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## **From the Disarmament Proposition of 1898 to the Willy-Nicky Telegrams: Looking at Nicholas II as Peacemaker of Europe**

by **Grace Larkin**

**T**HE FALL of the Russian monarchy remains a tragically sad event in the scope of history. With scholarly attention focused on violence, the rise of Bolshevism, and the ensuing Soviet Union, the final tsar fades into the tapestry of Russian history as a tarnished reminder of bloody rebellions, pogroms, and war. As Nicholas II attempted to institute political and social peace within his homeland and Europe, the variegated influences on the tsar reveal themselves through considerate examination of the Russian political situation at both international and domestic levels, the complicated nature of Nicholas II's personal life and its effect on his public persona, and early twentieth intellectual sources. This paper aims to present the final tsar as a peacemaker through deliberate understanding of his motives and the effects of political, familial, and personal influence upon his public persona and reign. Despite his nickname of Nicholas the Bloody, Nicholas II can be remembered as a surprising innovator for the cause of European peace because of his Disarmament Proposition of 1898 which led to the first Hague Conference and his attempt to prevent World War I with the infamous Willy-Nicky Telegrams.

### **Beginning Abroad**

Nicholas II did not necessarily frame his own definition for his pacifism, but rather evidenced it through the words of his political statements, often delivered by



Figure 1. International reaction to the Rescript for Peace from a Paris newspaper, courtesy of Getty Images.

the Russian court officials. Also known as the Tsar's Rescript for Peace, the Disarmament Proposition of 1898 presented the tsar's wishes for a peaceful Europe with specific goals in mind as both a humanitarian and as a major player within the European political climate. The

statement, presented on behalf of Nicholas II, suggested that the arms race beleaguering European countries not only taxed the individual finances of each state, but continued to waste the “intellectual and physical strength of the nations, labor and capital...diverted from their natural application, and unproductive, consumed.”<sup>1</sup> In simpler terms, the countries of Europe detracted from their developmental progress in culture, economy, and accumulated wealth by continually upping their weaponry, essentially further crippling themselves in the pursuit of possible war. The Russian tsar suggested peaceful disarmament and a conference to discuss such plans in an attempt to not only create a sustainable peace for the region but to promote the quality of life for the peoples of Europe.

In addition to the statement’s pragmatic reasoning, the Rescript for Peace presented the Russian tsar as a concerned ruler who insisted on peace as the essential burden of all European countries. Nicholas II directed his proposal for peace to all European governments, both small and large, in the hopes that cautious movements to disarm would ensure “maintenance of general peace,”<sup>2</sup> choosing to identify the necessity of such actions as an issue of international relations. The document recalls previous attempts at peaceful relations, citing that the failure to provide permanent peace could be traced to “general appeasement” and “powerful alliances,” rather than focusing on the establishment of peace as the world order as a replacement for war.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the statement boldly suggests that the further collection of arms in the attempt to prevent conflict will only inevitably result in a disastrous war. The tsarist call for a peace conference

reveals Nicholas II’s hopes for a unified and peaceful Europe.

Both heavy criticism and supportive lauding of the Disarmament Proposition followed its publication. In January 1899, a mere five months after the tsar’s invitation to create a durable peace via disarmament and diplomacy, T.J. Lawrence of the *International Journal of Ethics* summarized the reaction to Nicholas II’s proposal. He affirmed the nobility and needful accuracy of the tsar’s statement, particularly in relation to the financial predicament the arms race had forced upon many European countries without any noteworthy gains in domestic or foreign security. Lawrence himself seemed to support the tsar’s initiative for European peace, stating European leaders had no choice but to support the proposal, as “No statesman cares to pose before the world as an enemy of peace and the things which make for peace.”<sup>4</sup> He focused particularly on the practicality of the tsar’s plan for peace, suggesting that the gradual process of disarmament will realign militarism into a more libertarian patriotism based in commerce and a healthy morality.

