak, but after such a terrible year it is likely that they stuck more prominently in his thoughts. "Give the land peace!" one letter writer pleaded. Russia could best "atone for the blood of the fallen" not by continuing the war, but working to reform the government that had so ineffectually managed

¹³⁵ See for example, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 123-135 and RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l.84-90.

¹³⁶ [Illegible] to Suvorin, December 21, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l. 148-149.

¹³⁷ Anonymous to Suvorin, December 26, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l.102-103.

¹³⁸ "Torgovets," to Suvorin, December 2, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, l.146-147.

it.¹³⁹ “A voice from society” had a bleaker and angrier view of the situation. The government treated:

the objects of its levies like a herd of lizards, a bunch of slaves! And we really are slaves, powerless, cowardly slaves; we do not know and do not trust each other, we don't know our strength; we are so forgotten and humiliated, [that] few can still feel the national shame of this terrible war.

Japanese soldiers had food and clothing, while the “looting” of corrupt officials left their Russian counterparts “hungry beggars.” “Show us a way out if you know of one[,] give us hope if you have it,” it concluded, “because life has become unbearable!”¹⁴⁰ This letter spoke in extremes that Suvorin would never dare put in his own published writings. Nevertheless, he shared the author’s distaste and despondency following the fall of Port Arthur, as his call for a *zemskii sobor* shows.

Meanwhile, *Novoe vremia* was busy causing one final run-in with Lamzdorf and the censorship bureau to round out the year. After a brief lull following the Dogger Bank incident, the newspaper had resumed its virulent anti-British tone despite the foreign minister’s earlier admonitions and the war scare. In a section following its leading article on December 21, it reported that British cruisers now followed Rozhdestvenskii in the Indian Ocean and were possibly helping Japanese agents track the fleet. This did not seem like the actions of a neutral power. The Russian navy ought to “make every effort to protect itself from spies,” it continued. More ominously, it noted that the incident at Dogger Bank had shown that “Admiral Rozhdestvenskii d[idn]’t joke around” when it came to his fleet’s safety.¹⁴¹ The British ambassador in Petersburg, Sir Charles Hardinge, took notice of these allegations and

¹³⁹ Anonymous to Suvorin, December 21, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 673, lls. 155-156.

¹⁴⁰ “Golos ot obshchestva,” to Suvorin, December 25, 1904, RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 95. The writer’s description of the tsar’s downtrodden subjects bears a certain resemblance to first and third paragraphs of Gapon’s petition on Bloody Sunday. The full text of the petition appears in Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday*, 344-349.

¹⁴¹ “Padenie Port-Artura,” *Novoe vremia*, December 21, 1904.

immediately voiced his distaste to Lamzdorf. In a letter, he called *Novoe vremia*'s claims "contemptuous" as well as "absolutely false and misleading." Hardinge could not stand by while a newspaper of *Novoe vremia*'s stature made such allegations. With the incident at Dogger Bank less than two months prior, tensions between the two empires remained high. An accusation of breached neutrality might still precipitate a declaration of war. Lamzdorf forwarded the message to the new minister of the interior, Petr Dmitrievich Sviatopolk-Mirskii.¹⁴²

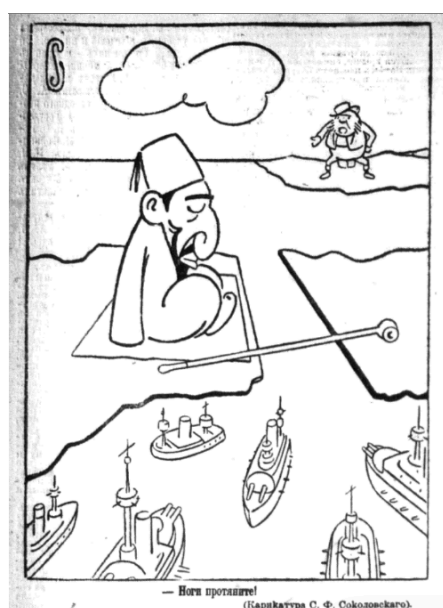


Figure 33. "Stretch out your legs!"

Novoe vremia continued to assert that British ships tailed the Second Pacific Squadron in the Indian Ocean, however. Reports now mentioned that the British consulate vigorously denied these claims. The paper responded that it would only believe the words of Rozhestvenskii himself on this matter.¹⁴³ It also upped this rhetoric by running a Sokolovskii cartoon that lambasted Britain's continued pressure on the Ottomans to prevent Russian ships from leaving

¹⁴² Lamzdorf to Sviatopolk-Mirsky, December 22, 1904, RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, lls. 228-229.

¹⁴³ "Kantseliarskaia otsenka roli pechati," *Novoe vremia*, December 24, 1904.

the Black Sea (Figure 33). Sviatopolk-Mirskii, busy with difficulties discussed in the following chapter, finally contacted *Novoe vremia* on December 27 and instructed them to stop printing these accusations, which they did.¹⁴⁴ As in the past, *Novoe vremia* faced no punitive actions because of Lamzdorf's orders.

The conflict had made newspapers more popular and profitable than ever in Russia, but, at the same time, it also exposed more of the tsar's subjects to the implicit criticism of the government that the war itself offered.¹⁴⁵ Covering the string of Russian defeats did not violate censorship laws, but still undermined support for the regime by making its ineffectiveness and unpreparedness painfully clear. In this way, war reporting could have "decided political effects" without making open or even implied anti-government statements.¹⁴⁶ In 1904, support for parliamentarianism or criticizing officials in the press superseded opposition to the war as a cause for punishment—even though censoring a periodical ran the risk of highlighting the very domestic issues the chief bureau had banned from print.¹⁴⁷ In this atmosphere, *Novoe vremia* continued to try to drum up support for both the war and the regime. The regime did not seem to want its help.

* * *

1904 had a dramatic effect on Suvorin, *Novoe vremia*, and its readers. At the war's outbreak, the newspaper and its publisher became a lightning rod for literate Russians on the

¹⁴⁴ Sviatopolk-Mirsky to Hardinge, December 27, 1904, RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 230; Sviatopolk-Mirskii to Lamzdorf, December 28, 1904, RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 231.

¹⁴⁵ Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 218.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Despite its open wariness about the conflict, *Russkoe slovo*'s two month ban on street sales (October 14 to December 13) that year stemmed from its arguments that the *zemstvos* should take on more local authority and its implicit criticism of public officials, not its opinions on the war. Ruud, *Russian Entrepreneur*, 70.

political right with strong opinions and concerns about the conflict with Japan. As the war went poorly this stature only grew. At the same time, Suvorin's confidence in his government plummeted. It might have been easy to brush off reader letters about the navy's poor condition at the beginning of the war, but defeats at Port Arthur and the setbacks preparing the Second and Third Pacific squadrons showed these concerns were well founded. Moreover, Suvorin's own experiences with the arrogant and incompetent men in charge of these tasks offered all the confirmation he needed. From his editorial office in St. Petersburg, he sat at a crossroads between the Russian public and the government that presided over them. The chasm between the two was growing.

Novoe vremia did its best to downplay and disguise Japan's advances on the battlefield, but its standard tactics could only go so far. At the war's onset, Suvorin had painted it as a way to regain the honor and prestige Russia had lost in Crimea and at the Congress of Berlin. Russia's moral superiority over the greedy and double-dealing British and their half-civilized Japanese puppets remained a common theme during the war. That said, moral superiority did not seem to be winning battles. Still, with the military seemingly incapable of besting Japan on the battlefield thus far, the newspaper had few options. It could keep using enemy treachery as an excuse for defeat or it could take matters into its own hands and begin to play armchair general (or admiral, as it were). *Novoe vremia* did both. Suvorin received a near constant flow of letters from his newspaper's concerned readers. He may have claimed that he was not trying to "speak for the *narod*," but a comparison of his writings and the reader letters show that this was not entirely true. By the end of 1904, *Novoe vremia*'s calls for a new phase of the war and Suvorin's

insinuations about the need for a *zemskii sobor* to unite the Russian people behind the tsar and save the nation showed a growing rift between the newspaper and the tsarist regime as well.¹⁴⁸

As the events of this year showed, *Novoe vremia*'s reportage and analysis displayed increasing frustration with the course of the war. It repeatedly overstepped its bounds with zealous opinions about how to manage the conflict and fierce condemnation of Russia's enemies and rivals. Despite Nicholas' continued deference, this brought it into constant conflict with the highest-ranking officials in the empire. Russia's chief diplomat attempted to censure the newspaper half a dozen times in 1904 alone. Though he despised *Novoe vremia*, Foreign Minister Lamzdorf respected its authority so much that he devoted time from a wartime agenda to keep track of its coverage of the Russo-Japanese conflict. Letters from British consuls and ambassadors seem to show his estimation of this potential influence was correct.

By the end of 1904 the government seemed to be rebuffing Suvorin and his newspaper's attempts to aid the war effort on all fronts. As late as October, Suvorin's diary notes that Nicholas still apparently found his "Little Letters" "delightful."¹⁴⁹ This praise likely rang hollow, however. The tsar's ministers attempted to censor what *Novoe vremia* presented as patriotic articles. When Suvorin tried to voice his well-meaning criticisms at meetings for a donation campaign *that he helped spearhead*, the tsar's admirals questioned his loyalty. In these ways, the Russian government had come to alienate one of its most loyal and vocal public supporters at a time when it needed public confidence the most.

¹⁴⁸ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, December 24, 1904.

¹⁴⁹ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 474.

Chapter Five

“Now is Not the Time to Sleep, When All of Russia is a Pillar of Fire”: Revolt, Defeat, and Peace

On January 10, 1905, St. Petersburg languished under a general strike. Over a hundred thousand factory workers, intelligentsia, and students refused to work and clogged the streets. Despite his misgivings about the strike movement, Suvorin seized the opportunity to act on the frustrations from the past year. Late that night, about a dozen Petersburg publishers held an informal meeting to discuss the revolution and how to get the presses running again (printers and typesetters were on strike as well). Apparently at Suvorin's suggestion, the group decided to telephone Interior Minister Sviatopolk-Mirskii to schedule an audience where they might present him their opinions. After securing an appointment for eleven-o'clock the next morning, they moved to *Novoe vremia*'s editorial office, where they formulated a petition.¹

They met the minister the next morning and presented him with two strongly worded requests. First, they asserted that the embattled government must give the press “full freedom” to report and discuss the pertinent issues of “public life.” Next, the petition called for the immediate convocation of a *zemskii sobor* to restore “state order.” This *sobor* must consist of freely elected representatives from all classes and *sosloviia* and have full freedom of debate. Finally, the *sobor* should take place with “full publicity.”² Suvorin later took credit for the initiative and its focus on the *zemskii sobor* idea in a “Little Letter.”³ As his writings and correspondence in spring 1905 show, he seems to have put considerable faith in this assembly as a panacea for the crisis Russia now faced.

¹ Suvorin, “Malen'koe pis'mo,” *Novoe vremia*, May 22, 1905.

² A verbatim copy of the petition appears in Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhitsa*, 336-337.

³ Suvorin, “Malen'koe pis'mo,” *Novoe vremia*, May 22, 1905.

For Suvorin and *Novoe vremia*, the breakdown of public order and government authority offered a chance to finally address the administrative and political issues that brought the empire to such a low point. In this atmosphere, a newspaper article or letter to the editor offered Russians a rare opportunity to publicly comment at length on long-forbidden topics and vent their frustrations. In the aftermath of the Bloody Sunday massacre, the newspaper, thus, set out a plan for reform that would allow the Russian population to participate in government while still preserving the tsar's absolute authority.

In his "Little Letters," Suvorin lobbied for this in the form of a *zemskii sobor*, a medieval "assembly of the land," somewhat comparable to the French *Estates General*. His feuilletons greatly inflated the significance and power of the actual *Zemskii sobor*, which had primarily been a gathering from which sixteenth and seventeenth century tsars could survey elite opinions. In addition, his explanation of the *Zemskii sobor* and how exactly it would save Russia in 1905 remained vague. He described it to readers as a consultative body that allowed the tsar to draw on the input and talents of his people. While not a governing parliament along the Western model, it included representatives from all levels of Russia society and offering them a chance to discuss important topics and offer the tsar advice, he explained. Drawing on romantic and slavophilic notions of unity between tsar and *narod*, Suvorin described this as a distinctly *Russian* way to win the war and overcome revolutionary chaos. Ultimately, the accuracy of this description would probably have been beside the point to him. The idea of a *zemskii sobor* was more important for what he could present it as—a way of allowing well-meaning Russians to work directly with the tsar without the diluting the monarchy's power or having to deal with the corrupt and inefficient imperial bureaucracy. Experiences over the past year had shown him that the empire's bureaucrats were both woefully unable to successfully fight Japan and resistant to

any help well-meaning Russians tried to offer. This government stood between the tsar and his people, Suvorin believed, and prevented the ruler from receiving the *narod*'s support and assistance. Re-establishing this link would allow Russia to employ its full strength to overcome the current crises. His rhetoric, thus, merged victory and reform into a single cause in 1905, and offered a *sobor* as the means to achieve it.

Peasants writing to Suvorin during this period seem especially taken by his call for a *zemskii sobor*. Letters, sometimes written on behalf of entire villages, engaged with his ideas, sharing their complaints and apprehensions, as well as their hopes for victory Japan and meaningful governmental reform. As in the preceding chapters, these letters help address the always-difficult question of press reception. In the context of 1905, they also offer a view of the lived experience of the peasantry and their reactions to news of the war and revolutionary disturbances in the capital and provinces. Suvorin's war posturing and talk of the *zemskii sobor* clearly struck a nerve with many of these peasant readers. Their letters often also betrayed a sense of the stark realities of the Russian countryside that he did not quite acknowledge.

The war remained a primary concern for *Novoe vremia* long after the other major players in the Russian press had lost all enthusiasm.⁴ After devastating defeats at land and sea, the peace negotiations at Portsmouth offered Russia one final chance to save its dignity and international honor. The paper refused to consider Russia defeated, and pushed for its delegates to take a strong, even aggressive, posture. The negotiations also raised the prospect of intervention by the European and North American powers, a contingency *Novoe vremia* had feared since the onset of hostilities in early 1904.

1905 brought the denouement to a number of important narratives that had their roots in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. As this chapter will show, the specter of Japanese victory and

⁴ McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 192.

the revolutionary attack on the tsarist regime caused discourse between *Novoe vremia* and its readers at both the bottom and top rungs of Russian society to reach a fever pitch. Frustrations with government's handling of the war caused the newspaper and its publisher to make bolder attacks on its supposed instigators. These targets—particularly Foreign Minister Lamzdorf—railed back and attempted to remold Russia's international image in the paper through the Chief Bureau of Press Affairs. For its part, the newspaper struggled for a way forward that did not betray its idealized image of autocratic Russia or stereotyped caricatures of its Eastern and Western enemies. Major defeats of Russian forces at land and sea, together with *Novoe vremia*'s advocacy for a *zemskii sobor*, brought an influx of reader letters offering opinions and suggestions to its editorial offices. In this chaotic environment, each group struggled to have its say in their country's foreign and domestic politics.

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Nicholas had appointed political moderate and reformer Petr Sviatopolk-Mirskii minister of internal affairs following Pleve's assassination as a conciliatory gesture to a restless public. The minister quickly announced his intentions to deviate from Pleve's ultraconservative line. His nebulous promises to expand *zemstvo* powers and loosen censorship won him early praise from liberals, but his lack of follow-through exacerbated the already tense situation in Petersburg. The atmosphere of comparative freedom following Pleve's repression gave reformers inflated expectations for the new minister's policies.

Sviatopolk-Mirskii's intended liberalizations proceeded painfully slowly as the unbroken string of Japanese victories further undermined faith in the government. At the Zemstvo

Congress—the long-awaited national gathering of *zemstvo* representatives, which Sviatopolk-Mirskii now allowed to meet—in early November, delegates called for a constitution, elected legislature, and civil liberties.⁵ Meanwhile, worker organizations, such as Father Gapon’s Association of Factory-Plant Workers of the City of St. Petersburg, continued to grow. When the interior minister finally presented Nicholas with an ukase in mid-December, the tsar had already cooled on the idea of extensive reform. The decree promised Witte, as chairman of the committee of ministers, would convene the committee to work on laws to codify Sviatopolk-Mirskii’s promised concessions. It gave no dates or guarantees, however, and did not mention a legislature. The half-heartedness of the ukase, coupled with the fall of Port Arthur a week later, left the capital in a deep malaise.⁶⁷

Tensions ran high in early January, as the ferment in Petersburg reached critical mass. On January 3, workers at the Putilov Plant shuttered their factory in a strike over four fired employees. By January 7, the movement had grown into a general strike that shut down the city. On the Sunday the 9th, Father Gapon led a procession of 50,000 to 100,000 workers and their families toward the Winter Palace to present the tsar with a petition making a number of requests for civil liberties and measures to alleviate worker suffering.⁸ The crowd carried icons and portraits of Nicholas. Petersburg authorities had known of the intended march beforehand, however, and deployed soldiers to block the demonstrators’ way to the palace. Late in the evening of January 8, a small delegation, including Interior Minister Sviatopolk-Mirskii, had visited the tsar in his residence at Tsarskoe selo outside of Petersburg and assured him that the

⁵ This was technically the second national *zemstvo* congress, since an unsanctioned meeting had taken place in May 1902.

⁶ A complete list of promised legislation appears in Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 72.

⁷ Ibid, 56-57; Surh, *1905 in St. Petersburg*, 127-128, 154; Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday*, 140-141, 201-202.

⁸ The full petition can be found in Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 87-89.

march was not an important matter, and that they had the situation under control.⁹ Nicholas was, thus, not even in the Winter Palace when the demonstrations approached the next morning. When the crowds refused to disperse, troops opened fire near the Narva Gate and on Troitskii Bridge, instantly killing dozens and wounding many more. Immediately dubbed “Bloody Sunday,” the event hurled the capital into turmoil and propelled not only more workers, but also students, tradesmen, and the intelligentsia to join the strike movement. For the next few days Petersburg was paralyzed.¹⁰

Novoe vremia and Bloody Sunday

Suvorin and *Novoe vremia*’s overall approach to the wave of revolutionary disturbances in 1905 built on its earlier sentiments. Suvorin had opposed war with Japan in 1903 because he viewed domestic issues as more important. As seen in Chapter Three, he viewed Witte’s Far Eastern projects as superfluous and conflict with Japan unnecessary. By fall of 1904, defeats in Northeast Asia had melded with these resurgent social and political concerns to create a sense of emergency. *Novoe vremia*’s correspondents had sent a steady flow of telegrams about strikes and disturbances in factories and universities across the empire but the chief bureau forbade their publication.¹¹ Against the backdrop of the siege of Port Arthur and the *zemstvo* movement, the newspaper went little further than giving tacit approval to the movement and Suvorin’s allusions to the *Zemskii sobor*, however.

Suvorin welcomed Sviatopolk-Mirskii’s appointment and approval of the Zemstvo Congress but had grave misgivings about either’s chances of success. In his diary, he noted that

⁹ Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday*, 208-209.