From economic impracticality to the tsar’s true motivations, the author carefully critiqued each argument besieging Nicholas II’s suggestions for peace, dispelling each one with solid logic. However, the bulk of Lawrence’s personal criticism for such a plan lies in the fact that he believed the rivalries between European states would prevent total or partial disarmament and that only an agreement to prevent furthering the arms race could occur. Instead, he presented a Swiss-based commission of small, neutral countries to oversee the peace conference and the disarmament, which would publish an an-

1 “Peace Conference at the Hague 1899: Rescript of the Russian Emperor, August 24 (12, Old Style), 1898,” *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, accessed November 13, 2016, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/hag99-01.asp#b1](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/hag99-01.asp#b1).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 T.J. Lawrence, “The Tsar’s Rescript,” *International Journal of Ethics* 9, no. 2 (January 1899): 138, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2375231>.

nual report for public consumption.<sup>5</sup> His only advice to the governments of Europe warned them against revering Nicholas too early and too much.

### **Playing Political Chess: King or Pawn?**

The First Hague Peace Conference of 1899 tried to embody Lawrence's clarifications upon the tsar's rescript. Twenty-six mostly European countries, yet strangely including the United States and Mexico, met in the Netherlands to discuss the conduct of warfare.<sup>6</sup> Historian Dan Morrill traces the fascinating amalgam of influence that led to Nicholas II's issuance of both the Disarmament Proposition and the following circular to call for the Hague Conference. He names various ministers of the Russian government, the tsar's personal disposition, and Nicholas II's mother, Maria Feodorovna, as direct agents for or against a Russian push for peace. His article plots the fluctuations of the tsar's decision-making process, noting that his weak will, lack of confidence in his own leadership skills, and constant questioning of himself led to thoughtful consideration in the construction of each document.<sup>7</sup> The Russian court officials surrounding Nicholas whispered their own opinions under the guise of advice, constantly trying to promote either peace or war.

Aleksei Kuropatkin, minister of war, appealed to the tsar's idealistic sense of mission, which Morrill suggests Nicholas II genuinely "did view himself as a

champion in the case of peace and acted accordingly,"<sup>8</sup> with a quick secondary reason of financial consideration to the Russian treasury as the arms race continued. Michael Muraviev, minister of foreign affairs, pleaded for peace, or at the very least, slowing the manic collecting of weaponry by other countries, in consideration of the international situation; he proposed that the peace conference would insulate Russia against an anti-tsarist coalition led by Great Britain.<sup>9</sup> Further developing the tsar's conception of a peaceful Europe, military officer A. Bazili forwarded a summary of the Universal Peace Congress in 1896 to Saint Petersburg, in essence introducing a Russian-supported international court of arbitration on the basis of humanitarian reasoning.<sup>10</sup> Despite their pragmatic approach to Russian security, Morrill notes that the longer the tsar waited on a firm declaration of peace, the more time these ministers had to obtain and develop Russian armaments, possibly casting a less than honest light upon the motivations of the Russian government for the Hague Conference.

As months passed between Muraviev's first presentation of the idea in March 1898, its publication as the rescript on April 24 and its following circular,<sup>11</sup> and the eventual conference in May 1899, Nicholas flitted between the opposing opinions of his trusty ministers and his family. He began to think less in the terms of total disarmament and more in the postponement of the arms race. The change in his thought can be attributed to interactions with his uncle, Grand Duke Aleksei Aleksandrovich, and his mother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, both of whom disdainfully positioned themselves against the

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5 Ibid., 151.

6 "Hague Convention, 1899, 1907," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed November 19, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hague-Conventions>.

7 Dan L. Morrill, "Nicholas II and the Call for the First Hague Conference," *The Journal of Modern History* 46, no. 2 (June 1974): 305-306, accessed November 12, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1877523>.

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8 Ibid., 300.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 304.

11 A circular is a letter or pamphlet distributed to a large audience; in this case, the word circular refers to the publication of Nicholas II's rescript.

circular and its implications. The Grand Duke, head of the Russian navy, desired a gradual increase, rather than decrease in Russian arms,<sup>12</sup> suggesting that he prioritized military might on behalf of Russian security rather than of European security. The Dowager Empress, in a dinner conversation with Kuropatkin,<sup>13</sup> suggested to her son that Russian tradition and security should be firmly rooted in the continuation of military achievement and the development of new weaponry. Wearied of being pulled in two directions, the tsar dragged his feet in the realization of his dreams for a peace conference. Political reality had tempered the tsar's optimistic idealism.