¹⁰ A detailed account of the events of Bloody Sunday is in *ibid.*, 229-271.

¹¹ A large collection of telegrams the censorship bureau forbade *Novoe vremia* from publishing is held in RGALI f. 459, o. 2, d. 748-751. Telegrams in delo 748, which covers November 1 through December 31 of 1904, report dozens of riots and disturbances across the provinces and in the two capitals.

while the interior minister was “a sincere man that actively desires reform,” he lacked the intelligence and vision to bring such change to fruition. As November and December progressed, it became clear to Suvorin that the raucous *zemstvo* movement and Nicholas’ fickleness would leave Sviatopolk-Mirskii hamstrung.¹² He noted with dismay that *zemstvo* meetings chanted “down with the autocracy.” In contrast to his mostly ambiguous public attitude toward a legislative body, he privately felt that no progress could take place until a “State Duma [*Gosudarstvennaia дума*]” was convened.¹³ By the end of December he believed the empire had no effective central government and agreed with the general consensus that Sviatopolk-Mirskii’s half-hearted concessions had proven too little, too late. His inability to live up to the promise of his appointment had caused the greatest damage to the regime, Suvorin argued.¹⁴

The incompetence and indecisiveness that had plagued the war effort now threatened stability at home. Suvorin wrote bitterly in his diary that the tsar’s government harbored only “fools and louts, [...] robbers and thieves.”¹⁵ Recalling a conversation with Witte from early December, he wrote that the committee of ministers chairman found the situation in the capital “generally hopeless.” Witte had helped pen the ukase of December 14, which offered promises of expanded *zemstvo* authority and loosening of censorship. It “would have satisfied the public three months ago,” Suvorin opined, “but not now.” He continued to view Witte as part of the problem. By the end of the month he told a friend that he never thought a revolution could happen in Russia, but current events now made it a real possibility.¹⁶

With Bloody Sunday, revolution came to Petersburg. The capital, already in a general strike on the morning of January 9, saw an unprecedented 160,000 laborers refuse to work the

¹² Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 473-474.

¹³ Ibid., 477.

¹⁴ Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhitsa*, 325.

¹⁵ Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, 477.

¹⁶ Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhitsa*, 325.

next day. In Moscow and its surrounding cities 45,000 more joined them. Tens of thousands of workers in the Baltic provinces and Poland struck. Students walked out of universities and held their own rallies where they denounced the tsarist regime and, in some cases, raised red flags.¹⁷ Another important group of laborers also joined the movement—printers and typesetters. Consequently, daily newspapers circulated only sporadically in the days surrounding the massacre. *Novoe vremia* did not run between January 8 and 14.

When *Novoe vremia* returned to print it continued to give the war center stage, broaching the revolutionary situation only guardedly. A leading article from January 16 shows the layers of obfuscation and logical leaps this engendered. The opening section hit all the newspaper's standard tropes about the war: the Japanese hid "bloodthirsty instincts" under their "smiles, ceremonies, and curtsies," while the American and European press paid them undue respect and openly denigrated Russia's good name. It then switched gears and addressed the strike movement under the subheading "About Self-Control." This section acknowledged the difficulties of the present crisis but urged readers not to let passions in the moment overshadow duties to their fellow countrymen. While tacitly acknowledging that laborers might have real reasons to strike, it argued that white-collar professionals, such as lawyers, students, and professors, did not. These well-paid and well-fed men did nothing but stroke their own vanity by neglecting their responsibilities to the people and striking next to starving workers. The article concluded with an indignant treatment of the "pack of lies" the foreign press was peddling about Bloody Sunday. It accused foreign correspondents of relying on hearsay rather than firsthand observations and of grossly exaggerating the number of casualties.¹⁸ *Novoe vremia* did not question the government's statement on the number of deaths on January 9 (the official report

¹⁷ Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 94.

¹⁸ It singled out the *Daily Mail*, which cited casualties as high as 20,000 in the London paper's January 25 (12) 1905 issue. To be fair, this was indeed quite an exaggeration. See below.

was 130), but historians and contemporaries have considered it an underestimation.¹⁹ These foreign newspapers printed “brazen lies” and “libel,” all aimed at injuring Russia’s “honor and dignity,” it argued.²⁰ While the events of 1905 presented new obstacles for its viewpoints, *Novoe vremia*, nonetheless, employed some of its old tactics to explain the situation to its readers.

In the same issue, Suvorin began explicitly pushing for the *zemskii sobor* that he had requested of Sviatopolk-Mirskii during the press meeting on January 11. Though he repeated many of *Novoe vremia*’s criticisms of the supposed excesses of the strike movement in his “Little Letters” from the following month, this remained his primary concern.²¹ His feuilletons offered a fanciful depiction of the *sobor* that had more to do with his current anxieties than the actual Muscovite government of the seventeenth century.²²

In his first published writings after the massacre he offered an embellished description of the *Zemskii sobor*’s powers and role under the old tsars. Unlike the messy and overly bureaucratized parliaments of Western Europe, he explained, this gathering did not exist in the form of a charter or constitution, but had formed gradually and organically to meet the Russian

¹⁹ The death toll at the Narva Gate and at Troitskii Bridge later that day was more likely between 130 and 200, with several hundred more injured. As Sablinsky notes, the government figure included only those that died on the spot or in hospitals, and thus undershot the final tally by not accounting for those who did not make it to hospitals or died later from their wounds. *The Road to Bloody Sunday*, 266-268.

²⁰ “Plennye,” *Novoe vremia*, January 16, 1905.

²¹ Suvorin admitted that most workers had understandable grievances but wanted to work for the good of Russia. The violence of recent days instead lay with “the wild dregs of the urban crowd that had nothing in common with the working class” and were simply “ready to take part in any disorder” and engage in “the horrors of senseless rebellion.” Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 16, 1905. He also chastised the intelligentsia for striking in “Little Letters” on January 19, February 3, 6, and 9, 1905.

²² On the *Zemskii sobor*, see Marshall Poe, “The central government and its institutions,” in *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume 1: From Early Rus’ to 1689*, Maureen Perrie ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 435-463; Paul Ostrowski, “The Assembly of the Land as a Representative Institution,” in *Modernizing Muscovy: Reform and social change in seventeenth-century Russia*, Jarmo Kotilaine and Poe ed. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 117-201; and Vasilii Osipovich Kliuchevskii’s study of the subject in *A Course in Russian History: The Seventeenth Century*, Natalie Duddington trans. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1994), Chapter Ten. This work was originally published as *Kurs russkoi istorii Prof. V. Kliuchevskogo. Chast’ III* (Moscow: Tipografiia G. Lisserev i D. Sobko, 1907).

people's needs.²³ In this way, it represented a pure, natural, and most importantly, *Russian*, method of government that brought together tsar and people, he believed.

Suvorin told his readers that a *sobor* had met regularly in the seventeenth century to provide “sensible” advice to the autocrat regarding important issues and policies. Critically, he believed it had played a major role in the decades of famine, dynastic strife, and foreign invasion known as the “Time of Troubles” (1598-1613).²⁴ As he explained, these *sobors* had “carried” Russia through this dark period and ended the Troubles by electing the teenage Mikhail Romanov to the throne in 1613. It then helped the young tsar consolidate his power and rebuild the tsardom. This iteration of the *sobor* seemed the best model for Suvorin, as he explained that it had consisted of representatives from three broad segments of Russian society, including the nobility, clergy, and “district people [*uezdnye liudi*].” In his description, the nebulous and inclusive term “district people” actually implied “peasants.” As he argued, Russia could not weather the current troubles without the meaningful input of this huge section of the population.²⁵

Critically for Suvorin, the *Zemskii sobor* had been a purely consultative body and, thus, did not challenge the principle of autocracy. Even though the tsar held the final say in all decisions, he argued, this “native [*rodnoi*]” institution had played an essential role by providing the monarch with a direct channel to the concerns and opinions of his subjects. Fully devoted to their sovereign, the *sobor* had stood with the tsar as his ally, constructive critic, and assistant.²⁶

²³ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 16, 1905. It was true that the *Zemskii sobor* was not codified. This, in many ways, led to the misconceptions of many of Suvorin’s contemporaries about its role and authority.

²⁴ A classic treatment of the Time of Troubles is S. F. Platonov, *The Time of Troubles: A Historical Study of the Internal Crisis and Social Struggles in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Muscovy*, John T. Alexander trans. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1970).

²⁵ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 16, 1905.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

As he saw it, this type of unhindered connection between tsar and people would put the entirety of Russian talent and resources at the sovereign's disposal.²⁷

The actual *Zemskii sobors* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had little of the prestige or authority Suvorin gave them in these articles. They had been ad hoc bodies of elites that the government occasionally called to offer opinions on pressing matters. The *sobor* served entirely at the tsar's prerogative and represented a feudal duty for the tsardom's aristocrats and high clergy rather than a right to popular representation. The Muscovite government never codified the assembly's precise duties or the composition, and little documentation survives of its role in state affairs. Some records indicate that lower-level provincial elites and even townspeople occasionally took part in these assemblies, but they were a distinct minority and their participation does not seem to have been a requirement for a *Zemskii sobor*.²⁸ While these assemblies did handle some legislative and financial matters during the Troubles, they stopped serving this purpose soon after Mikhail Romanov ascended the throne. This authority then returned to the council of *Boyars* [the highest ranking Muscovite nobility]. Even when the tsar convened the *sobor* to "approve" important law codes, its purpose seems to have been not to debate the laws but instead provide information on local conditions that would help the government in its work. Furthermore, while it did formally approve some measures, this approval was not required for legislation to pass.²⁹

The understanding of the *Zemskii sobor* Suvorin put forward in his articles came more from later Russian intellectuals and his own imagination than historical reality. The phrase "*zemskii sobor*" did not appear in Muscovite texts. Konstantin Sergeevich Aksakov, a radical

²⁷ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, January 25, 1905.

²⁸ Poe, "The central government and its institutions," 461; Ostrowski, "The Assembly of the Land," 118.

²⁹ Ibid., 130. As Ostrowski explains, the *sobor* that helped construct the Ulezhenie of 1649, which consolidated the institution of serfdom, played at most an advisory, rather than deliberative role.

Slavophile, coined it in 1850 in order to argue that it constituted the “popular will” of the Russian people that had worked side-by-side with the tsars before Peter the Great.³⁰ Liberal intellectuals latched onto the idea as well, holding it up as a historical institution that could lay the basis for parliamentarianism in Russia.³¹ Both greatly inflated the meaning and importance of actual *Zemskii sobors*. Current scholarship rejects the idea that the institution represented any form of the “popular will.” Evidence that the peasantry—90 percent of the Muscovite population—participated in any *sobor* is dubious at best.³² Further, historians, such as Paul Ostrowski, question the “nativeness” of the institution, as well. Ostrowski argues that it was more likely modeled on the *quriltai* assembly that central Asian khans consulted about war and succession issues.³³

In prior “Little Letters” Suvorin had quoted the works of the preeminent Russian historian of his time, professor V. O. Kliuchevskii, and it seems likely that some of his ideas about the *Zemskii sobor* stemmed from Kliuchevskii’s work.³⁴ For instance, Suvorin’s assertion that the “district people” that elected Mikhail Romanov were, in fact, peasants seems drawn from the professor’s study of the *Zemskii sobor* in a popular public lecture series on Russian history.³⁵ Kliuchevskii had argued that they had *probably* been peasants, however. Further, this was only to show that these were likely the peasants of rural landowners, since the professor’s larger goal

³⁰ For more on Aksakov’s ideas and their context, see, Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka trans. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 238-283.

³¹ Poe, “The central government and its institutions,” 460; Ostrowski, “The Assembly of the Land,” 120.

³² Ibid., 124.

³³ Ibid., 128-140.

³⁴ Suvorin quotes Kliuchevskii, for example, in his “Little Letters” in *Novoe vremia*, December 6, 1894; December 24, 1896; and January 12, 1904, among other mentions. He may also have gotten some ideas from another important resource for historical information in the late empire, the massive *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Brokgauza i Efron*. Its article on the *Zemskii sobor* draws on Kliuchevskii’s work and offers a brief account of how prior Russian historians had understood the assembly. The entry is V. Miakotin, “Zemskie sobory,” *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ F. A. Brokgauza i A. Efrona* tom 12, chast’ 2 (St. Petersburg: Brokgaus and Efron, 1890), 499-504.

³⁵ Kliuchevskii’s analysis of the *Zemskii sobor* in these lectures would be published in *Kurs russkoi istorii Prof. V. Kliuchevskogo. Chast’ III*. His discussion of “uezdnye liudi” appears on page 246.

in this lecture was actually to describe the growth of serfdom in the seventeenth century.³⁶ Kliuchevskii actually downplayed the importance of *Zemskii sobors*. Though expressing a certain regret that these assemblies had faded from use, he nonetheless explained that they had had no permanent legislative or governing authority. As he put it, in the Tsardom of Muscovy, “the will of the people was not recognized as a political power.” These bodies were “merely a temporary gracious extension of the sovereign’s power to the subjects,” he explained, “which did not detract from the fullness of his power, but diminished his responsibility for possible failure.”³⁷ In this light, Suvorin’s *zemskii sobor* was actually a selective mélange of pseudo-historical dreams of Russia’s past that he could repurpose as a way to point toward Russia’s future.

In the following weeks, however, Suvorin used this rhetorical creation to great effect, and laid out an argument for why he thought his *zemskii sobor* offered the best way forward. The missteps of 1904 had severely undermined his faith in the tsarist government to win the war with Japan or even maintain law and order. He had become unsure of the ability of the regime’s bureaucratic structure to effectively weather these crises. In his articles, he lamented the fact that the *sobor* had fallen out of use after the introduction of the European-style state bureaucracy under Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century. This was, however, not factual, as historians generally agree that this had actually begun in earnest during the reign of Peter’s father, tsar Alexei Mikhailovich.³⁸ Still, he presented the bureaucracy as a foreign construction that could not fully comprehend or manage Russia. Peter had introduced it in order to bring the autocracy up to Western standards, Suvorin posited, and it had since developed in isolation from

³⁶ Kliuchevskii, *A Course in Russian History*, 204-205.

³⁷ Ibid., 215.

³⁸ Poe, “The central government and its institutions,” 458-460.

the *narod*.³⁹ A *sobor* was far preferable, because, as he ambiguously asserted: while “men lie, a gathering does not lie.”⁴⁰ His argument, which was drawn from Slavophilic ideas, viewed a body composed of people from all segments of society that respected their own rank and the tsar’s autocratic authority as superior to a Western-style parliament. He believed the latter type of representation often led to political intrigue and selfish individualism. Critically for Suvorin, this idealized connection between tsar and people also bypassed the corps of bureaucrats and officials that had shown themselves so ignorant and inefficient.

The idea of convening a modern-day *zemskii sobor* had lingered in Suvorin’s mind since at least 1902. When Viacheslav Pleve ascended to interior minister that year, Suvorin had paid him a brief visit and apparently launched into a passionate speech about the institution. He lamented that a prior interior minister, Nikolai Pavlovich Ignat’ev, had been unsuccessful in pushing the idea of the *sobor* in the aftermath of tsar Alexander II’s assassination in 1881.⁴¹ He went further to insinuate that the *sobor* might hold the key to diffusing the domestic tensions that Pleve then faced. The hardened reactionary had no time for fanciful ideas about reviving medieval institutions, however, and laughed off the idea.⁴² Alexander III and the ultraconservative *Ober-Procuror* [Chief-Procurator] of the Holy Synod Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonotsev had assertively rebuffed Ignat’ev’s proposal in 1882, as well.⁴³ Nonetheless,

³⁹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 16, 1905.

⁴⁰ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 25, 1905.

⁴¹ Alexander II’s assassination brought a sudden end to Interior Minister Mikhail Tanielovich Loris-Melikov’s quasi-constitutionalist reforms in 1881 when the new archconservative tsar Alexander III replaced him with the more reactionary Ignat’ev. Though Loris-Melikov’s reforms sought to revamp the tsarist state and act through rule of law, he specifically ruled out the prospect of popular representation either on the Western parliamentary model or a consultative *Zemskii sobor*. Peter A. Zaionchkovsky, *The Russian Autocracy Under Crisis, 1878-1882*, Gary M. Hamburg trans. (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1979), 148. On Loris-Melikov’s program, see 145-189.

⁴² Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhtsa*, 282-283.

⁴³ Many in the government remained extremely wary of national representative institutions and of Ignat’ev’s idea in particular. They also considered it an odd, and perhaps demagogic, obsession aimed at bolstering his own power. The minister’s continued support of the idea facilitated his removal in May 1882. For Ignat’ev’s plans for a *Zemskii*

Suvorin persisted, speaking to Witte about it again that same year. In a letter regarding the *zemstvo* movement, he told his friend that a *zemskii sobor* could strengthen the autocracy by simultaneously drawing on the past and accounting for current contingencies. The autocracy must evolve to meet the needs of the present, he argued. Eschewing what he saw as the *zemstvos*'s drift toward unacceptable ideas, such as a constitution or parliament, which might restrain the tsar's power, he believed the *sobor* would strengthen the tsar and "make him a true autocrat."⁴⁴ The military disasters of 1904 and upheaval after Bloody Sunday thus brought this idea to the forefront of Suvorin's published writings.

While he gave scant details about the logistics of convening a *sobor*, he spoke often about what he felt to be its ideal demographic composition. For fear of excluding large swaths of the peasantry, he suggested making speaking knowledge of Russian, rather than a formal education, a primary requirement for participation.⁴⁵ Further, he contemplated restrictions on non-Christian subjects. Noting that Muslims made up 11% of the population, as much as Catholics and Protestants combined, he admitted, "excluding them would not be desirable." The empire's Jews, however, were a different story. Suvorin took a strong anti-Semitic line in his articles and recommended excluding Jews from the *sobor*.⁴⁶ Using common Russian stereotypes of Jews as intellectually and economically powerful yet deceitful, he implied that they would no doubt find a way to exert their influence in a constitutional system. "A constituent assembly is easy to imagine without the peasants, but never without the Jews," he asserted. Reaffirming his desire

sobor, and his tragi-comic attempts to implement them in 1881-1882, see Zaionchkovsky, *The Russian Autocracy in Crisis*, 287-303.

⁴⁴ "Pis'mo A. S. Suvorina S. Iu. Witte," in S. Iu. Witte, *Izbrannye trudy*, ed. M. Iu. Lachaeu (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010) 527.

⁴⁵ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, February 2, 1905.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

for peasant participation, he asserted that “a *Zemskii Sobor* without a significant number of peasants,” on the other hand, was “nonsense.”⁴⁷

Suvorin exalted the idea of older, simpler, and “purely Russian” elements forming the basis of Russian political and social life. His focus on the inclusion of the *narod* in his own conceptualization of an outdated political body as old as the autocracy harkened back to the romantic notions of tradition and community. His rhetoric paints a glorious picture of “the voice of the country reach[ing] the tsar’s throne in sincere, truthful, expression,” and “the whole country stand[ing] before the tsar, obedient to his sovereign power and ready to uphold the internal legal order and consolidate it in harmony with the Russian character.”⁴⁸ He kept this chorus up throughout January and February. The gathering ought to take place as soon as possible, he argued, as the unity and strength that would flow from it could both end the revolutionary turmoil and lead Russia to victory in the war.⁴⁹ The solution to these issues lay not in adopting alien ideas from Europe but in returning to the harmony of the pre-Petrine era. Adapting this native institution to contemporary Russia would mark its “maturity” and realization of its full potential. A *sobor* would bring about Russia’s “rebirth.”⁵⁰

Suvorin was not alone in pushing for a *zemskii sobor*. The crises of late 1904 and early 1905 saw the coalescence of several right wing political organizations that engaged with the idea. In Moscow, Count Pavel Sergeevich Sheremetev’s *Soiuz russkikh liudei* [Union of Russian Men] championed calling a *zemskii sobor*, and described it in the same romanticized and imprecise words as Suvorin. This small group of nobles and professors also thought a *sobor* could revitalize Russia by reuniting it with its supposedly harmonious past. Though the group

⁴⁷ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 25, 1905.

⁴⁸ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, January 16, 1905.

⁴⁹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 14, 1905.

⁵⁰ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 3, 1905.

never transitioned to duma politics as readily as groups such as V. A. Gringmut's Russian Monarchist Party, its members remained the political organization most devoted to the idea.⁵¹ Gringmut himself owned the archconservative *Moskovskie vedomosti*, but neither he, nor his newspaper, nor his party, had much time for a whimsical idea they believed could interfere with the autocrat's personal rule.⁵² Most conservatives feared any type of empire-wide popular assembly, even an ill-defined and purely consultative body like the one Suvorin and others proposed. They believed these assemblies would either gradually transform into legislating parliaments over time, or attempt to claim this power for themselves all at once.⁵³ Suvorin, therefore, remained the loudest voice in favor of the *sobor* among the empire's most prominent newspapers.

Suvorin and *Novoe vremia* were understandably ecstatic when Nicholas caved to popular pressure and issued a rescript on February 18 that announced plans to convene a national duma to help discuss and draft legislation. The tsar issued three important proclamations from Tsarskoe Selo that day. In the morning, he published a manifesto condemning the disorder and those calling for institutions based on "principles alien to our fatherland," such as a constitution and a legislature. That evening, he then issued an ukase to the Committee of Ministers, asking it to "examine and consider the ideas and suggestions presented... by private persons and institutions concerning improvements in the state organization and the betterment of the people's existence." Finally, he sent a rescript to the minister of the interior, instructing him to work up plans to gather "the worthiest people, trusted by the *narod* and chosen from among the population, to

⁵¹ Don Rawson, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34-44. For further positive opinions toward applying this romanticized notion of the *Zemskii sobor* to 1905 Russia, see V. I. Omelianchuk, "Parlamentarizm v ideologii rossiiskikh konservatorov nachala XX v.," *Voprosy istorii*, No. 2, (February, 2015): 13-35, esp. 16-17

⁵² Rawson, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905*, 21.

⁵³ Omelianchuk, "Parlamentarizm v ideologii rossiiskikh konservatorov," 17-19.

participate in the preliminary formulation and discussion of legislative proposals.”⁵⁴ Sviatopolk-Mirskii had resigned in exasperation on January 18, and Nicholas had replaced him with another moderate, the stodgy career bureaucrat Aleksandr Grigor’evich Bulygin. The new minister created a commission that spent six long months working on a document that would define the form of this gathering of “worthy people,” its duties, and authority. When finally approved in August, it granted an elected consultative body that could discuss laws but not approve them. Further, it could not propose changes to the governmental structure, and either the tsar or the State Council, which the tsar appointed, could easily overturn its decisions. Much like the ukase of the previous December, this offered too little to the restless populace. By then the public wanted a fully empowered constitutional legislature.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, the body announced by the so-called Bulygin Rescript seemed to fit Suvorin’s vision of a *zemskii sobor*. The idea of trusted Russian representatives from around the empire gathering to lend their talents to the tsar and help overcome the current tumult had been the centerpiece of this idea. Nicholas’ promises were vague, but so were *Novoe vremia*’s words about the *sobor*. In this way, it was easy for the newspaper to interpret the tsar’s promises as fulfilling the essence of its notion of a *zemskii sobor*.

Over the next week, Suvorin and his newspaper could hardly contain their jubilation and enthusiasm. The publisher proclaimed February 18, 1905 “the happiest day of [his] life,” and painted it as the culmination of all his hopes for Russia. His words on the rescript appear hyperbolic even against the purple prose of 1904. The day would be “remembered until the last Russian soul perishes,” he cried. It did not matter what name the new body carried; its affect would be the same as a *zemskii sobor*. It would represent the “experienced, sincere, [and]

⁵⁴ The rescript appeared under the imperial manifesto in *Novoe vremia* on February 19, 1905. See also, Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 112-113.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

incorruptible voices of the native land,” he exclaimed. “In all its maturity and splendor,” the gathering would be “like the morning sun, dispersing the clouds and fears of the night.”⁵⁶

Novoe vremia’s leading articles followed suit. “Thanks be to God,” an article from February 19 proclaimed, asserting that this concession left liberals and revolutionaries no reason to continue opposing the war. Now that a representative body would consult with the tsar and address domestic issues, all could openly advocate unconditionally “conducting the war to a victorious end.”⁵⁷ How could Russian soldiers shed their blood in Manchuria if their brothers in Petersburg still refused to work? Those continuing to strike in the empire’s cities undermined the war effort. The newspaper tried to calm tensions by explaining that the empire now had a clear and definite path for both internal reform and victory.⁵⁸ Russia must continue the war to maintain “peaceful prosperity” in the Pacific. Lastly, it again raised the issue of access to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, arguing that Russia must defend its naval bases on its eastern shores, lest access to the Pacific Ocean become as hindered as access to the Mediterranean. The ambiguous reforms the Bulygin Rescript of February 18 promised, thus, seemed enough to assuage some of *Novoe vremia*’s deepest worries about the revolutionary situation on the domestic front.

Novoe vremia received many reader letters in response to Suvorin’s comments on the proclamations of February 18. The number of letters purporting to originate from peasants warrants special attention. The nature of Suvorin’s calls for a *zemskii sobor* seems to have struck a chord with several of the peasantry’s primary concerns. He made sure to let his readers know. In a “Little Letter” on February 22, he spoke about the influx of peasant letters to *Novoe vremia*’s editorial office and construed them as fully supporting his take on the revolution and interested in his ideas about a *zemskii sobor*. Peasants did not understand why workers in cities

⁵⁶ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, February 19, 1905.

⁵⁷ “Vysochaishii rescript i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia,” *Novoe vremia*, February 19, 1905.

⁵⁸ “Manifest i vneshnaia politika,” *Novoe vremia*, February 20, 1905.

were demonstrating, he explained, but they understood the *sobor* and were enthusiastic about participating in it.⁵⁹ It is difficult to gauge whether any of these letter writers had any prior knowledge of the historical *Zemskii sobor*, though none of them challenged Suvorin's explanation of its composition or purview.⁶⁰ Many letters did share his feelings, but the overall scope of their attitudes complicate his romantic vision of all classes and *sosloviia* gathered in unity to aid tsar and motherland. While a number of these peasants welcomed his proposal that the *narod*'s representatives work with the tsar, many also expressed anger and hopelessness about conditions in the countryside, as well as skepticism at the possibility of real reform.

Perhaps the most common of these complaints centered on the inability of government bureaucracy to provide the tsar's subjects stability and safety in their daily lives. Much like Suvorin, these letters' writers blamed ministers and local bureaucrats for corruption and failure to execute the tsar's well-intentioned plans. Referring to a line in the Manifest of February 18 that reminded all government institutions and officers "of their oath... and calling for an increased vigilance in the protection of law, order, and security" one reader wondered why these bureaucrats needed such a reminder simply to do their job. Noting that the manifest had been read in every church and religious institution of the country and discussed in every newspaper and teahouse, he protested that neither increased law and order nor the bureaucracy's fulfillment of the tsar's promise of a *sobor* seemed forthcoming.⁶¹ Another letter, signed simply "the peasants of Voronezh" asserted that the police lacked sufficient resources to administer their districts. The "uncontrolled" government bureaucracy was "so out-of-date that even we small

⁵⁹ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, February 22, 1905.

⁶⁰ As Brooks has shown, Russian history was a common subject of the *lubki* prints popular with the peasantry, as well as in the works published by the Moscow and St. Petersburg Literacy Committees, which supported rural schooling in the 1890s. This, coupled with the expansion of periodicals aimed at lower class and peasant readers, raises the possibility that they might have been familiar with the idea of the *Zemskii sobor* prior to reading Suvorin's feuilletons. *When Russia Learned to Read*, 111-119, tables provided on 362, 364.

⁶¹ Anonymous to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 104.

people notice.”⁶² This atmosphere of distrust toward the dysfunctional government seems to have made Suvorin’s promise of some measure of participation sound all the sweeter to *Novoe vremia*’s rural readers.

Many readers also seem to have shared Suvorin’s joy at the February proclamations and his vision of a *zemskii sobor* as a “pure” Russian institution more suited to helping govern the empire than a liberal parliament. One letter repeated Suvorin’s own pronouncement that Russia had entered a “springtime” period where the return of the *sobor* would bring about the Empire’s revival. Another stated that the promise of a *zemskii sobor* had caused “the heavy nightmare that had weighed on the rural [*devernii*] *narod* to vanish, as if by magic.”⁶³ Both also harshly criticized the liberal revolutionaries calling for a constituent assembly. While this writer called republican values alien to the tsar-loving Russian people, another, going by the name “A Russian peasant,” put things more brusquely. “These crazy democrats need to realize that not everything is possible,” and their demands for Western democracy left most Russians “bewildered,” he explained. It seemed high time “peasants full of common sense” had their voices heard.⁶⁴

Some letters did not share Suvorin’s optimism, however. One reader, Semen Perepelits, wrote on behalf of 132 peasants in his village. He and his neighbors did not support a future *sobor* because they believed that such a gathering would not fix the situation in the countryside or turn the tide of the war. A *sobor* would do nothing but allow the “scoundrels” in local governments and city dumas a new way to scam the “simple, uneducated” peasantry. In these gatherings each already acted only for themselves and did not care for any others, “especially our

⁶² “Voronezhskie krest’iane” to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI f. 459, o.2, d. 677, l. 110

⁶³ “Russkii muzhik” to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 108; Peasant Ivan to Suvorin, February 22, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 112.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

poor brother peasants,” he continued.⁶⁵ A peasant from the Yaroslavl region agreed, writing that the government was not meeting the *narod*’s “needs and demands” and doing nothing to alleviate the grinding poverty of the countryside.⁶⁶ This skepticism confronted Suvorin’s dreams with the harsh reality of rural life. The feeling carried over into letters on other issues as well.

Regarding the demographic makeup of the proposed *sobor*, many letter writers steadfastly stood with Suvorin’s anti-Semitic line. A number launched into vicious, epithet-laced tirades against the empire’s Jews, employing the same negative stereotypes Suvorin used to justify excluding them. “The peasants of Voronezh” explained that they very much desired the assembly to include people from all classes of Russia, but only if the members were “pure Russians,” and adherents to Orthodoxy. Calling Jews “vampires,” their letter went on to accuse them of gaining their livelihoods through insolence and deceit at the expense of ethnic Russians. If this *sobor* were to become a “genuine helper to the sovereign,” it continued, it ought to be built entirely on truth, something apparently only “pure” Russians could provide.⁶⁷ Others, like Semen Perepelits, lumped Jewish landlords together with liberal intelligentsia bastards [*svolochi*] that openly rejoiced at the misfortune of the Fatherland in the war with Japan and incited the workers to revolt.⁶⁸ Suvorin’s support of these anti-Jewish sentiments and advocacy for peasant participation in the future consultative body made him a magnet for such letters. Peasant readers often followed these anti-Semitic tirades with language imploring him to use his stature in the publishing world and connections to the imperial government to keep making the case for a *zemskii sobor*.

⁶⁵ Semen Perepelits to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 108.

⁶⁶ “Iaroslavskii krest’ianin” to Suvorin, February 28, 1905, RGALI, f. 450, o.2, d. 674, lls. 13-14.

⁶⁷ “Voronezhskii krest’iane” to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI f. 459, o.2, d. 677, l. 110.

⁶⁸ Semen Perepelits to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 108. As Maureen Perrie has noted, this association of Jews with liberals and students was common among peasants in 1905. In parts of the countryside even the word student itself was coming to have negative political connotations. Maureen Perrie, “The Russian Peasant Movement of 1905-1907: Its Social Composition and Revolutionary Significance,” *Past & Present*, no. 57 (November, 1972), 135.

Finally, other letters painted a frightening picture of the countryside quite at odds with Suvorin's rosy image of poor but virtuous peasants waiting for the opportunity to lend their voices to the national cause. Commenting on the conditions in her village, a peasant named G. Kamina said that Suvorin's advocacy for "the peasants to participate in the *zemskii sobor*," if heeded, "would save maybe thousands of victims from the bursting of the people's patience." To underscore the direness of the situation, Kamina went on to relate a disturbing conversation with a seventy-year-old peasant man about the revolutionary disturbances in Khar'kov. "We peasants missed our chance when they killed the tsar liberator," the old man explained, referring to the assassination of Alexander II by terrorists in 1881. With a "determined expression" that horrified the writer, he continued: "we should have massacred the landowners then." Clearly many in the peasantry harbored deep anger and bitterness toward their local superiors that Suvorin's fantasies of the *sobor* could not soften. The letter ended with a prescient concern for the following months as the revolution spiraled ever further out of control. "And all these poor Commissions!" she exclaimed, referring to the lethargic government bodies convened to formulate and carry out the reforms of the February proclamations. "They are slow," she continued, "and Russia is in terrible danger."⁶⁹

The situation in the countryside by 1905 was indeed volatile.⁷⁰ While the immensity of the peasantry—still seventy percent of the total population in the early 1900s—makes it impossible to describe conditions in every village across the empire, a number of important trends characterized the mood in rural areas.⁷¹ The abolition of serfdom in the 1860s had given peasants only a portion of the land they had once farmed and redemption payments to the

⁶⁹ Peasant G. Kamina to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 118.

⁷⁰ For a history of the Russian peasantry as whole, see David Moon, *The Russian Peasantry: The World the Peasants Made, 1600-1930* (New York: Longman, 1999).

⁷¹ The population statistic is from Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 26.

government on the lands that they did receive with their emancipation. Explosive population growth in the late nineteenth century made land scarcer, which in turn led to increased reliance on renting or wage labor on gentry or new peasant-owned estates. (Much of the landed gentry suffered from the end of serfdom as well and by 1905 the class as a whole had sold almost a third of its land, usually to peasants). This only benefitted a small number of the peasantry and did not keep pace with the population growth, however. Further, in more productive regions where farming remained profitable and more gentry held onto their land, such as Ukraine, the transition to industrial practices pushed more peasants off their soil and into wage labor on large-scale farms. This made much of the empire's peasantry extremely poor and resentful of local landowners.⁷²

Increased industrialization in the cities and rising opportunities for education affected the countryside as well.⁷³ Many peasants migrated to the cities to work seasonal factory jobs that supplemented their family's income in the village. In some cases this exposed them to the radical ideas of parties such as the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRs), which called for the immediate redistribution of land to the peasantry. The party had made inroads into the countryside, and some scholars argue that a rash of peasant raids on landed estates in Ukraine during a famine 1902 owed partly to the spread of its propaganda in the region.⁷⁴ These ideologies did not factor into the rural unrest of 1905 as much as the poverty and resentment toward landowners, however. The increased mobility and spread of information that industrialization brought to the

⁷² Maureen Perrie, "The Russian Peasant Movement," 123-125. Robert Edelman, *Proletarian Peasants: The Revolution of 1905 in Russia's Southwest* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 40-47.

⁷³ On the growth of literacy in the Russian countryside in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Benjamin Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) and Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 35-58.

⁷⁴ Maureen Perrier, *Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party from its origins through the revolutions of 1905-1907* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 53-57.

countryside, as well as basic education in *zemstvo* schools gave many peasants a clearer sense of the direness of their situation, as well.⁷⁵

Lastly, major crop failures caused exceptionally poor winter and summer harvests in 1905. Land hunger now became more acute. With most of the army off in Northeast Asia and the government floundering, many peasants now saw the chance to finally repartition all land in the countryside in their favor.⁷⁶ Newspapers had quickly brought the news of Bloody Sunday to many rural areas. Though peasant violence and attacks on landed estates began to flare up in February, it did not start gaining real momentum until the spring thaw set in that April.⁷⁷

Peasant readers commenting on the manifest and rescript of February 18 were writing Suvorin just as the countryside was beginning to smolder. Irrespective of their views of the war or his *zemskii sobor*, almost all reader correspondents expressed undercurrents of anger and desperation. These letters represent the opinions of only the miniscule subset of the peasantry that had the means and inclination to write to *Novoe vremia*'s dominant figure. For this reason, they cannot be taken as typical or indicative of peasant attitudes in early 1905 as a whole. Yet, they do provide valuable feedback about how at least some of the newspaper's peasant readers received Suvorin's ideas. Their presence in his archival collection and the occasional marks he left on them in his characteristic sloppy pencil indicate that he probably read them. Thus, he was not fabricating the peasant letters he mentioned in his "Little Letter" articles in 1905. He was increasingly listening to only a subset of their opinions, however, as his writings over the course of the year will make clear.

⁷⁵ Perrie, "The Russian Peasant Movement," 124-125.

⁷⁶ Edelman, *Proletarian Peasants*, 84-85.

⁷⁷ According to the work of S. M. Dubrovskii, the number of peasant disorders in early 1905 broke down as follows: 17 in January, 109 in February, 103 in March, 144 in April, and 299 in May. Quoted in Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 162.

The War's Final Catastrophes

The war quickly intruded on *Novoe vremia*'s enthusiasm as Kuropatkin finally brought his full force to bear against Japan outside of Mukden. By early 1905, reinforcements and materiel had finally begun to arrive in Manchuria in sufficient numbers for the supreme commander to stop stalling. He now had close to 300,000 troops at his disposal and decided to act. In early February he ordered an attack. The battle lasted three weeks and saw each side send over 270,000 troops into combat near Russia's supply point at Mukden.⁷⁸ The line held against Marshall Oyama's counterattacks for almost two weeks, but by the third, the Japanese started to outflank armies on the western end. Kuropatkin ordered his troops to disengage and then, eventually, retreat. In the process, a large portion of his forces devolved into a disorderly rout. Had he continued to press his attack, he might have broken the Japanese line, and had he ordered a full retreat sooner, he might have prevented the rout.⁷⁹ The battle proved devastating: Russian suffered 90,000 casualties and Japan 70,000. Oyama had wrecked Kuropatkin's forces but did not manage to deliver the deathblow. With his troops and supply lines exhausted, the Japanese commander could not stop the bulk of Russian troops from retreating northward to their next major supply point at Harbin.⁸⁰ Kuropatkin's army had survived, but it had suffered a decisive defeat in the largest land battle of the war.