### Success in International Stability and Political Peace

The first Hague Conference convened on Nicholas' thirty-first birthday, May 18, 1899. Several journalists attended the discussions among the leaders of nations and their various militaries. In 1911, *The Advocate of Peace*, an international relations journal published by the American Peace Society, presented the magnitude of the conference's international and historic significance. Though originally approached as "a huge diplomatic joke" taken up at the insistence of a vacillating, timid tsar,<sup>14</sup> the first Hague Conference matured into a successful system of international arbitration with a world judiciary and legislation. These diplomatic meetings spanned ten weeks without political disruption, concluding with the estab-

lishment of a legal precedence for peace. *The Advocate of Peace* cites various literary and philosophical threads, from Tolstoy to Bloch, as proof that the tsar's rescript and its consequences existed as no accident, but as the culmination of "centuries of Christian progress."<sup>15</sup> The article stresses the importance of the conference's humanitarian and global scope which marshaled the leaders of the world. The universal scale from which the men, who represented four-fifths of the world's population, worked included global economy, the democratic spirit, and respect for internationalism. From this platform, the conference "was to humanize...the inhumanities of actual war"<sup>16</sup> by redefining the customs of war, limiting armaments, and inaugurating the pacific settlement of disputes through arbitration.

While Nicholas II's original hope for disarmament ended in pragmatic failure, his intent for a more secure Europe began to take shape. To exemplify a Russian application of the tsar's pacifism, his influence through the Hague Conference came to fruition with the case of the Dogger Bank incident. In light of building tensions of the Russo-Japanese War, a panicked Russian admiral opened fire and demolished a fleet of English fishermen in the North Sea, mistaking them for Japanese war ships in 1904.<sup>17</sup> A delicate arbitration process through the international court set by the Hague Conference prevented a war between Russia and England with official Russian reparations and published apology. In later heated diplomatic meetings with Nicholas II, American president Theodore Roosevelt painstakingly engineered the end to the Russo-Japanese war through the Hague's conven-

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12 Ford, Thomas K., "The Genesis of the First Hague Peace Conference," *Political Science Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (September 1936): 372, accessed November 13, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2144022>.

13 Morrill, 307-308.

14 Robert F. Raymond, "Hague Conferences and World Peace," *The Advocate of Peace* 73, no. 4 (April 1911): 83, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20666167>.

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15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 84.

17 Raymond A. Esthus, "Nicholas II and the Russo-Japanese War," *The Russian Review* 40, no. 4 (October 1981): 398, accessed November 11, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/129919>.

tions.<sup>18</sup> Pacifist journals hailed these incidents as tangible success of the momentum spawned by the tsar's rescript. The intent for peace was proving to be as important as pragmatic application.

### **Practicing What He Preaches**

After the tsar's serious foray into peace relations on an international scale, similar concepts began to trickle into his domestic policies as well, but succeeding at home proved to be much trickier than on the international stage the tsar had just graced. Russian society strained under the weight of deep ethno-religious divides, particularly between the privileged and legally protected Orthodox Church, other branches of the Christian religion, and non-Christian religions such as Judaism. On March 12, 1903, Nicholas II's government issued a ukase<sup>19</sup> of toleration concerning this highly pressurized social tension; the document granted religious freedom to the people of Russia, an action which accrued global acclaim as a peace-making action. The edict upheld the views of the Orthodox Church, which remained privileged by law, but guaranteed the rights of non-orthodox subjects to practice and worship according to other belief structures. Critical commentary predicted that the 1903 edict would ease the stress on the Russian populace by encouraging individuality and freedom as a gesture of goodwill towards deviance within the rigid Russian social strata. Journalists lauded Nicholas II's action as reminiscent of

his father, Alexander III, claiming the ukase of religious toleration as "the most significant act of state since the emancipation of the serfs..."<sup>20</sup> genuinely born from the "earnest desire to remove the causes which recently produced such deplorable outbreaks..."<sup>21</sup> of violence based on religious discrimination.