The defeat crushed army morale and doomed Kuropatkin as supreme commander. During the rout, soldiers abandoned their equipment and, in some cases, mutinied against their officers.⁸¹ Within two weeks Nicholas called a war council to discuss Kuropatkin's fate. The commander had no real allies at the council, and on March 13 it advised the tsar to relieve him in favor of

⁷⁸ Steinberg, "Operational Overview," in *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective*, 124-126.

⁷⁹ Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 134.

⁸⁰ Steinberg, "Operational Overview," 126.

⁸¹ Steinberg, *All the Tsar's Men*, 144.

General Linevich, who had led Russian troops during the Boxer Uprising. He took their advice. The disgraced leader secured Nicholas' permission to remain in the theater of war, but only as subordinate commander of Linevich's first army.⁸² Kuropatkin set about trying to salvage his reputation and defend his decisions almost immediately. In April, he telegraphed Suvorin to ask him not to print an interview he had given to one of *Novoe vremia*'s correspondents. He feared that he had spoken too candidly about the difficult situation in Manchuria and did not trust the correspondent's assurances of anonymity.⁸³ He made more substantial efforts after the war. In 1910, he sought to clear his name by publishing a three-volume work on the conflict with Japan.⁸⁴ In the aftermath of the battle, however, Kuropatkin appeared almost entirely discredited.

In the days following the defeat at Mukden, *Novoe vremia* tried to comfort its readers and somehow keep up support for the cause. *Novoe vremia* had put great stock in Kuropatkin as a commander and tactician, but this fiasco had proved this image incorrect.⁸⁵ No longer able to laud him as the motherland's great military hero, the paper calmly acknowledged that, though still beloved by the troops, Kuropatkin's time as supreme commander was over. Russia now needed a new military leader and a new army.⁸⁶ Suvorin concurred. In his "Little Letter" following the battle he compared it to Austerlitz, where in 1805 Napoleon had smashed the armies of Russia and Austria in a single day. Kuropatkin had held for fifteen days without calling for a truce, he reminded readers. Suvorin shifted blame for the loss to individual commanders, but still, he recognized that the army had been unprepared for the battle and that Kuropatkin did not have the "strength of genius" required to defeat the enemy.⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid., 144-145.

⁸³ Kuropatkin to Suvorin, April 28, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 1, d. 2178, l. 4-5.

⁸⁴ A. N. Kuropatkin, *Zadachi Russkoi armii* (S. Peterburg: V. A. Berezovskii, 1910).

⁸⁵ Kuropatkin's abovementioned writings largely offered a defense of his actions.

⁸⁶ "Knight commander," *Novoe vremia*, March 5, 1905.

⁸⁷ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, March 3, 1905.

Britain and the U.S. called on Russia to pursue peace negotiations.⁸⁸ In addition to questioning Anglo-American motives, the paper drew the familiar comparison with Napoleon's capture of Moscow in 1812. If Russia had sued for peace after Napoleon occupied the city it would have denied the empire its triumphant march into Paris two years later, the paper stressed.⁸⁹ It needed to draw such parallels to make a case for continuing the war.

The devastating loss at Mukden had quickly taken the wind out of *Novoe vremia's* sails, however. While liberal publications, such as Moscow's *Russkoe slovo*, saw it as reason to redouble their crusade to end the war, Suvorin's newspaper went back to old tropes in search of excuses.⁹⁰ The newspaper had continued to scold Russians in Petersburg for striking while the battle raged, but the news of defeat caused it to begin shifting blame outwards.⁹¹ In its aftermath, the paper returned to the recurrent issue of China's role in facilitating Japanese military maneuvers. This time, it asserted that Japan had gained the upper hand in part by using the supposedly neutral Imperial Chinese Railway to bypass Russia's western flank. They had also reportedly occupied the neutral city of Xinmin in early March, using it as a base of operations for the rest of the battle.⁹² As an aside, the article also noted that the railway itself enjoyed British funding.⁹³ These actions constituted a "flagrant violation of Chinese neutrality." Moreover, the paper claimed, it was respect for the city's neutrality that had prevented the Russian army from sending cavalry to help guard the region. Referring back to the incident on board the *Reshitel'nii*

⁸⁸ Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 525-526.

⁸⁹ "Chto zhe dal'she, voina ili mir?" *Novoe vremia*, March 2, 1905.

⁹⁰ McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 187-188.

⁹¹ "Pervostepennye sobytiia i vtorostepennye deiateli," *Novoe vremia*, February 23, 1905.

⁹² This seems to have been a rumor, since Japanese forces had actually taken Kuropatkin's western flank by tricking him into sending this flank's cavalry to bolster the Russian center. Further, Japanese general Gentaru Kodama's forces would have had to cross the Liao River to their west, which they did not do during the battle. Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 468-469.

⁹³ It even printed "Imperial Chinese Railway" in English to hammer home the point.

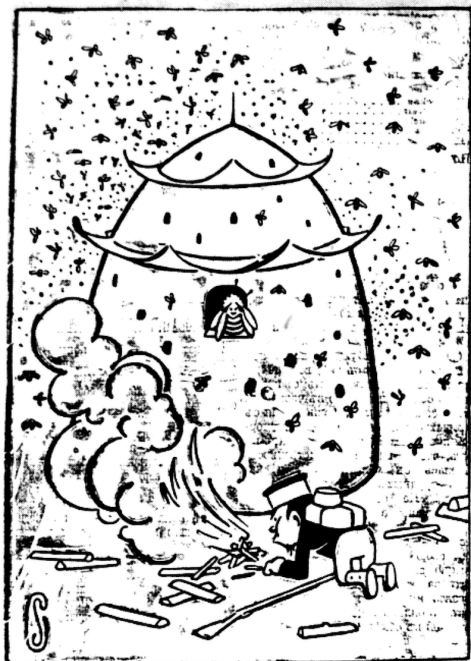
of the previous fall,⁹⁴ it decried both Japan's repeated disrespect for Chinese neutrality and China's "impotence" at preventing such incidents from continuing.⁹⁵ If this state of affairs continued, it protested, perhaps Russia ought to renege on its 1902 agreement with China to evacuate its troops from Manchuria during peacetime.⁹⁶ That a disregard of this very agreement had in many ways precipitated the Russo-Japanese conflict seemed lost on *Novoe vremia*.

In March and April, Sokolovskii joined in with a pair of cartoons lampooning the Sino-Japanese relationship. In Figure 34, he draws a Japanese soldier of diminutive stature (as usual) attempting to smoke out a giant beehive. The queen bee—Dowager Empress Cixi—looks on in amusement while her workers swarm. Japan continued to take advantage of and antagonize the Chinese for its own ends under the guise of Asian friendship. As the cartoon implies, this situation cannot continue indefinitely, since the Chinese bees could easily overwhelm the lone Japanese soldier. In another cartoon (Figure 35) Sokolovskii shows Japan's take on the so-called "Open Door" policy that allowed the Great Powers to maintain their "spheres of influence" on Chinese territory. The door in a Chinese wall stands open, but a grotesque samurai stands guard just inside, literally armed to the teeth. Japan again looks to overstep its bounds, the picture insinuates, by dominating China under the guise of comradeship. Once again, Japan sought to break international agreements for its own benefit.

⁹⁴ Covered in chapter four.

⁹⁵ "Kitaiskii neitralitet," *Novoe vremia*, February 28, 1905.

⁹⁶ "Kitaiskii neitralitet," *Novoe vremia*, March 12, 1905.



— Я не боюсь — меня знают.
(Япония и Китай).
(Карикатура С. Ф. Соколовского).

Figure 34: "I'm not scared, they know me (Japan and China)."



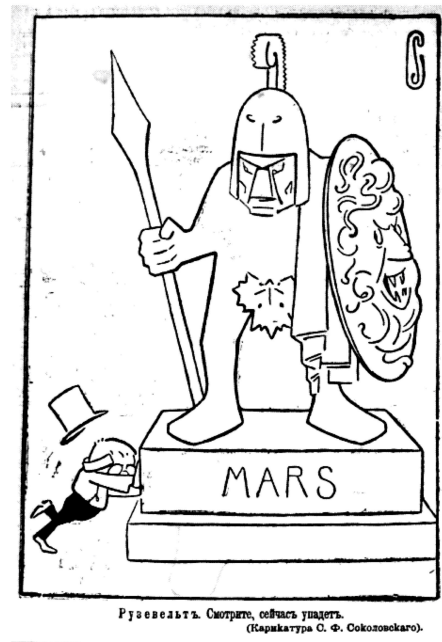
Двери, конечно, остаются открытыми.
(Карикатура С. Ф. Соколовского).

Figure 35: "The doors, of course, will remain open."



«Business» притупляет.
(Карикатура С. Ф. Соколовского).

Figure 36: "Business" compels it.



Рузвельта. Смотрите, сейчас упадет.
(Карикатура С. Ф. Соколовского).

Figure 37: Roosevelt. Watch, I'll knock it down.

Other cartoons poked fun at the United States for attempting to broker peace between the two empires. In these, the U.S. appears both predacious and ineffectual. Figure 36, ““Business’ compels it,” satirizes Uncle Sam as an angel floating in the sky. He carries an olive branch in his arms, ready to swoop down and offer peace, but only when it fits with U.S. interests. In late 1903, *Novoe vremia* had wondered aloud whether Britain and the United States were pushing Japan to war with Russia in hopes that the two would destroy each other. With Russia’s Manchurian army routed, predatory nations, like the U.S., saw their chance to permanently damage Russia with a dishonorable peace settlement. As Figure 37 shows, however, the US had a monumental task before it if it wanted to broker such a peace. The cartoon depicts President Theodore Roosevelt as a tiny figure straining with all his might to push a large statue of the Roman god of war, Mars. Despite Roosevelt’s assertion that he can topple the sculpture, it does not budge. Clearly, United States’ posturing and opportunism was all talk.

Novoe vremia kept championing the war and began to increasingly insist that reform and victory could only be obtained together. To this end, it made sharper criticisms of the government alongside its flowery rhetoric about sacrifice and fighting to the end. Leading articles continued to present Europe as ungrateful that Russia was “taking up the sword to protect European, Christian culture,” against a “resurgent Asia,” in the form of Japan.⁹⁷ Suvorin spouted that Russia had not truly lost at Mukden, since victory existed not on the battlefield but in the *narod*’s spirit. He remained steadfast against the prospect of a “shameful peace.” The issue for him lay in rekindling the Russian imagination through a unifying purpose, i.e., a *zemskii sobor*.⁹⁸ Against the backdrop of recent events, however, the paper began to more openly complain about Nicholas’ government. Suvorin bemoaned the slow pace of action after the proclamations of

⁹⁷ “Aziatskaia opasnost’,” *Novoe vremia*, April 1, 1905.

⁹⁸ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, March 3, 1905.

February 18. The government suffered from “executive impotence,” and its silence about domestic reform weighed on the Russian people more than the defeat of their army.⁹⁹ Articles urgently called for the publication of diplomatic documents explaining how the war had begun. The type of redoubled effort required for victory could only emerge if the Russian people could “establish a degree of responsibility for each of the participants in this great tragedy.”¹⁰⁰

The paper leveled an even more embarrassing accusation a few weeks later. In leading articles from April 24 and May 7, *Novoe vremia* cited an anonymous report alleging the ministry of foreign affairs had had only one employee who could speak Japanese at the time of the break in diplomatic relations. The empire possessed schools that taught Eastern languages, the newspaper explained; the Ministry simply was not using them.¹⁰¹ This lack of skilled agents slowed the flow of information to the Ministry and caused Russian intelligence to lag well behind more efficient foreign ministries, such as Britain’s. Training for those entering the Russian Foreign Service fell far short when it came to Eastern languages, the paper claimed. The May 7 article went so far as to state that the foreign ministry “had absolutely no people familiar with Eastern languages.”¹⁰²

Since Bloody Sunday, *Novoe vremia* had come to the chief bureau’s attention a few times for its coverage of revolutionary events and increasingly pointed criticisms of members and branches of the imperial government. It had yet to face any action regarding its reportage on foreign affairs, however. The paper was becoming bolder, as interactions with the bureau show. In February, for example, editor Bulgakov had felt confident enough to ask the bureau’s head to

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ “Voina i ee smysl’,” *Novoe vremia*, March 14, 1905.

¹⁰¹ “O vostochnykh iazykakh,” *Novoe vremia*, April 24, 1905.

¹⁰² “Diplomaty i vostochnye iazyki,” *Novoe vremia*, May 7, 1905. On Russian orientology and study of East Asian Languages in the late imperial period see Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism*, 93-198.

forgive *Novoe vremia* minor “accidents” when it came to reporting on banned topics. He even asked it to “keep in mind the paper’s ‘consistently calm and appropriate orientation’ when it broached a topic the bureau found unsuitable. It had not directly violated any government orders.”¹⁰³ In the current revolutionary atmosphere, the government needed all the allies in the press that it could get. *Novoe vremia*’s staff seemed well aware of this necessity.

Still, such a direct allegation against the foreign ministry’s expertise in Eastern languages caught Minister Lamzdorf’s attention, and he soon contacted the chief bureau to rectify the situation. The he had already attempted to censure *Novoe vremia* earlier that March regarding an article criticizing German activity in Morocco, but the bureau had not found proper grounds to act.¹⁰⁴ This time, however, the newspaper stepped over a line, and the foreign minister won a measure of restitution. In a memorandum to Minister of Internal Affairs Bulygin, Lamzdorf refuted the newspaper’s assertion that the foreign ministry lacked agents with Eastern language skills and offered employee records to back his position.¹⁰⁵ The censorship bureau consented and compelled *Novoe vremia* to print a statement repudiating the article’s claims.¹⁰⁶

On May 14, *Novoe vremia* ran the refutation. The foreign ministry’s statement listed its employees that “had studied Eastern languages” as consisting of thirty-two persons at its Petersburg office, eighty-four stationed in the Middle East and Central Asia, and fifty-one in the Far East. Further, the ministry’s office in Port Arthur always had “two or three” persons on staff that knew Chinese. This ought to prove that, contrary to the newspaper’s reports, the foreign ministry always possessed “a sufficient number of specialists... familiar with Eastern

¹⁰³ In this instance, Bulgakov was specifically asking forbearance for *Novoe vremia*’s “accidental” publication of banned telegrams detailing the arrest of symbolist writer Leonid Andreev. Vasilii Semonovich Adikaevskii, Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pechati internal memorandum, February 12, 1905, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 251.

¹⁰⁴ Lamzdorf to Bulygin, March 16 1905, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, l. 255; Bel’gard to Lamzdorf, March 18, 1905, RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 257.

¹⁰⁵ Lamzdorf to Bulygin, May 3, 1905, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 289.

¹⁰⁶ Bel’gard to Gartvig, May 7, 1905, RGIA f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 290.

languages.”¹⁰⁷ As in the past, Lamzdorf took perceived affronts to his and his ministry’s honor quite seriously.

But *Novoe vremia*’s worries about language training did have basis. In the second half of the nineteenth century, only the St. Petersburg University’s faculty of Oriental Languages offered courses in Chinese and Japanese. At the turn of the twentieth century it had nine professors and enrolled a little under two hundred of the university’s two thousand students. While it had a disproportionally high number of students and resources compared to other faculties there, Chinese and Japanese were only two of the many languages it offered.¹⁰⁸ Further, though the faculty often served as a pipeline to service in the Foreign Ministry, the government had not substantially invested in the study of Japan or the Japanese language in the 1890s and 1900.¹⁰⁹

Novoe vremia refused to drop the issue. The next day it called the ministry’s refutation of the paper’s claims about the dearth of Japanese language speakers in the foreign service unsatisfactory. “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is trying to prove that it has many ‘persons having studied(?) Eastern languages,’” but the newspaper’s report had not said that.¹¹⁰ The offending article spoke of “the shortage of not ‘persons’ but of *full-time employees* [*shtatnykh chinovnikov*], and not ‘having studied,’ but *knowing* Eastern languages,” the newspaper argued.¹¹¹ The figures the ministry provided had not made this distinction clear. The ministry’s response did not actually address the paper’s contentions. The empire’s adversaries “knew Russian well,” it asserted, but apparently “not single person” currently employed at the foreign

¹⁰⁷ “Manchzhuriia i Bosnia-Gertsegovina,” *Novoe vremia*, May 14, 1905. A copy of the refutation can also be found in RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, lls. 292-293.

¹⁰⁸ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism*, 182, 197.

¹⁰⁹ A professor at the Oriental faculty later claimed that this had meant that when relations deteriorated in 1903 the Foreign Ministry had had no fully trained Japanese specialists on hand. Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient*, 79.

¹¹⁰ Question mark in parentheses appears in original text.

¹¹¹ Emphasis original.

ministry could read Japanese. The paper concluded by pressing the ministry to refute this.¹¹² It did not immediately respond.

Novoe vremia continued to push the issue, however, publishing an unflattering letter to the editor from Vladimir Viktorovich Korsakov, the resident physician for the Russian consulate in Beijing, a few weeks later.¹¹³ Korsakov spoke to the paper's claims, explaining that in recent years he had seen many vacancies for Chinese language specialists at the consulate remain unfilled. Unfortunately, once arriving, any new recruits had little opportunity to continue their language study between administrative duties and frequent business trip to other consulates.¹¹⁴ Beyond simple rumors, *Novoe vremia* now had purported firsthand evidence of the foreign ministry's dearth of officials fluent in Eastern languages.

Count Lamzdorf's office contacted the chief bureau the next day to demand a refutation of these claims.¹¹⁵ In its statement, the ministry explained that it filled any vacancies in the Beijing consulate as soon as possible, and that a smaller number of students owed to the "exceptional conditions of the time." Regarding Korsakov's claim that language study ceased for students once they reached the consulate, it countered that their work in Beijing constituted a continuation of this training. At the consulate, these students maintained "close contact with the population" while carrying out their duties, it argued, "and therefore get the opportunity to practically apply and improve the knowledge they have acquired at the University."¹¹⁶ The ministry wanted to make it clear to the paper's readers that its diplomatic corps suffered no such

¹¹² "Manchzhurskie tamozhni i iapontsy," *Novoe vremia*, May 15, 1905.

¹¹³ Korsakov wrote for *Novoe vremia* under the pseudonym "*Pekinets* [A resident of Beijing]."

¹¹⁴ *Pekinets*, "Pis'mo k redatoru," *Novoe vremia*, June 4, 1905.

¹¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Bel'gard, June 7, 1905, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 300.

¹¹⁶ Refutation to June 4, 1905, *Novoe vremia* article, June 7, 1905, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, lls. 301-302.

shortcomings. The chief bureau agreed to the foreign ministry's request and compelled the newspaper to print the refutation.¹¹⁷

The articles making these claims were a part of a larger trend in *Novoe vremia*'s reportage on the war. Others, such as Men'shikov's "Do we have a navy?" had taken a similar tack, bringing to light what it felt were difficult truths about shortcomings that the motherland needed to face in order to better itself. Despite its intentions, the paper always earned official censure when it printed articles offering these sentiments.