*The Advocate of Peace* also revisited the tsar's movements for domestic peace following their positive critique of the earlier Disarmament Proposition of 1898. The journal stressed that the freedom of religion meant the beginning of all civil liberties demanded by human nature; Russia stood to gain domestic strength and security from such measures, therefore ensuring European respect for improving European living conditions. Russian history had been spattered with the bloody rebellions resulting from poor peasantry-nobility interaction, so a show of improvement at the tsar's behest painted Russia as a progressively civilized, modernized European society on par with the rest of the world.<sup>22</sup> Yet more important than the humanitarian value of the religious toleration ukase proved to be the historical significance to the practical application of the tsar's dreamy optimism. The edict meant the re-evaluation of Russian law, the inclusion of the domestic spirit in the operation of the Russian civil service, and the reform of local government to improve not only the general living conditions of the peasantry but to introduce of self-government through involvement of the populace in local concerns.<sup>23</sup> Despite thinking that

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18 Robert F. Raymond, "Hague Conferences and World Peace," 85.

19 "A Notable Document Issued at St. Petersburg: Muscovite Sovereign Plans Reform of Rural Laws," *San Francisco Call* 9, no. 103 (March 1903): 1-2, accessed November 27, 2016, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SFC19030313.2.11.2>.

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20 Alexander III, Nicholas II's father, was known as the Peacemaker of Russia. The press actively drew parallels between father and son for their peacemaking actions. "What Moved the Czar," *The Advocate of Peace* 61, no. 2 (February 1899): 30, accessed November 13, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25751313>.

21 Ibid, 2.

22 "The Czar Again," *The Advocate of Peace* 65, no. 4 (April 1903): 60-61, accessed November 13, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25752118>.

23 *San Francisco Call*, 1.



Figure 2. St. Petersburg bulletin announcing the October Manifesto, courtesy of Alpha History.

more individuality would result in happier people, limiting disharmonious behaviour, the tsar's well-meaning actions regrettably backfired as he attempted to correct Russian governmental behaviour.

Swiftly followed by further documents of clarification in 1904 with the promise of the removal of legal constraints and prejudices for minority groups,<sup>24</sup> the

24 Eugene M. Avrutin, "Returning to Judaism after the 1905 Law on Religious Freedom in Tsarist Russia," *Slavic Review* 65, no. 1 (2006): 91, accessed November 11, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4148524>.

October Manifesto of 1905 spawned a wave of violence across the Russian landscape. The decree allowed for the conversion of faith without legal punishment, in essence establishing differences between the public (and governmentally regulated) sphere and the private sphere of Russian life; the change to the societal structure of Russia proved to be too threatening to the traditional regime. A hegemonic populace made for easy ruling, and the granting of civil liberties bucked the traditionally tight grip of the tsar upon his people. Prior to this progress, the existing ethno-religious divisions had provided easy scapegoats for flaws in Russian society, from alcoholism to famine to crime. With the added legal protection, minority religions and races now posed as competition to established Russian norms,<sup>25</sup> depositing extra stress on the already creaking existing social structure. In angry response, extreme right-wing tsarist groups lashed out in xenophobic and class-based pogroms.<sup>26</sup>

## The Domestic Failure of International Intent

Nicholas II's attempts to preserve civil peace in Russia led to terroristic attacks upon Jews, students, the Russian intelligentsia, educated elites, and ethnic minorities such as Armenians. Ten months of vigilante bloodshed troubled the country in the form of angry rallies

25 Social stressors stemmed from discrepancies between the practices of race and religion, such as Jewish Armenian as opposed to traditionally Orthodox Slavic. Sergei Podbolotov, "'... and the Entire Mass of Loyal People Leapt up': The attitude of Nicholas II Towards the Pogroms," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 45, no. 1/2 (January-June 2004): 194, accessed November 11, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20174849>.