In spring 1905, with forces approaching total defeat in Northeast Asia and the path to internal reform uncertain, Suvorin went even further down this path both privately and in print. In his response to Mukden, he had offered his usual grandiloquence about the need to continue the war effort. He also took a critical tone toward Minister Sviatopolk-Mirskii. He had regularly offered polite critiques of defunct officials, such as the now effectively powerless Witte.¹¹⁸ But his words about the former minister of the internal affairs were direct and bordering on condemnatory. He wrote that during their meeting on January 11, Sviatopolk-Mirskii had told Suvorin and the other publishers that the ministry had known of Gapon's plan and the size of his movement days before the events of January 9. Yet, Suvorin asserted, it had misunderstood the severity of the situation in the capital, and not taken the demonstration seriously enough.¹¹⁹ Despite the minister's secret police and informants, he argued, the press had had a better understanding of the atmosphere in St. Petersburg just prior to the massacre than the interior minister. Repeating *Novoe vremia*'s earlier refrain, he argued that if the press had had full freedom to report on the strike movement in the first days of the month there would have been no

¹¹⁷ Chief Bureau of Press Affairs to editorial office of *Novoe vremia*, June 7, 1905, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 303.

¹¹⁸ As noted, Witte held the title "Chairman of the Committee of Ministers." In reality, Nicholas presided over the committee, giving the chairman little actual authority.

¹¹⁹ As Sablinsky shows, this had in fact been the case. *The Road to Bloody Sunday*, 206-210.

Bloody Sunday. This was yet another example of how disconnected the government was from the lives of its subjects.¹²⁰

While articles in *Novoe vremia* continued to speak in grandiose language about the war and the importance of calling a *zemskii sobor* in the weeks following Mukden, Suvorin suffered an internal crisis.¹²¹ This shows most clearly in a distressed and critical letter he wrote Witte on March 18. He had wanted to speak to his old friend “warmly and sincerely” but was in too great a state of agitation over the war. He could only be blunt: “My opinion of you has always been the same. You are the smartest and most gifted person among all state officials in the last 15 years. And that is why you are the most to blame for the situation in the Far East.” Lamzdorf and his immediate predecessor, Count Mikhail Nikolaevich Murav’ev, lacked the ability and imagination to do anything beyond follow orders. Witte had therefore been the only person capable of rebuffing Bezobrazov and the belligerent faction that ultimately pushed Japan to declare war. “You could have dispersed this gang of scoundrels or put it in its place,” Suvorin exclaimed painfully, “you could have, could have, could have.” And yet, for some reason, Witte had failed.¹²²

Worse, Suvorin fumed, since Witte did not wish war with Japan he had not helped the empire prepare for that contingency. If he had allocated the state funds used for the commercial center and railway terminus at Dal’nii to fortify and provision Port Arthur instead, perhaps the war might have played out quite differently, he asserted. He admitted knowing little about Japan before the war and for this reason had been overly sure of Russia’s martial superiority. The events of the past year had shown the backwardness of the military, however. Witte should have

¹²⁰ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, March 3, 1905.

¹²¹ Suvorin attempted to offer stirring words about the perseverance of the Russian fighting spirit and the benefits of calling the Zemskii Sobor in “Little Letters” from March 3, 5, 15, and 16, while *Novoe vremia* chimed in on the Sobor in the April 6 articles “Peremeny v angliiskikh vzgliadakh” and “Vyborakh v zemskii sobor.”

¹²² Suvorin to Witte, March 18, 1905, RGIA, f. 1622, o. 1, d. 470, lls. 1-2.

prepared for war, not rested on the idea that he could steer events according to his own peaceful calculations. “The intelligent people must answer for events,” he wrote, “not the fools.” As the most capable minister, it had been Witte’s business to work harder to steer Russia away from catastrophe. The government had ceased to function, he somberly concluded. The “phenomenal incompetence” of Russia’s ministers now assured that a new catastrophe was on the horizon.¹²³ Suvorin had expressed these sentiments in his diary throughout 1904. The extent of the crisis in early 1905 seems to have finally pushed him to confront Witte.

As chairman of the committee of ministers, Witte had limited access to the levers of government power during the war and the first months of the revolutionary crisis. He played a peripheral role in the disappointing ukase of December 14, but the proclamations of February 18 soon overshadowed the committee’s work on the ukase’s vague promises. Witte then had little to do with the implementation of the Bulygin Rescript.¹²⁴ In contrast to his overwhelming influence before 1903, his work as Committee Chairman confined him to more mundane administrative matters and infrequent meetings with the tsar. In his memoirs, Witte lamented that he had been forced into a position where he could only observe the disasters of a war that he claimed to have done everything at his disposal to forestall.¹²⁵

Witte responded to Suvorin’s letter promptly. After stating that he “was never angry at people’s opinions” he offered a justification for his actions during the lead-up to the war. Despite the publisher’s accusations, Witte explained that he had not concocted the idea for Dal’nii and he had certainly not intentionally put it above Port Arthur in his considerations for the Far East. Moreover, he had been as adamantly against the lease of Dal’nii as of Port Arthur. As to Suvorin’s claim that he alone could have prevented the war, Witte had a simple answer. How

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 416.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 369.

could he have halted the path to war or prepared Russia for its possibility if he could not even keep his job as finance minister? The issue had been beyond his control, he explained. His response ended by pointing to *Novoe vremia*'s call for the publication of diplomatic documents from before the war in an article a few days prior.¹²⁶ Diplomatic documents from 1903 would show that he had done everything within his power to prevent the war, he argued. These documents needed to be published, he concluded.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, Rozhestvenskii's fleet came ever closer to the theater of combat. At the end of March, *Novoe vremia* printed leading articles that celebrated the fleet's arrival at Singapore and offered a large map of the South China Sea.¹²⁸ Reflecting on the upcoming confrontation, the paper predicted that Rozhestvenskii's "meeting with the Japanese fleet in the Chinese Sea will be one of the most serious and decisive events of this terrible war."¹²⁹ *Novoe vremia* had been one of the earliest voices in the Russian press to push for the Baltic fleet to undertake its journey. As the critical moment approached, it offered almost daily commentary, if even to simply to inform readers that there was no news on the fleet. On May 14, it finally caught wind of an imminent naval engagement. At the end of its leading article that day, it published a brief report on telegrams that indicated Japanese and Russian ships were preparing to mobilize for battle.¹³⁰ Two days later it told readers "The hour [had] come," and promised forthcoming news of a decisive confrontation.¹³¹

The awful premonitions of Suvorin, his readers, and Rozhestvenskii himself were realized in the narrow channel between Korea and Japan on May 14 and 15. With the Russian

¹²⁶ He refers to the article "Voina i ee smysl'," *Novoe vremia*, March 14, 1905.

¹²⁷ Witte to Suvorin, March 19, 1905. RGALI, f. 459, o. 1, d. 719, lls. 135-136.

¹²⁸ "Ob eskadre admirala Rozhestvenskogo," *Novoe vremia*, March 28, 1905; "Singapur!..." *Novoe vremia*, March 29, 1905; the map appears in *Novoe vremia*, March 31, 1905.

¹²⁹ "Ob eskadre admirala Rozhestvenskogo," *Novoe vremia*, March 28, 1905.

¹³⁰ "Manchzhuriia i Bosnia-Gertsogovina," *Novoe vremia*, May 14, 1905.

¹³¹ "Chas nastal...", *Novoe vremia*, May 16, 1905.

ships at Port Arthur destroyed during the siege, the Second Pacific Squadron sought to link up with the remaining vessels at Vladivostok. Admiral Togo intercepted them, however, as they passed between Japan and the island of Tsushima. After an intense series of encounters, Togo smashed Rozhdestvenskii's fleet.¹³² In a feat of tactical brilliance, Togo managed to maneuver his ships so that they "crossed the T" of the Russian line. As the Russian ships steamed ahead in single file, Japanese ships shifted to face the queues perpendicularly, allowing all of their vessels to launch broadsides while only the front few Russian ships could return fire. The maneuver obliterated the Russian squadron.¹³³ Of the entire fleet, only three ships limped to Vladivostok. All other Russian vessels were destroyed, incapacitated, or seized. Worse, Rozhdestvenskii had been wounded and captured as well.¹³⁴ The defeat was total.¹³⁵

News of the battle trickled in slowly, but even the earliest reports seemed to confirm that Russia had suffered a major loss. *Novoe vremia* described Rozhdestvenskii as a tragic hero who, despite being outnumbered and thousands of miles from his motherland, bravely did his duty.¹³⁶ "No words of comfort can be found," Suvorin said in his elegy for the lost fleet, lamenting that "all [has been] crushed by the horrific drama at sea." These sailors had joined the ill-fated mission knowing full well the difficulties they faced. "Many said 'we are going to our death,'" he intoned, but nonetheless undertook the long perilous journey because of their "devotion to the motherland and its glory."¹³⁷ The annihilation of the Second Pacific fleet now meant Russia must fight with only one hand, another leading article explained. The paper offered readers the minor consolation that Russia had already fought most of the war handicapped, as the First Pacific Fleet

¹³² For an hour-by-hour account of the battle, see Pleshakov, *The Tsar's Last Armada*, chapters 11, 12, and 14.

¹³³ Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 501-508; Westwood, *Russia Against Japan*, 146.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹³⁵ J. N. Westwood compiles numerous eyewitness accounts of the battle, as well as the voyage that preceded it in *Witnesses of Tsushima* (Tallahassee: The Diplomatic Press, 1970).

¹³⁶ "Amerikanskii utki," *Novoe vremia*, May 17, 1905.

¹³⁷ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, May 18, 1905.

had been nullified almost a year ago at the Battle of the Yellow Sea.¹³⁸ Yet Russia must continue, it argued. Referring to the foreign press' calls for peace, the paper stated, "it would take no special courage [...] to commit suicide." Instead, it would take singular bravery to keep fighting.¹³⁹ As the dust settled after Tsushima *Novoe vremia* ignored the realities on the battlefield and refused to believe the war was over.

Peace and Its Discontents

Nicholas had insisted on continuing the war throughout the military disasters of 1904 and 1905, but the loss of the fleet at Tsushima finally pushed him to consider making peace. He convened a military council a week after the battle that included Grand Princes Alexei Alexandrovich and Vladimir Alexandrovich, and Admirals Dubasov and Alekseev, among other military leaders. Some, such as Dubasov, strongly advocated fighting to the end. Voices for peace won out, however, and the council decided that the domestic situation was more important than victory.

U.S. President Roosevelt had formally and informally offered to broker peace between the two warring empires since the Battle of Liaoyang in July 1904.¹⁴⁰ His further entreaties after Port Arthur and Bloody Sunday made his willingness to host negotiations well known in the Russian capital. On May 30, 1905, Nicholas informed Roosevelt's attaché in St. Petersburg that

¹³⁸ "Chto zhe dal'she?" *Novoe vremia*, May 19, 1905.

¹³⁹ "Tsusimskoi boi i inostrannaia pechat'," *Novoe vremia*, May 21, 1905.

¹⁴⁰ For more on Roosevelt's involvement see. Eugene P. Trani, *The Treaty of Portsmouth: An Adventure in American Diplomacy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969). Trani gives the American president a bit too much credit for brokering the peace, but offers an interesting take on the negotiations from the American perspective.

he would consent to the president's suggestion. A day after that, Roosevelt sent his official request for a conference to Russia and Japan and the peace process began.¹⁴¹

After about a month of back and forth between Washington and the two combatants, all parties agreed to a peace conference that July in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The negotiations with Washington in June dragged on longer than strictly necessary, owing to poor communication between Lamzdorf and his ambassador in Washington and other minor complications.¹⁴² Meanwhile, Nicholas struggled to find an official willing to serve as plenipotentiary. After two ambassadors declined to lead the Russian delegation, the tsar reluctantly decided on Witte. Though Nicholas had been lukewarm about him since 1903, Witte's skill and lingering stature in Russian politics made him an obvious choice to speak for the empire at Portsmouth. Japan sent its foreign minister, Komura Jutarō, to lead its delegation. By July 23 both sets of representatives had arrived in Portsmouth and the negotiations began.

Suvorin greeted the destruction of Rozhdestvenskii's fleet by redoubling his efforts to bring about a *zemskii sobor*. In his mind, only this gathering of Russian talent and spirit could turn the tide. If the loss of Port Arthur and Bloody Sunday had driven him to the idea of a *sobor* as the answer to Russia's problems, Tsushima had confirmed it. Even as he mourned the fallen sailors he wrote that the tragedy had opened the way for such a gathering. Russia must stop waiting for the Bulygin commission. It had formed under much different circumstances, and thus lagged behind the pace of events.¹⁴³ The tsar must convene the *sobor* immediately, because Russia now needed it "like the living need air."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ I. V. Lukoianov, "The Portsmouth Peace," in *The Treaty of Portsmouth and its Legacies*, Steven Ericson and Allen Hockley eds. (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2008), 46; Raymond A. Esthus, *Double Eagle and Rising Sun: The Russians and Japanese at Portsmouth in 1905* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988) 43-46.

¹⁴² Esthus, *Double Eagle and Rising Sun*, 47-48.

¹⁴³ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, May 18, 1905.

¹⁴⁴ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, May 19, 1905.

“Little Letters” from the days following the battle again laid out Suvorin’s vision for a *zemskii sobor* and its role in this final stage of the war. “The Yellow enemy triumphs with force of arms, the internal [enemy] through force of disorder and unrest,” his articles bellowed. The current government relied on out-of-touch officials rather than talents and abilities of Russian society. The *sobor* would rekindle the spirit of Minin and Pozharskii, the two heroes of the Time of Troubles. It would allow the Russian people to act in their own interests, not those of petty bureaucrats beholden to pensions and status.¹⁴⁵ It would allow contributions from groups without a usual means of affecting policy, such as the peasantry.¹⁴⁶ He could not avoid mildly contradicting himself on the issue of continuing the war, however. “They say I advocate war,” he wrote on May 24. “No, I do not advocate war, but an appraisal of the *narod*’s forces with the help of a *zemskii sobor*,” he countered. He did not know what the *sobor* would suggest to the tsar, but put his faith in its ability to express the overall will of the people on this matter.¹⁴⁷ A few days later he clarified this position. The convocation of a *zemskii sobor* was “the only way to not only continue the war,” but ultimately, “conclude an innocuous peace.”¹⁴⁸ The *sobor* would serve to decide the direction of Russia’s domestic and foreign policies.

With diplomatic wheels already turning, it was difficult for *Novoe vremia* to avoid the issue of peace. It approached the prospect with skepticism, if not outright refusal. It had already scoffed at Roosevelt’s offers of mediation. Despite its attempts to keep up support for the war, however, the destruction of Rozhestvenskii’s fleet necessitated that it at least start taking the idea seriously. The newspaper tepidly reported that the U.S. president had contacted both sides about this. It remained incredulous, noting that while diplomats in such situations always spoke

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, May 20, 1905.

¹⁴⁷ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, May 24, 1905.

¹⁴⁸ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, May 29, 1905.

optimistically, yet their confidence was rarely justified.¹⁴⁹ Considering its longstanding charge that the US, along with Britain, had pushed Japan and Russia to war in the first place, the paper remained deeply wary of Roosevelt's invitation. Suvorin looked back to the humiliating and onerous peace the U.S. had conducted with Spain after the two countries' war in 1898 and wondered if Roosevelt hoped to broker a similarly disadvantageous peace for Russia. He advised that if talks must take place, they ought to exclude outside brokers.¹⁵⁰ Begrudgingly acknowledging peace a possibility, discussion in the paper's leading articles in late May and early June debated the conditions it might entail.

Since *Novoe vremia* still viewed continuing the war as a viable option any talk of peace in its pages necessitated that Russia occupy a position of strength at the negotiating table. Throughout the following months it pointed to the number of forces Russia still possessed in Manchuria and the fervor of the people to continue fighting as evidence that the empire was in no way defeated.

A "Little Letter" from June 5 summed up the paper's overall position: "if there is to be peace, not an inch of Russian territory, not a penny of indemnity."¹⁵¹ Though the prospect of losing territory remained, of course, completely unacceptable, the possibility of an indemnity loomed larger in its coverage. Excepting the sparsely inhabited island of Sakhalin, which Japan invaded in July with little resistance, Russia seemed only in real danger losing Port Arthur, Dal'nii, and perhaps the Manchurian railways. *Novoe vremia*, therefore, returned repeatedly to the prospect of an indemnity.¹⁵² Japan had extracted an exorbitant sum from China after both the

¹⁴⁹ "Optimizm diplomatov," *Novoe vremia*, May 30, 1905. Also, "Posredichestvo Ruzevel'ta," *Novoe vremia*, May 29, 1905.

¹⁵⁰ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, June 5, 1905.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² After Port Arthur, Japan "dream[ed] of a billion in indemnities," it explained in "Mechti Iaponii o kontributsii," *Novoe vremia*, January 6, 1905. A few other examples include: "Mir i karman Rossii," *Novoe vremia*, March 3,

Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Rebellion, and it stood to reason that it would want the same from Russia. Such reparations would be a profound humiliation. The newspaper (correctly) asserted that Japan's strong desire for monetary recompense was the sign of an overextended and exhausted nation.¹⁵³ Suvorin wrote that the war had "ruined" both countries but that Japan now "needed money" more than Russia.¹⁵⁴ Articles from early August explained that Japan needed an indemnity, or it could not afford to keep its military at its current state.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, it also had run up considerable debts to fund its forces, which would soon come due.¹⁵⁶ In the newspaper's pages Japan seemed far from secure in its position at the arbitration table.

To *Novoe vremia*, the greatest danger to Russia in any peace treaty remained its rival empires in Europe and North America. The Congress of Berlin was the obvious touch point. Then Russia had at least defeated the Ottomans on the battlefield. Now, with its forces trounced on land and at sea, it stood to lose even more if the great powers interfered in peace negotiations for the current war. If the Berlin Congress had been a "shameful peace," Suvorin had written in late May, what could Russia expect in a peace conference after Tsushima?¹⁵⁷ The paper urged Russian delegates to keep constant watch, lest Portsmouth turn into "an international tribunal" to pass judgment on Russia.¹⁵⁸ In July, it warned its readers that even now, Russia's rivals were scheming to "indirectly" intervene.¹⁵⁹ Suvorin expressed the same anxieties and contemplated

1905; "Diplomaticheskie nedugi," *Novoe vremia*, June 13, 1905; "Koshelek, ili zhizn'," *Novoe vremia*, July 16, 1905; "Mir ili voina," *Novoe vremia*, August 11, 1905.

¹⁵³ For Japan's quite precarious logistical situation by June 1905, see Paine, *The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 71-75.

¹⁵⁴ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, August 13, 1905.

¹⁵⁵ "V poiskakh deneg i mira vo chto by to ni stalo," *Novoe vremia*, August 12, 1905.

¹⁵⁶ "Mir i kontributsiia," *Novoe vremia*, August 13, 1904.

¹⁵⁷ Suvorin "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, May 26, 1905

¹⁵⁸ "Uchastie i Kitaia v mirnoi konferentsii," *Novoe vremia*, June 21, 1905.

¹⁵⁹ "Evropa i Japoniia," *Novoe vremia*, July 4, 1905.

whether Roosevelt might take on the same role at this conference that Bismarck had taken at Berlin.¹⁶⁰ Now more than ever, third parties were not to be trusted.



Figure 38. “While no one’s stopping me.”



Figure 39. “The doors are open.”

As the peace conference coalesced, these countries continued to appear as self-interested, malicious forces. *Novoe vremia* held Britain and the U.S. “morally” responsible for the war because of their support for Japan and did not trust the two country’s intentions.¹⁶¹ Some of Sokolovskii’s cartoons from that summer played on these themes. In Figure 38, he personified British avarice with a crude image of John Bull having taken off his shoes in order to devour a bowl of soup using spoons in both his hands and feet. Bull blithely comments that he may as well, since no one was stopping him. In another, Figure 39, he played on the way foreign powers

¹⁶⁰ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, June 5, 1905.

¹⁶¹ “Evropa i iaponia,” *Novoe vremia*, July 5, 1905.

continued to force their way into Chinese markets. Here, he again criticized the Open Door Policy and showed John Bull, Uncle Sam, a Japanese figure, and Deutscher Michel (a national personification of Germany), ransacking goods from a Chinese warehouse. In “China’s part in the peace conference,” *Novoe vremia* accused the U.S. of similarly disregarding China’s interests by excluding it from preparations for Portsmouth. Roosevelt had purely selfish reasons for organizing the peace conference, while the war itself had taken place largely on Chinese territory. The article contended that perhaps a smaller role for China in the talks would prove more beneficial though, since Russia would fare better with fewer intermediaries.¹⁶² The empire faced a hostile international community as it negotiated peace. As *Novoe vremia* saw it, the great powers had done little since the war began to reassure Russia they would not interfere.

Nonetheless, *Novoe vremia*’s primary sentiment in summer 1905 remained defiance. “Only confused persons can consider Russia defeated,” it trumpeted.¹⁶³ “The majority of the *narod* are not at all able to recognize the Japanese as victors,” and thus it was a “delusion” for them to expect any major concessions.¹⁶⁴ It even explicitly ruled out the possibility of a “second” Berlin Congress in article that July. European powers had only been able to intervene in 1878 because the Ottoman Empire lay defeated and could not exert its own pressure at the Treaty of San Stefano. Since Russia was bruised but not beaten, the paper argued, it had a much stronger negotiating position. It was, therefore, “not the time to talk about a second Berlin Congress,” since third parties would need to deal with both sides during the talks, and Russia still had the option of continuing to fight.¹⁶⁵ In its pages, *Novoe vremia* insisted that Russia must keep fighting, whether at the negotiating table or on the battlefield.

¹⁶² “Uchastie i Kitaia v mirnoi konferentsii,” *Novoe vremia*, June 21, 1905.

¹⁶³ “Komu nuzhen mir,” *Novoe vremia*, July 24, 1905.

¹⁶⁴ “Nikakikh ustupok,” *Novoe vremia*, August 6, 1905.

¹⁶⁵ “Vtoroe izdanie Berlinskogo kongressa,” *Novoe vremia*, July 5, 1905.

According to *Novoe vremia*, this attitude came not just from the newspaper's staff but also from the readers. In the weeks following Tsushima, it ran articles asserting such reader support alongside its ranting against disadvantageous peace. An article from May 22 noted the flood of letters the newspaper had received calling for the war to continue. These letters spanned classes, *sosloviia*, and profession. They showed the resolve of the *narod*, it argued.¹⁶⁶

Suvorin devoted a few of his "Little Letters" to the issue of reader mail as well. He spoke specifically of the high number of peasants writing to *Novoe vremia*, explaining that their letters "were sometimes signed by whole groups of peasants," a fact that he felt offered "precious evidence of national consciousness, deeply wounded national dignity, and devotion to the Homeland and the Emperor." Many responded to the newspaper's calls for a *zemskii sobor* with enthusiasm and, as earlier, especially gravitated to Suvorin's assertion about peasant participation. These letters discounted the idea that peasants were ignorant and had no sense of patriotism, he argued. On the contrary, they represented the true spirit of the *narod*: "Were not all those Minins, of which the Russian land was full during the Troubles, the peasants, merchants, [and] townspeople, completely illiterate?" he asked. These people understood the type of self-government the *sobor* represented on a more basic level. They yearned for the return of this natural connection between government, sovereign, and people. They also knew what this war meant for them, he continued. A humiliating peace that included an indemnity would fall squarely on their backs. Peasants had paid "unjust and cruel" taxes for many centuries. "Better death than eternal poverty" under an indemnity, they felt.¹⁶⁷ In another article, he explained that

¹⁶⁶ "Iz pisem," *Novoe vremia*, May 22, 1905.

¹⁶⁷ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," *Novoe vremia*, May 29, 1905.

some could conscience talk of peace, but only under the aforementioned mantra of “not an inch of land, not a penny of indemnity.”¹⁶⁸

By this point, the peasant movement had begun wreaking havoc in the countryside. The movement would reach a peak in June and July before entering a minor lull around harvest time and then resurging with a vengeance in November and December of 1905.¹⁶⁹ Though land hunger played a major role in the peasant uprisings, their ferocity took different forms in different parts of the empire. In the Baltic and Caucasus peasant attacks and riots largely targeted government authorities. In the agriculturally rich south and southwest (the so-called Black Earth Belt), a little over half of the insurrections were “strikes” where peasants refused to go to work on large landed estates and had violent confrontations with landlords and strikebreakers.¹⁷⁰ The majority of the action in central Russia consisted of coordinated raids on landed estates and large private properties. Large groups broke into the estates, where they seized grain and livestock and often destroyed offices that stored records of rent and debts. Occasionally they burned or looted the manor houses and attacked the owners, though in many cases the groups announced their intentions well in advance of their arrival.¹⁷¹ Tsushima and calls for peace, thus, came during a rising tumult in the countryside.

The letters in Suvorin’s archival collection bear out many of his and *Novoe vremia*’s assertions about the opinions of at least the small section of their readership that felt compelled to write to the newspaper. The collection contains a spike in mail from after the Battle of Tsushima calling for Russia to keep fighting. Most of the two-dozen letters in the file that date

¹⁶⁸ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, June 5, 1905.

¹⁶⁹ There were 492 rural disturbances in June, 248 in July, 155 in August, 71 in September, 219 in October, 796 in November, and 575 in December. Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 162.

¹⁷⁰ Edelman, *Proletarian Peasants*, 94-96.

¹⁷¹ Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 162-163. Perrie, “The Russian Peasant Movement,” 127-134.

from the weeks following the battle come from authors at least claiming to be peasants, with some indeed writing on behalf of their entire villages.¹⁷²

As letters from peasants and other *Novoe vremia* readers show, many readers continued to view the newspaper as an important venue through which to express their patriotism and opinions. As with the swell of reader responses to Bloody Sunday and the February proclamations, however, they contain a not-so-subtle undercurrent of suffering and anger.

Further, the most emphatic voices of approval usually parroted Suvorin's own words. A large subset of these letters definitely told the publisher what he wanted to hear. Suvorin, inevitably, focused more on these opinions in his writings when he spoke of his and his ideas' support among *Novoe vremia*'s readership. In some ways this made his interaction with readers a kind of feedback loop that repeated the same ideas.

Many of the most ardently patriotic voices gravitated to Suvorin's words about saving Russia from a "shameful peace." The peasant M. A. Kulvtsov, for example, exclaimed such a humiliation would cause worse pain to "worn-out Russian hearts" than the loss of Rozhestvenskii's squadron. "God save us from [this] shameful peace," he wrote before calling on "national [*narodnye*] forces" to join and "defeat the impudent enemy."¹⁷³ Others mimicked Suvorin's words about Russia's defiance in the face of Napoleon in 1812¹⁷⁴ or the spirit of Minin and Pozharskii¹⁷⁵ in their entreaties. Several letter writers shared Suvorin's alarm and conviction in hyperbolic prose that mirrored his "Little Letters." One peasant exclaimed, "It is better to die than to see the shame of Russia."¹⁷⁶ Another repeated words from Suvorin's feuilleton from May

¹⁷² These letters can be found in RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 674, lls. 53-99 and f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, lls. 120-166.

¹⁷³ M. A. Kulvtsov to Suvorin, May 22, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 674, l. 58.

¹⁷⁴ Peasant Kornilov to Suvorin, May 22, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 674, lls. 59-60; Shesnikov to Suvorin, May 18, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 124.

¹⁷⁵ K. T. to Suvorin, May 23, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 131; Peasant M. Dolgov to Suvorin, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 146.

¹⁷⁶ "Polugramotnyi krest'ianin" to Suvorin, May 29, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 674, l. 65.

19, crying that Russia “must never shamefully fall to its knees before Japan!”¹⁷⁷ A few harkened back to the initial outburst of patriotism of January 1904, calling for a new military donation campaign or offering tactical or strategic suggestions.¹⁷⁸ Mostly, though, reader correspondence following Tsushima spoke frequently in rhetorical terms about abstract ways to unite Russia and renew the cause. Constant reference to the motherland and *narod* in this way hints toward an earnest sense of national pride and patriotism among at least some of *Novoe vremia*’s peasant readership.

In their appeals to save Russia’s dignity, many took aim at the internal enemies they felt were actively pushing the empire toward a shameful peace. While anti-Semitism figured in a few letters condemning those calling for peace,¹⁷⁹ government bureaucrats, liberals, and revolutionaries were more common targets. “Liberal gentlemen [*gospoda*] want a new structure built on European principles,” a peasant reader wrote. They shouted “down with the war! Give us a parliament!” and were willing to accept a shameful peace to achieve their goals.¹⁸⁰ Another spoke more viciously: “gag the mouths of these gentlemen that scream it is better to have a shameful peace than continue the war; war or peace—it’s all the same to them.” To listen to them would be to ignore the sacrifice of “lost fathers, husbands, and brothers” and “curse our children.”¹⁸¹ As in February, they also joined Suvorin in blaming disconnected officials for the government’s failures at home and abroad. These “lazy” bureaucrats lacked “zeal,” the peasant Nikolai Sobolev wrote. “Now is not the to time to sleep,” he pleaded, “when all of Russia is a

¹⁷⁷ K. T. to Suvorin, May 23, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 130.

¹⁷⁸ Nikolai Sobolev to Suvorin, May 29, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 151; Peasant Mikhail Kaluga to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 156.

¹⁷⁹ Letters that allude to Jews as a negative force in the war effort include Peasant Mikhail Kaluga to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 156 and Worker G. Ivanov to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 159.

¹⁸⁰ K. T. to Suvorin, May 23, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 131.

¹⁸¹ “Soldat-muzhichek” to Suvorin, May 26, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 148-149.

pillar of fire.”¹⁸² Russia languished not by any fault of the *narod*, these readers argued, but because of the unpatriotic and foreign elements that sought to move it in shameful and unnatural directions.

The majority of correspondents agreed with Suvorin’s call for an immediate *zemskii sobor* to reenergize and reorient Russia back to its proper disposition both domestically and internationally. Letters spoke of “deep gratitude” as well as “tears of emotion and a faith” at the publishers’ pleas and attention to the “plight of the peasants.”¹⁸³ Those speaking of “absurd inventions and harmful underground publications” could not mislead the peasantry, others contended, since they knew that Russia’s true governmental form existed in the “unity between the tsar and his *narod*.”¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the peasants would indeed play an important and useful role in a *zemskii sobor*, they believed. One reader “assured” Suvorin that peasants possessed the proper understanding of the domestic situation. At the gathering, they “would be able to not only distinguish white from black, but discuss Important Business and State Matters.”¹⁸⁵ Undeniably, the peasants were “gifted people, capable of genius,” another wrote.¹⁸⁶ In their eyes, the *sobor* offered a real way forward, especially for those most disenfranchised by the current regime. Suvorin’s arguments seem to have inspired a real passion for it among this corps of readers.

A vocal minority disagreed with Suvorin on the issues of the war and *zemskii sobor*. Some posed mild objections, questioning whether any type of representative body might violate autocracy¹⁸⁷ or suggesting a slightly more open attitude toward negotiating peace.¹⁸⁸ A letter from the peasant V. Vladimirov made a few particularly strong rebuttals to Suvorin’s arguments.

¹⁸² Nikolai Sobolev to Suvorin, May 24, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 151.

¹⁸³ D. V. Popkov and G. O. Pushin to Suvorin, May 24, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 144.

¹⁸⁴ Peasant M. Dolgov to Suvorin, May 24, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, lls. 146-147.

¹⁸⁵ Timofei Arkhipov to Suvorin, May 22, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 126.

¹⁸⁶ Nikolai Sobolev to Suvorin, May 24, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 152.

¹⁸⁷ Ermolaev to Suvorin, May 22, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 128.

¹⁸⁸ Ivanov to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 674, l. 80.

He vehemently argued that Russia did not need a *sobor*. It might have made some sense in 1903, but it was completely unsuited to dealing with the issue of whether to continue the war. Besides, the “smart [*umnyi*]” people elected to the body would ultimately act in their own interests, shunning the wants and needs of the peasantry. No matter, Vladimirov jibed, since peasants had no understanding of the merits of peace versus continuing the war anyway. On this issue, he deferred to the government. Suvorin’s claims to speak of and for the peasantry irked him the most, however. He felt that the opinions peasants offered in Suvorin’s and *Novoe vremia*’s pages “were not their own, but the *newspaper*’s.” Any talk of the *zemskii sobor* came directly from *Novoe vremia* and had little basis in the peasant’s daily life.¹⁸⁹ His disagreements channeled many of the sentiments of those peasants that opposed Suvorin’s call for a *sobor* in February.

The sense of pessimism and despair Suvorin had received in letters from the beginning of 1905 lingered as well. Even readers writing to agree with the newspaper betrayed a bitterness and misery about life in the countryside. A group of peasants from Novgorod *guberniia* wrote to support the war and *zemskii sobor* but could not help mentioning their trepidation. They took shame at Russia’s defeats, blaming the nation itself. “To be a good warrior, one must be a good person and be educated,” they wrote, “but in Russia everything is lowered, everyone thinks only of themselves, there are few honest people who would care about the common good!”¹⁹⁰ Another explained the peasants currently starved in the countryside and “were suffocated by poverty,” while the state sat on “crumbling foundations.”¹⁹¹ Those without hope spoke more ferociously. Suvorin’s “vile newspaper” sold its readers lies, a group of peasants wrote. A *zemskii sobor* offered no change for Russia, since it would probably end up run by “the same bureaucratic

¹⁸⁹ V. Vladimirov to Suvorin, June 5, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 160, Emphasis original.

¹⁹⁰ Peasants from Pel’gorskoe volost, Novgorod guberniia to Suvorin, June 5, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 674, l. 98.

¹⁹¹ S. Prestomodin to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 677, l. 139a.

bastards and governors” that opposed the *narod* now.¹⁹² Thus, despite Suvorin’s seemingly genuine faith in his own idea of the *Zemskii sobor* and overtures to the peasantry, a fundamental disconnect between the two remained.

When it came to the peasantry, Suvorin was perhaps not entirely deluding himself by thinking that he was speaking for and directly to his readers. Scholars, such as Jeffrey Brooks, have noted the development of the kind of nationalist thinking among the peasantry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries similar to that which Suvorin expressed in his writings.¹⁹³ Additionally, experts on the peasantry, such as Maureen Perrie, offer that despite increased connection with the outside world and the attempts of radical groups like the SRs the Russian peasantry largely remained oriented toward its traditional loyalties to tsarism.¹⁹⁴ By and large, she explains, they saw no need to oppose the autocracy. As their participation in the duma elections of 1906 showed, many bought into the idea that some kind of “union of tsar and people” could solve the land issue by bypassing the hated landowners and bureaucrats.¹⁹⁵ Thus, it is possible that Suvorin found fertile ground for his ideas here. The nature of his call for a *zemskii sobor*—that all unite behind the tsar and work together without challenging the monarchy—relied on public desire for such a *sobor* and public goodwill that would motivate them to work with the tsar under this framework, however. A sizeable portion of peasant respondents did not possess such optimism. Though their letters may have fed his personal frustrations, they did not appear in Suvorin’s “Little Letters” in any real way. He liked being able

¹⁹² Pavel Rubtsov, et al. to Suvorin, undated 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 2, d. 674, lls. 71-72.

¹⁹³ Brooks, *When Russian Learned to Read*, 214-235.

¹⁹⁴ In *Proletarian Peasants*, Edelman disputes the idea that the peasantry was still mostly traditional in its world view and tactics, and uses the example of the 1905 peasant strikes in southwest to show that Russian peasants could act in highly coordinated and militant ways that in many ways mirrored the workers in the cities.

¹⁹⁵ Perrie, “The Russian Peasant Movement,” 154.

to claim a direct connection to the Russian people, but he did not always like what they had to say.

All the while, *Novoe vremia* continued to publicly harangue the Foreign Ministry. It earned Lamzdorf's strongest wrath with its June 13 article "Diplomatic Ailments." This leading article leveled major accusations against Lamzdorf and Russian diplomacy, just as all sides were cementing the arrangements for the Portsmouth peace conference. The piece cited unverified (and ultimately false) reports from Washington that Lamzdorf had taken ill and temporarily halted negotiations with Roosevelt. When viewed in light of the endless stalling and postponement that had characterized pre-war negotiations with Japan over the Manchurian occupation, it argued that this new illness must be another ploy to impede meetings with Washington. As diplomatic documents the Japanese government had recently released to the press now showed, Russian policy in 1903 seemed to have been geared toward frustrating any progress on the Russo-Japanese talks.¹⁹⁶ The Foreign Ministry appeared to create "red tape" at every turn, the article argued, giving excuses as to why such and such meeting or decision must be postponed. In this way, Russia had drawn out these negotiations unnecessarily. This tactic had proven a terrible mistake, the article contended, since the hesitation gave Japan the impression that Russia was stalling to prepare for war.¹⁹⁷

Russia had more diplomatic delays than actual negotiations with Japan in 1903 and early 1904, *Novoe vremia* argued. These purely procedural delays had needlessly aggravated Japan and led to the surprise attack on Port Arthur. Lamzdorf's supposed "ailment" now seemed like an

¹⁹⁶ The article refers to a collection of diplomatic documents from 1903-1904 that the Japanese Imperial Diet ordered published in late 1904 to support Japan's case for the war among the international community. The documents were translated into English to facilitate the collection's circulation around the world as *Correspondence Regarding the Negotiations Between Japan and Russia, 1903-1904* (Presented to the Imperial Diet, March 1904). Ian Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 238, 257.