26 Pogroms are traditionally anti-Semitic riots, but the pogroms of 1905 extended to students and educated subjects at the hands of working class right-wing activists. *Ibid.*, 193-207.

and street beatings, sparking further anti-tsarist and anti-Nicholas II sentiment. Minorities blamed Nicholas II for the violence because of the highly inflammatory use of his portrait by the super-right monarchist movement, furthering the rise of anti-monarchical revolutionaries. While no actual evidence of the tsar's support for the pogroms can be directly established,<sup>27</sup> the absence of state-sanctioned suppression of the pogroms remains startling. The tsar's own opinion concerning the response to his October Manifesto showed that he grouped the classist and minority-based pogroms and resulting revolutionary demonstrations together under the umbrella of general social disorder; he emphasized putting faith in arbitration rather than seeking social harmony through violence, echoing his previously established international sentiments. Nicholas II laid direct responsibility at the feet of local government officials, suggesting a mishandle of local enforcement of the new religious law, and he called for an observance of law and order.<sup>28</sup>

The established social order had begun disintegrating beneath the tsar's good intentions. The warring populace, minorities, and peasantry outraged at the injustice of inequality, the nobility and government officials furious at stepping away from rigid conservatism of Russian values, tumbled through social revolution while blaming their leader.<sup>29</sup> The resurgence of such actions af-

“ THE TSAR'S NATURAL HUMILITY, AVOIDANCE OF CONFRONTATION, AND GENUINE GOOD-NATURED ATTITUDE TOWARDS MANKIND PROMOTED A PEACEFUL PRIVATE PERSONA, ONE THAT PROVED DIFFICULT IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITIES SUCH AS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE OR REGIONAL WAR.

ter his abdication cast further doubt on the tsar's alleged endorsement of the pogroms as pogromists returned to poking holes in the fabric of Russian social stability during the civil war.<sup>30</sup> Torn between the temptation to fall back to the familiar tsarist crackdown or easing burdens through further liberal legislation, Nicholas II reconvened the State Duma in 1906 in an attempt to provide

a peaceful concession in the face of the swirling anger belonging to the Russian masses.

Established with initiatory legislative and oversight powers, the Duma can essentially be described as a lower house of a parliamentary system subject to the balance of the noble-dominated State Council and ultimately limited by the tsar's authority.<sup>31</sup> The governmental body tempered the utter disregard of the State Council for the peasantry because its reconvening represented the civil participation of the Russian people through petition and election of representatives to the State Duma. Laws could not be passed without the approval of one or the other body. The establishment of the constitutional monarchy of Russia ultimately failed in practice as class tensions flared in diplomatic discussion, especially as Duma members began flexing their newfound legal power to

27 Ibid., 197.

28 Ibid., 202.

29 Eugene P. Trani, "Russia in 1905: The View from the American Embassy," *The Review of Politics* 31, no. 1 (January 1969):

49-53, accessed November 10, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1406454>.

30 Sergei Podbolotov, "... and the Entire Mass of Loyal People Leapt up": The attitude of Nicholas II Towards the Pogroms," 206.

31 Serge L. Levitsky, "Legislative Initiative in the Russian Duma," *The American Slavic and East European Review* 15, no. 3 (October 1956): 314-315, 317-318, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3001096>.



quickly incorporate desperately needed reforms.<sup>32</sup> The legal deadlock and rise in revolutionary activities resulted in further social disharmony as the Russian Ministry manipulated the Duma as necessary to tighten the grasp of tsarist control. Between political corruption, class tension, and the hesitant production of reformatory promises, the seeds of revolution blossomed into a full-scale coup of the government;<sup>33</sup> the eleven year fiasco known as the Duma disappeared alongside the tsarist regime with the rise of Soviet Union. Once again, Nicholas II's hopeful plan for a peaceful society had been stamped out by the difficulties of its practical execution.

### Personality of Peace (Or Non-confrontation)

The shy, reserved, and non-confrontational personality belonging to Nicholas II clearly bled into his style of rule and public persona. His surrounding entourage, family, and visiting dignitaries of other European nations provide commentary upon exactly how the taxing responsibilities of being Emperor of Russia proved ill-suited for his gentle nature.<sup>34</sup> Despite fierce devotion to his country and recognition of the importance of his role for his people, Nicholas II did not possess the charisma or powerful attitude commanded by other European rulers.