¹⁹⁷ "Diplomaticheskii nedugi," *Novoe vremia*, June 13, 1905.

indication that Russian diplomacy might be planning to stall once again. The article hoped that these postponements might at least give the empire's diplomats time to plan a "decisive" strategy for the talks that would preserve the motherland's dignity. If Russia must discuss peace, it had to be from a position of strength and strategy. The article was not optimistic, however. Ill-advised stalling had led to disaster in January 1904; it was unlikely it could achieve a different outcome at the negotiations.¹⁹⁸

Novoe vremia had drawn Lamzdorf's wrath throughout the war, but this piece aggravated him like never before. Previous articles had presented the Count and his ministry unfavorably. This one, however, succeeded in personally attacking him, denigrating Russian diplomacy and its tactics, and drawing a direct line between the ministry's actions and Japan's attack on Port Arthur. In an angry letter to the interior minister, Lamzdorf called the article's depiction of himself and Russian diplomacy "extremely unfavorable," especially during the current negotiations with the US government. It had accused him of this "diplomatic ailment" based on false statements in a telegram that had escaped censors. Considering the article's dissemination of this discredited source, as well as the critical importance of finalizing the Portsmouth conference, Lamzdorf wrote, "I am sure you will agree with me that the malicious insinuations of '*Novoe vremia*' should not go without corresponding punishment." This article not only undermined the foreign ministry's credibility, it "cast a shadow" over its overall sincerity in even pursuing peace with Japan. Lamzdorf requested a full report on which actions the interior ministry would take against *Novoe vremia*. He also requested the chief bureau deny the reports of the offending telegram in *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik* and other appropriate press organs.¹⁹⁹ This

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Lamzdorf to Bulygin, June 14, 1905, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, lls. 312-313.

time, the minister wanted *Novoe vremia* to answer for wounding his and the diplomatic corps' reputations.

The interior ministry was not forthcoming, however, and denied Lamzdorf his full recompense. In his response, Bulygin agreed to print a refutation of the Washington telegram but stopped short of punitive action against *Novoe vremia*. He gave the foreign minister a common refrain: the newspaper's overall "well-intentioned direction" and pro-government alignment made official sanction difficult. He offered the assurance that press bureau chief Bel'gard would give *Novoe vremia*'s editor a tongue-lashing. Rather than offering the "strictest suggestions" the newspaper had received in 1904, Bel'gard would berate the editor about "the tactlessness and inadmissibility" of the article, and "all the harm of its political insinuations."²⁰⁰ Though strongly worded, this did not go further than a dressing-down. Once again, *Novoe vremia* received no official penalties for its provocative writing about Russia's relations with its imperial rivals.

It seems this verbal warning did influence Suvorin, however. He raised the issue in his correspondence with Witte soon after. The latter noted that he knew Lamzdorf to be "very sensitive to the press," as many state officials were, but agreed with Bulygin that it would be difficult to sanction the newspaper.²⁰¹ Lamzdorf's recriminations struck to the heart of Suvorin's frustrations with the entire war experience. The minister wanted *Novoe vremia* punished for acknowledging Russia's weaknesses and past missteps.

In July, Suvorin wrote a letter to Bel'gard that laid bare his feelings on the issue. Having spoken to the article's author he admitted that he would have written the piece differently himself but stood by its sentiments. His newspaper "conducted itself correctly and patriotically" and spoke only from the most loyal position. A minister's gaffes were not the newspaper's

²⁰⁰ Bulygin to Lamzdorf, June 15, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444 l. 314.

²⁰¹ Witte to Suvorin, June 16, 1905, RGALI, f. 459, o. 1, d. 719, lls. 140-141.

gaffes. *Novoe vremia* had depicted the minister in an unflattering light because he had acted in an unflattering way. When a newspaper makes mistakes, it faces embarrassment, he wrote, but when a minister makes mistakes “the whole country suffers.” “Count Lamzdorf says that such articles undermine the credibility of the negotiations he now conducts,” Suvorin continued, but if a “newspaper can shake confidence in such an important matter as the peace talks” how would punishing the newspaper restore that confidence? Moreover, the telegram reporting the minister’s “diplomatic ailment” had appeared in numerous other periodicals, contrary to Lamzdorf’s assertion that it had been banned. The censors had not initially prohibited the telegram, and so, incorrect as it may have been, *Novoe vremia* had the right to express an opinion about it. Suvorin did not succumb to “such an absurd pride as to imagine *Novoe vremia* had an extraordinary significance in world politics.”²⁰² Rather, this was a matter of the imperial government stifling its subjects’ attempts to engage in patriotic, if painful, discussions of Russia’s actions as a global power.

Regardless, the negotiations continued and *Novoe vremia* paid close attention. The paper kept a skeptical eye on the talks, ready to abandon diplomacy and return to combat at any moment. Even before Japan made its peace conditions officially known, the newspaper stood firm in its position that the results on the battlefield did not correspond to the actual “balance of power” between the two empires. It argued in mid-June that, “if the Japanese [were] going to consolidate the situation that now exists in Manchuria with the treaty, and even worse, push further, their proposals should be rejected as inclined to the humiliation of Russia and not guaranteeing a lasting peace.”²⁰³ The newspaper rallied behind its sometime friend Witte. Articles showed the chairman of the committee of ministers carrying himself and Russian

²⁰² Suvorin to Bel’gard, July 15, 1905, RGIA, f. 776, o. 3, d. 444, l. 372.

²⁰³ “Proekt uslovii mira,” *Novoe vremia*, June 17, 1905.

interests with “deep dignity” during the deliberations.²⁰⁴ Suvorin called him “a born statesman, in the way that some are born poets.” Though it could still fight, Russia had shown its sincerity by sending someone who had wanted peace with Japan since the Boxer Rebellion. That Witte had demanded full press access to the Portsmouth conference showed Russia had nothing to hide and would not permit Japan or the US to engage in underhanded tactics.²⁰⁵ Russia would cut a powerful image in Portsmouth, even if this meant leaving without reaching an agreement.

Novoe vremia continually guaranteed its readers that Russia would never accept an indemnity.²⁰⁶ Suvorin dismissed a suggestion that Russia pay Japan a large sum in exchange for the return of Sakhalin.²⁰⁷ “Russia has never paid indemnities,” he exclaimed, and this proposal was merely such a demand in disguise.²⁰⁸ On August 14, as the talks reached their climax, it ran a cartoon by the artist “Mitrich” depicting Japan’s quest for Russian money (Figure 40). In the image, a Japanese soldier with sharp fingernails and pointed ears futilely chases rubles that have sprouted wings and taken flight. Witte would, in fact, succeed in keeping any monetary payment off the table.

Witte and Komura’s agreement left Russia remarkably unscathed. Nonetheless, *Novoe vremia* greeted news of the peace agreement on August 17 without excitement. The most important terms included: Russia forfeiting its lease on Port Arthur and Dal’nii and acknowledging Japanese claims to Korea; both forces ceasing hostilities and evacuating Southern Manchuria; and, Russia ceding the southern half of Sakhalin and the South Manchurian Railway to Japan.²⁰⁹ The empire had lost little important territory and escaped an indemnity.

²⁰⁴ “Prezident Ruzevel’t i kontributsiia,” *Novoe vremia*, August 14, 1905.

²⁰⁵ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” August 4, 1905.

²⁰⁶ See, for example, “Mir i kontributsiia,” *Novoe vremia*, August 13, 1905 and “Prezident Ruzevel’t i kontributsiia,” *Novoe vremia*, August 14, 1905.

²⁰⁷ I. V. Lukoianov, “The Portsmouth Peace,” 58.

²⁰⁸ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 13, 1905.

²⁰⁹ The full text of the treaty can be read in Esthus, *Double Eagle and Rising Sun*, 207-212.

Still, Suvorin called Portsmouth “the most disadvantageous peace... Russia had ever concluded.” Horrible bloodshed had ended, yet the motherland had no real cause for celebration.²¹⁰ He could only shake his head resignedly as he mentioned telegrams from General Linevich in Manchuria the day before about the army’s battle readiness and desire to fight. Neither side could be happy with this peace, he argued. Further, it could not last. “This is only a page in the history of our relations with Japan,” he wrote, “We’ll rest and go again without fail. ... We can shake hands like people who spent eighteen stormy months together, got to know each other well enough, and then say: ‘Goodbye.’”²¹¹



Figure 40. Are they really flying away?

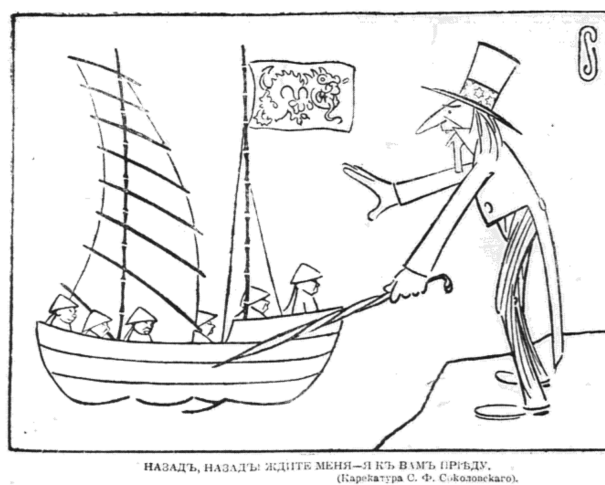


Figure 41. Back, back! Wait for me—I'll come to you

²¹⁰ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 17, 1905.

²¹¹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 18, 1905.



Figure 42. Who else wants to fight? (England and America)

Novoe vremia's leading articles grumbled as well, offering readers a mixture of disappointment and tepid relief. The dreaded second Berlin Congress had not occurred, but the nation had suffered grievous wounds to its national pride.²¹² Russia still fielded a large army in Manchuria, the newspaper asserted, and the Japanese were extremely dissatisfied with the Portsmouth Treaty. A new friendly balance of power between the two in Northeast Asia therefore seemed unlikely. The empire still had important interests in the region and needed an ice-free port to connect with Siberia. The "international drama" had not ended at Portsmouth, *Novoe vremia* argued, it had merely taken a "lengthy intermission."²¹³

The United States' role in the peace particularly irked the newspaper. It mocked Roosevelt's growing fame as a peacemaker.²¹⁴ It scornfully wrote that the U.S. president now deluded himself with this and with the idea that he had been an "honest broker."²¹⁵ He seriously believed that he had played the decisive role in concluding the treaty, it argued, even though he

²¹² "Mir," *Novoe vremia*, August 17, 1905.

²¹³ "O Portmutskom dogovore," *Novoe vremia*, August 31, 1905.

²¹⁴ On Roosevelt's renown after Portsmouth see, Trani, *The Treaty of Portsmouth*, 156-157.

²¹⁵ "Ruzevel't v roli chestnogo maklera," *Novoe vremia*, August 20, 1905.

had been unsure of such a settlement only a few hours before Witte and Komura announced their agreement.²¹⁶ Sokolovskii chimed in with a few cartoons to underscore this negative impression of the United States. One took specific aim at its history of exclusion acts against peoples from East Asia. In Figure 41, he depicts Uncle Sam halting a boat flying the Qing dynasty's flag and carrying tiny Chinese stereotypes before they can disembark onto U.S. soil. "Back, back," he barks, "wait for me—I'll come to you." This showed U.S. as anything but magnanimous or honest in dealings with peoples in East Asia. Another cartoon (Figure 42) tied this image back to old fears of Anglo-American collusion in provoking the war. Britain, personified as Sherlock Holmes, counts a large pile of money while Uncle Sam sits next to him slightly grimacing, several olive branches and a few coins laid out in front of him on the table. "Who else wants to fight?" Holmes asks as both wink at the viewer. Greedy as ever, Britain saw the war as a financial opportunity, the drawing implies. The U.S. had used it to gain prestige. There had not been a second Berlin Congress, but Russia's European and North American rivals still remained predatory and untrustworthy.

Eventually, *Novoe vremia* reluctantly accepted the treaty. The newspaper explained that it had the "moral right" to belabor the negative elements of the Portsmouth agreement, since it had unceasingly spoke for the highest interests of the motherland by "preaching perseverance, energy, and endurance" during the conflict. The die had been cast, though. It was now the duty of every Russian subject to accept peace and move on, since "the idea of revenge was never akin to the Russian *narod*."²¹⁷ Moreover, the domestic situation remained volatile and now required their full attention. "The State Duma must now occupy all our thoughts," Suvorin wrote on August 18. He referred to the ill-defined consultative body the Bulygin Commission had finally

²¹⁶ "Vpechatleniia," *Novoe vremia*, August 18, 1905.

²¹⁷ "Portsmutskii traktat," *Novoe vremia*, August 25, 1905.

presented to the tsar just two weeks prior. Drawing on his words about the *Zemskii sobor*, he once again appealed for readers to rally to the tsar and devote all themselves to putting people of “energy, talent, and reason” into the proposed assembly. Russia had not “passed the test” of its domestic turmoil during the war, and if it could not deal with these issues in peacetime it faced dire consequences.²¹⁸

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1905 had marked a peak of the newspaper’s role as a venue for cross-class discussions of Russian national and imperial identities. Unending losses on the battlefield had brought it into greater and greater conflict with the regime and the officials it held responsible for these defeats. The contentious relationship with Foreign Minister Lamzdorf continued from the previous year and finally boiled over as the Portsmouth conference coalesced. The newspaper emerged victorious in its battles with the minister for a few reasons. Lamzdorf was the empire’s chief diplomat, but he lacked the prestige and skill of a Witte or Plevé. With his mentor Witte out of favor between 1903 and 1905 Lamzdorf could exert little influence outside of his own ministry. Perhaps more importantly, *Novoe vremia* successfully avoided official sanction for its writing during the war because of its carefully cultivated image as the regime’s chief proponent in the popular press.

Suvorin’s calls for a *zemskii sobor* and joy at the tsar’s vague February promises offer insights into how Russian conservatives understood the nature of the tsarist state and its connection to its people. Using nationalist rhetoric, Suvorin argued that Russia must look to its own unique traditions for the solution to its ills. For monarchists, the strongest tsarist tradition—

²¹⁸ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, August 17, 1905.

the autocracy—remained inviolable. Suvorin's conceptualization of a *zemskii sobor*, historically inaccurate as it may have been, offered an institution in line with these traditions that might quench the people's desire for political participation. This assembly would bring about the kind of ideal of national unity and strength common to right-wing nationalism in Europe during this period. In this way, Suvorin was able to blend ancient traditions with modern calls for representation. His insistence on continuing the war even after Port Arthur, Mukden, and Tsushima and his revision of Russian history to offer a model to do so show that he was more than a little out touch with the reality of the war and the conditions on the home front.

As letters show, many of Suvorin's readers in the countryside seem to have applauded his ideas. Though they represented only a small sliver of *Novoe vremia*'s readership, they nevertheless help us understand how segments of the newspaper reading population responded to this kind of nationalist ideology in 1905. As we have seen, these readers latched onto some of Suvorin's sentiments more than others. While a few repeated his platitudes about national unity, almost all shared the desire for a measure of popular input in government. Some even gravitated to his nebulous ideas about calling a *zemskii sobor*. These sources also present a starker picture of the Russian countryside than Suvorin's articles and their visions of a chorus of Russian voices awaiting the chance to sing in harmony. The peasant world of 1905 seems instead one of emotional bonds to tsar and country but animosity toward perceived local and national enemies.

Novoe vremia strayed little from its initial tropes about its rivals in the East and West in its overall narrative of the Russo-Japanese conflict. Though Japan's victories on the battlefield necessitated the newspaper tone down its earlier emphasis on its adversary as small and weak, it continued to portray the island empire as a treacherous foe that preyed on its fellow Asians and flouted international law. Other great powers, especially Britain and the United States, similarly

remained depicted as greedy and predatory competitors that left Russia constantly on guard. After Tsushima, these empires outpaced even the Japanese as Russia's most potentially dangerous foes during the peace negotiations. The newspaper took little comfort in the terms Witte secured in the treaty. Its loyalties during the turmoil of 1905 were increasingly to an idealized notion of the Russian nation rather than the tsarist regime that currently existed. *Novoe vremia*'s patriotism was not contingent on Russia's triumph over Japan, but defeat on incredibly generous terms was still defeat. Given its investment in the war's outcome from the beginning, it was unlikely to have been satisfied with anything besides victory.

Epilogue and Conclusion

After he gave his thoughts on the Portsmouth peace in August 1905, Suvorin did not publish a “Littler Letter” for over two months. He spent this time in Italy, where he did “not read a single Russian newspaper, including *Novoe vremia*.”¹ He returned in late October to a Russia much changed.

Earlier that month, worker unrest and frustration at the slow pace of reform erupted into another general strike. It lasted for nine days and spread from Petersburg and Moscow throughout the provinces. By October 16, the crippled infrastructure had caused food prices to soar in the two capitals.² Nicholas, under increasing pressure from Witte and other ministers and facing the breakdown of law and order, consented to a manifesto that officially promised civil rights, the rule of law, and a legislative body based on universal suffrage.³ Witte had penned the Manifesto of October 17, and the decree appointed him to lead a new cabinet (the Council of Ministers) with policymaking powers as Russia’s first prime minister. The document set the stage for a new political era, but it did not solve the state’s problems.

Leading articles occasionally covered international politics in late 1905 and early 1906, but the domestic situation garnered most of *Novoe vremia*’s attention. It greeted the October Manifesto with jubilation and claimed that it had “completed Russia’s destiny.” Russians could now seize the “initiative” to work with the government for the good of the motherland. Though condemning radicals, the paper called for lenience toward those arrested during the events of 1905. It made a particular point of applauding the “liberation” of the press from censorship that the Manifesto seemed to suggest and printed a statement by the recently formed Union for the

¹ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, October 29, 1905.

² Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 215.

³ The manifesto appears in full in *Ibid.*, 228-229.

Defense of Free Speech.⁴ The union consisted of the editors of Petersburg's main newspapers, and its statement proclaimed that the press would openly express its opinions about the October Manifesto.⁵ Although moderating its enthusiasm with calls for reconciliation and calm, *Novoe vremia* supported the October Manifesto and began to engage with the new political reality. In the coming months, *Novoe vremia* ran articles downplaying the violence of militantly pro-tsar and anti-Semitic mobs of so-called "Black Hundreds."⁶ It was also quick to praise the newly formed moderate monarchist party. The Union of October 17 (known as the Octobrists) formed to support the gains of the Manifesto but, unlike the more liberal Constitutional Democrats (known as Kadets), saw little need to ask for more.⁷ For the first time, Sokolovskii's cartoons started to cover Russian politics and depict government officials, often unflatteringly.⁸ In the wake of the Manifesto, the Kadets and radicals alike overplayed their political hand. They refusing to cooperate with Witte's new government and pushed for further freedoms. Urban and rural disturbances continued sporadically into the next year. *Novoe vremia* called on Witte to bring the hammer down to restore order and push forward with the tsar's promises.

On October 18, 1905, Witte had met with forty representatives from the press to shore up support for the Manifesto. He had asked for their support to reestablish calm, but those present—including Suvorin's son Mikhail, who was a *Novoe vremia* co-editor—responded by demanding guarantees of press freedom. Witte deferred and offered only the basic assurance that press

⁴ "Amnestiia," *Novoe vremia*, October 22, 1905. The Union's statement appears in the fifth section of this lengthy leading editorial.

⁵ Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 219-220; Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 234.

⁶ "Inostrannaia pechat' o 'chernykh sotniakh,'" *Novoe vremia*, October 30, 1905. For more on the Black Hundreds, including their tactics and organization, see Jacob Langer, "Corruption and the Counterrevolution: The Rise and Fall of the Black Hundred," (PhD diss., Duke University, 2007).

⁷ "Soiuz 17 oktiabria," *Novoe vremia*, November 26, 1905. For the Union of October 17 see Emmons, *The Formation of Political Parties and the First National Elections in Russia*, 89-143, 206-225.

⁸ See, for example, his depiction of Witte confronting the revolutionary menace in "Vitte i anarkhiia," *Novoe vremia*, December 11, 1905.

reform was coming. Neither side got what it wanted from the meeting.⁹ When Suvorin began publishing “Little Letters” a few days afterwards, his love-hate relationship with Witte resumed as well. He criticized the new prime minister for not acting decisively enough to put down revolutionary disturbances in the cities and countryside. Simultaneously, however, he told readers that Russia would be completely lost without Witte.¹⁰

Suvorin supported the new government but remained adamant about *Novoe vremia*’s right to publish freely. He had not attended the October 18 meeting, but had a run-in with Witte several weeks later. The Petersburg Soviet of Worker’s Deputies, a worker council formed during the revolution and, staffed by Bolsheviks, SRs, and other radicals, had distributed a “Financial Manifesto” calling on Petersburgers to withdraw all their money from state banks in cash. Though he detested the radicals that had written the document, Suvorin faced pressure to print it from his typesetters and printing press workers, who had been involved in the general strike movement. He and Witte had a telephone conversation about this topic the night of December 1. The prime minister informed Suvorin that he would close *Novoe vremia* immediately if it published the document. After a brief discussion, Suvorin agreed not to publish the manifesto.¹¹ Witte made good on his promise. He considered the soviet’s statement a radical enough attempt on the empire’s treasury to require extraordinary measures. When eight Petersburg newspapers published the manifesto on December 2, he received the council of

⁹ Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 234; Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 220-221. *Novoe vremia* published a transcript of the meeting, “Redaktory peterburgskikh gazet i zhurnalov u S. Iu Vitte,” *Novoe vremia*, October 22, 1905.

¹⁰ Suvorin, “Malen’koe pis’mo,” *Novoe vremia*, December 17, 1905; McReynolds, *The News Under Russia’s Old Regime*, 209-210.

¹¹ Witte recounts the conversation in his memoir in the original Russian, *Iz arkhiva S. Iu. Vitte. Vospominaniia*, vol. II, 429-430; See also, Makarova, “A. S. Suvorin v dnevnikh S. I. Smirnovoi-Sazanovoi,” 176.

ministers' approval to close them, seize all issues that ran the document, and file suit against their publishers under a new set of press laws.¹²

The decline in law and order in autumn 1905, together with the celebratory "Days of Liberty" that followed the October Manifesto had already led to *de facto* press freedom, however. Early promises of loosening censorship, like the tsarist government in 1905 as a whole, lagged well behind the pace of events. On November 24, Witte presented Nicholas with an ukase that would essentially grant press freedom by dismantling the system of administrative penalties. He kept his word to the Petersburg publishers about reform, but made sure the government still had the means to influence the press. When the tsar signed the decree, responsibility for determining criminal content in publications transferred to the judiciary. The chief bureau continued to monitor the press, but it lost the ability to issue warnings, ban street sales, close publications, or order the prompt publication of official refutations. The criminality of an article or published statement now had to be proven in a court of law. Laws governing what was allowed in print remained vague, and the tsarist regime filed over a hundred of these cases in 1906 alone.¹³ Still, the November 24 ukase technically ended state censorship by removing the imperial government's power to interfere with the press directly. Journalists now had relative freedom to speak their mind.¹⁴

Urban disturbances culminated in a ten-day general strike and armed uprising of workers led by Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SRs in Moscow in mid-December. Witte and the new interior minister, Petr Durnovo, responded with ruthless force. Durnovo was a reactionary Witte

¹² Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 223; Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 299-300.

¹³ Conviction was not always guaranteed. The government filed numerous suits against *Russkie vedomosti* over the next few years, for example, but the paper was only convicted twice. Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 225.

¹⁴ Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 225-226; Jonathan W. Daly, "Government, Press, and Subversion in Russia, 1906-1917," *The Journal of the Historical Society* 9, no. 1 (March, 2009), 31-33.

had chosen to replace Bulygin because of his experience with police administration.¹⁵ After crushing the rebellion with troops and artillery, the repression spread to provincial cities and the countryside. At the end of 1905, Witte's measures had restored relative calm to the capitals. By the next spring, almost 70 percent of the empire's provinces and territories had laws in place that gave police and the military extraordinary powers to maintain the peace.¹⁶

On January 1, 1906, *Novoe vremia* expressed relief at the restoration of order and looked forward to the upcoming elections to the State Duma in March. In a "Little Letter," Suvorin hoped that with major disturbances seemingly over, Russia could now set about the task it had laid out for itself in the previous year. People from all levels of society—from gentry, to intelligentsia, to workers, to peasants—could now lend their talents to aid the tsar in realizing their motherland's full potential. The Duma was creating "a new Russia, a new empire," he explained. Neither Japan, nor the Revolution had destroyed their homeland in 1905. The "internal, invisible, divine power of our tribe" would bring about Russia's rebirth in the New Year.¹⁷

Novoe vremia figured prominently in the empire's popular press over the next decade, but in the new political terrain of the Duma period it was somewhat less influential. With the press ostensibly freed and political parties legal, domestic politics were now more or less open for debate. Periodicals could now be more open with their political affiliations, and many parties founded their own newspapers, such as the popular Kadet paper, *Rech'* [*Speech*].

Between the Duma elections of 1906 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Suvorin's newspaper largely supported the Octobrists and maintained its staunchly conservative

¹⁵ Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 249-250. On the Moscow Uprising, its background, and defeat, see Laura Engelstein, *Moscow 1905: Working Class Organization and Political Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982).

¹⁶ Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 334-335.

¹⁷ Suvorin, "Malen'koe pis'mo," January 1, 1906.

orientation. It frequently cheered the reactionary policies of Petr Arkadevich Stolypin, Russia's prime minister from April 1906 until his assassination in September 1911.¹⁸ While it remained nominally pro-government, the newspaper continued to report on abuses and incompetence and did not refrain from criticizing specific officials and ministers. When gendarmes fired on hundreds striking gold miners in the Lena goldfields in April 1912, for example, it joined the liberal press in condemning the action and Prime Minister Vladimir Nikolaevich Kokovtsov's limited response.¹⁹ Around the same time, Men'shikov, who emerged as Duma-era *Novoe vremia*'s most influential writer,²⁰ published a string of articles that berated the Russian military administration's continuing attempts to rebuild after the Russo-Japanese War. His attacks in 1912 contained many of the same complaints about negligence and inefficiency that colored his words about the Russian navy in 1904.²¹ The newspaper, thus, occupied a similar space during the Duma period as it had in the decade prior. It remained the most widely read conservative newspaper in the empire, yet relative press freedom and nominally representative government in many ways deprived it of the connections that had made it so dominant.

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¹⁸ Witte resigned for a number of reasons, including his desire to leave the position after more or less weathering the revolutionary crisis, his association with the extremely unpopular Durnovo (whom the tsar pressed to resign as well), dysfunction and disagreements among members of the Council of Ministers, and exhaustion. Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Authority Restored* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 71-72. Witte was briefly followed by Ivan Goremykin, who served for only a month and a half before Stolypin assumed the chairmanship. For more on *Novoe vremia* during this period, see David R. Costello, "Novoe Vremia and the Conservative Dilemma, 1911-1914," *Russian Review* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 1978): 30-50.

¹⁹ For more on the Lena Goldfields Massacre, see Michael Melancon, *The Lena Goldfields Massacre and the Crisis of the Late Tsarist State* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M Press, 2006).

²⁰ Suvorin wrote fewer and fewer "Little Letters" after 1906, and published his final feuilleton in the series on August 28, 1908.

²¹ Costello, "Novoe Vremia and the Conservative Dilemma, 1911-1914," 38-41.

By the end of 1905, the terms and structure of the conversation in *Novoe vremia*'s pages regarding Northeast Asia's importance to Russia's identity as an empire and as a nation had changed. Lamzdorf ultimately never contacted the chief bureau about *Novoe vremia* again after the incident over the "Diplomatic Ailments" article in June 1905. With the collapse of the censorship regime he and his predecessors lost their ability to directly and officially make opinions known to the newspaper and demand its prompt reply.²² Censorship would not return in this form until war began again in 1914. Further, the reality of Duma elections made newspapers no longer one of the only ways for the public to discuss (if indirectly) these types of issues. Finally, defeat in the conflict with Japan brought an end to the thrust of expansion into Northeast Asia that had begun with the Tripartite Intervention of 1895. After Portsmouth, Russia lost most of its influence in southern Manchuria. Although Russia began work on an Amur line to the Trans-Siberian Railway along its border with Manchuria in 1907, foreign policy interest in the region would only peak again following the Chinese Revolution of 1911.²³

The decade of 1895 to 1905 marked a distinct moment in Russia's national and imperial imagination. In the empire's largest conservative newspaper, this era was characterized by a search for Russia's political, cultural, and national position between Europe and Asia. Events such as the Sino-Japanese War, lease of Port Arthur, and Boxer Uprising oriented this search outward. Russia's identity was something to be determined on the international stage. National and ethnic stereotypes played an important role in explaining where exactly it stood regarding its Asian and European neighbors. Political cartoons and polemical articles offered images of what Russia was not. It was neither a greedy and intrusive European empire, nor was it a treacherous or backward Asian realm. *Novoe vremia* presented Russia instead as an admixture of the best

²² Lamzdorf in fact resigned as foreign minister in early 1906 and died a few months later.

²³ On the Amur Line, Chia Yin Hsu, "A Tale of Two Railroads." For Russian interests in Mongolia and the Chinese Revolution, see Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 269-298 and Willard Sunderland, *The Baron's Cloak*, passim.

qualities of each. It had the civilizational and technological sophistication of Europe but none of its pomposity or avarice. Its shared geography and autocratic model made it a benevolent neighbor to China but not susceptible to the Qing dynasty's stagnation or crudeness. Though the focus was on Russia's relations with China and Northeast Asia, the European audience remained a critical component. The empire's benignity in the region might benefit its eastern neighbors but was more important as a performance of Russia's power and civilization for European powers. These rivals had spurned its aspirations and wounded its pride earlier in the nineteenth century during the Crimean War and at the Congress of Berlin. Russia's supposed peaceful and mutually beneficial expansion into Manchuria would prove its moral superiority to the European and Japanese empires now stumbling over themselves to subjugate the weakened Qing Dynasty.

In *Novoe vremia's* pages, Russia undertook a singular "civilizing mission." The trope that one's empire was uniquely qualified or possessed a special duty to colonize was not uncommon. Russia's French allies during this period, for example, considered their form of imperialism superior to others because it consisted of the maintenance and spread of republican values to colonized peoples. As the bulwark of democracy in Europe, the argument went, it was France's duty to enlighten its colonies and eventually instill the French verve for liberty in them.²⁴ *Novoe vremia's* vision of the uniquely Russian form of imperialism in many ways rested on the inversion of these principles. Russia could equitably and beneficially deal with Asian peoples because it was the most Asian of the European powers, the newspaper argued. Its strength lay in the combination of European enlightenment with the supposed social unity that sprang from tsarist autocracy. Further, although in this narrative Russia sought to appear civilized before its European rivals, its emphasis on the oppression and poverty relations with Europe had wrought upon the Chinese population questioned the very idea of European civilization. In this way, the

²⁴ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 1-2; Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses*, xx.

newspaper and many of its readers (especially in the foreign ministry) sought to present Russian imperialism as conspicuously *anti-imperialist*.

War with Japan—an empire that the *Novoe vremia* depicted as having the *worst* qualities of Europe and Asia—represented a collision of its idealized vision of Russia’s role in Northeast Asia with reality. The war began mostly because of Russia’s distinctly un-neighborly actions in northeastern China. For the newspaper’s journalists and many of its readers, however, the war was the culminating test of this vision. Victory would allow the perpetuation of a benign image. It would more importantly prove Russia’s mettle as a civilizing power to European countries that viewed it as backward and unrefined. *Novoe vremia* ran ardently nationalistic articles and ramped up its stereotyping of European and Japanese enemies. This fervor pressed beyond the bounds of what the government deemed appropriate on several occasions. For their part, *Novoe vremia*’s readers took part in a fleet donation campaign and wrote Suvorin letters expressing their hopes and anxieties about the conflict. Steady losses on the battlefield along with gross inefficiencies and miscommunications in the war effort seemed to show that Russia was failing this test.

As a result, *Novoe vremia* and its readers re-oriented their pursuit of Russia’s destiny inwards. Defeat at the front and the disintegration of the domestic situation led to soul-searching and increasingly open criticisms of the tsarist regime’s shortcomings. One important result of this inward focus appeared in the tide of reader letters to Suvorin highlighting government inadequacies. The newspaper’s own implicit critiques of elements of the regime in 1904 (and explicit ones in 1905) were also a part of this trend. Another important result was Suvorin’s reinterpretation of the *Zemskii sobor* and his conversation with these readers about its nature and necessity. The notion sprang partly from his own deluded ideas about the feasibility of

continuing the war and his somewhat wishful interpretations of the reader letters he received on the topic. Still, his history of championing this notion of a *zemskii sobor* and insistent campaigning for it in 1905 seem to show a dedication to his monarchical dreams for the Russian nation. That some of his readers wrote to lend their support to his idea may have convinced him they were a real possibility.

In his biography of Suvorin, Dinershtein argues that *Novoe vremia*'s publisher "did not know his own people [*narod*], or rather, did not want to understand their aspirations and concerns."²⁵ Suvorin's interactions with his readers regarding the war effort and his ideas about the *Zemskii sobor* show this to be an oversimplification. He was certainly prone to demagoguery, and differences between his private opinions on the war and tsarist government and those he published in his "Little Letters" demonstrate more than a little doublethink. Yet, he was not entirely out of touch with his readership. He might have only hinted at the dissatisfaction they expressed to him in his published writings, but their letters likely affected his interactions with the imperial government. Their expressions of grief at the war and despair at the deterioration of the home front seem to have confirmed some of his private opinions in 1904 and 1905. To a certain extent, Suvorin may have viewed this reader correspondence as a soundboard of approval for his own ideas about Russian society and its enemies. Many readers, indeed, simply repeated his words back to him. But for all his selectivity when drawing on their words in his "Little Letters," the fact that he received so many reader letters in 1904-05 shows that he did have access to a range of public opinion. Suvorin, therefore, seems to have at least *thought* that he spoke for and to many in his audience.

²⁵ Dinershtein, *A. S. Suvorin*, 94.

An examination of its published and unpublished dialogues with the government shows the seriousness with which the newspaper's readers in these circles viewed its influence. Memoranda to Count Lamzdorf and the chief bureau from both Russian officials and foreign diplomats aptly demonstrate the paper's reputation as a mouthpiece for government ideas and its perceived sway over Russian readers. The frequency with which Count Lamzdorf contacted the chief bureau regarding its coverage of events in the Far East also betrays a deep concern for Russia's appearance to both the domestic and international audience. The foreign minister may have had somewhat of a personal grudge against the newspaper (which it reciprocated), but he still respected its authority enough to consistently try to influence its reportage and commentary regarding the events in Northeast Asia.

Furthermore, this continued attention also demonstrated the measure of influence the newspaper had over the foreign ministry itself. Lamzdorf's, and earlier, Murav'ev's, interactions with *Novoe vremia* almost invariably entailed attempts to restrain its jingoistic rhetoric. In these instances, the ministry viewed the newspaper's reputation as powerful enough that its words might interfere with the ministry's diplomatic endeavors. Admonitions from the British ambassador during the war regarding the newspaper's anti-British rhetoric showed that these fears had some basis. Lamzdorf at times seems to have worried that *Novoe vremia* exerted too much influence over public discourse about the war and Russia's international position. Indeed, the newspaper appears to have warranted legitimate foreign policy consideration during this period.

Ultimately, the constant back and forth between *Novoe vremia* and the foreign ministry illustrates that the newspaper was often more nationalistic and enamored with Russian glory than even the government. Its drift toward criticism of the bureaucracy and foreign ministry in late

1904 and 1905 came from this standpoint. The deepest moments of crisis in 1905 proved the newspaper's loyalties in the end lay more with its own conceptualization of Russia and the tsar than with the government.

Additionally, the newspaper's fervor, together with the flood of reader support in the form of letters and donations to the fleet campaign, offers important insights into a portion of the public's relationship with Russian imperialism. At its heart, the war with Japan was for and about empire. It took place on Russia's imperial frontier and entailed the defense of both its interests and identity as a global power. This particular imperial project, thus, remained tightly bound to conceptions of Russian national identity. Although many letters voiced concerns about internal issues, the connection of these issues to the war and the empire's outward appearance showed concern for Russia's international prestige. The Russian reading public was certainly smaller than Europe's, and Suvorin's newspaper reached only a subsection of these readers. Yet, *Novoe vremia* and its readership showed an enthusiasm for the war effort and engagement with national and imperial stereotypes and ideals similar to those found among the British and French publics at the time.²⁶ In this way, they exhibited a definite awareness and support for empire. As the events of 1904 and 1905 show, the tsarist government's inflexibility did not just fail to tap into this attitude among a portion of the public; it actively alienated many of the voices offering support.

Nonetheless, the Chief Bureau of Press Affairs' repeated references to the paper's overall "well-intentioned" and "loyal" orientation show that though the regime forbade meaningful input from its subjects on political matters, it could not afford to completely ignore this public opinion. Ironically, the newspaper's real and perceived closeness to the tsarist regime led to both

²⁶ On British popular interest in empire, see MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 253-254, for the French case, see Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses*, 202-208.

government ministers' attempts to reprimand it for its content and the chief bureau's and interior ministry's repeated refusal to do so. For most of the decade in question, the chief bureau served less as a vehicle for official sanction on *Novoe vremia* than a conduit for the newspaper's and the foreign ministry's conversations about how strongly Russia ought to denigrate its rivals and pursue its "legitimate interests" internationally.

At the turn of the twentieth century, *Novoe vremia* offered a discursive space for its journalists and readers among both government circles and the general population. The flow of opinions from both audiences to the newspaper (and back) resulted in a distinct narrative of Russia's place as both a nation and global empire. The national and ethnic stereotypes it used as foils remained fluid between the Sino-Japanese War and the events of 1905, but largely stuck with the image of Britain and Japan as perfidious and untrustworthy rivals and China as a sympathetic, though perhaps slightly dangerous, friend. The most important stereotype in its pages, however, was Russia itself. As the only moral force among the imperial powers in Northeast Asia, Russia appeared as isolated and maligned by the international community. In this setting, its account was one of rectifying the wrongs Europe had done to Russia and proving that it still deserved the respect of its peers.

As I have argued, *Novoe vremia*, in conversation with its various readerships, presented Russia's expansion into Manchuria, war with Japan, and Revolution in 1905 as part of the same national and imperial narrative. In its pages, Russia's actions in Northeast Asia served the nation while expanding the empire. When the Russo-Japanese War exposed the inefficiencies and volatilities of the Russian homeland this conflict became part of the national project as well. Finally, when Revolution shook the empire's foundations, the newspaper's criticisms of the

government and Suvorin's idealized *zemskii sobor* merged victory with reform to create a single nation-building project.

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