Starting from childhood, Nicholas II venerated

his father, Alexander III, as a political and personal ideal; his father's rigid morality instilled a deep-seated reservedness and no-frills approach to life within his young son that carried over into Nicholas' ruling style. Conscientious of the magnitude of his role, the final tsar firmly believed in divinity of his actions; in particular, he believed that his mission emanated from God.<sup>35</sup> A.A. Mosolov, the Minister of the Court Chancellory from 1900-1916, recalls the tsar's reluctance to debate controversial topics, his natural timidity, and his tendency to be anti-confrontational, stating that when it came to important decisions concerning the welfare of his nation, Nicholas II preferred solitude, "to be alone with his conscience."<sup>36</sup> Reflective and prayerful, the tsar could spend hours in private deliberation upon the consequences of his political moves. In addition to domestic personnel, foreign ministers also took notice of Nicholas II's genuine hesitation at the execution of his duties.

Major General John Hanbury-Williams of Great Britain, while finding the tsar personally endearing, penned in his recollection of his years at the Russian court that Nicholas II seemed very much an optimist, prone to fidgeting and smoking when agitated or under pressure,<sup>37</sup> and that he preferred "entirely and absolutely...simple, plain and sober living."<sup>38</sup> The tsar's natural humility, avoidance of confrontation, and genuine good-natured attitude towards mankind promoted a peaceful private persona, one that proved difficult in the face of adversities such as civil disobedience or regional war. His own

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32 Robert L. Tuck, "Paul Miljukov and Negotiations for a Duma Ministry, 1906," *The American Slavic and East European Review* 10, no. 2 (April 1951): 118-119, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2491547>.

33 J.L.H Keep, "Russian Social-Democracy and the First State Duma," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 34, no. 82 (December 1955): 183-184, accessed November 27, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4204717>.

34 Basil Maklakov, "On the Fall of Tsardom," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 18, no. 52 (July 1939): 73, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4203551>.

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35 A.A. Mosolov, "Chapter 1," *At the Court of the Last Tsar* (Russia: Methuen, 1935), accessed October 12, 2016, <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/mosolov/>.

36 Ibid.

37 John Hanbury-Williams, "1916 Diary," *The Emperor Nicholas II as I Knew Him* (London: Humphreys, 1922), accessed October 13, 2016, <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/hanbury/>.

38 Ibid., "The Emperor After Leaving Headquarters."

wife, Alexandra, remarked that her “poor Nicky’s cross is a heavy one to bear, all the more as he has nobody on whom he can thoroughly rely and who can be a real help to him. He has had so many bitter disappointments, but through it all he remains brave and full of faith in God’s mercy. He tries so hard, works with such perseverance...”<sup>39</sup> In accordance with the tsarina’s concern for her husband, the historical record shows she deeply influenced Nicholas II’s life, therefore impacting Russian matters of state.

As Nicholas moved further from the advice on foreign affairs from his mother,<sup>40</sup> several of the people attending the royal court recount the resulting growth in the tsarina’s sway over her husband. Pierre Gilliard, tutor to the royal children, emphasizes the motive of genuine concern behind Alexandra’s actions, yet he acknowledges that her protective restriction of her husband’s schedule through careful separation of the details of personal and public spheres<sup>41</sup> and her increasing activism in political affairs<sup>42</sup> did not endear her nor her husband to the common people. The effect of Alexandra on the domestic political situation hurt the public perception of the tsar, as Gilliard presents that the tsar misgauged the personal characters of his ministry and had been led to believe that the nasty circulation of vicious rumors could not possibly

affect his relationship with his people.<sup>43</sup> Sophie Buxhoeveden, lady-in-waiting to the tsarina, blamed the royal family’s intense desire for privacy for the build-up of events that led the inevitable failure of the tsar’s reign:

They [meaning the royal family] did not realise, of course, that the troubles of 1905 were only a general rehearsal of those of 1917, but they thought the times too grave for festivities. The mistake they made was in not replacing their large functions by more informal receptions of prominent politicians and people of note. By this means they would have kept in touch with the general atmosphere of the country, for, by their position, they were cut off from direct contact with public opinion...<sup>44</sup>

The tsar devoted every spare second he had outside of his political life to his wife and children,<sup>45</sup> a behaviour which clearly weighed on him as his public responsibilities as the ruler of Russia and peacemaker of Europe began to intrude on his privacy. Concern for Alexei, the young tsarevitch grievously afflicted with hemophilia, constantly occupied the tsar’s mind, and under the influence of Alexandra, the ruler began to rely heavily on mysticism and religion to guide his life. Major General Hanbury-Williams remarked upon the tsar’s personal beliefs as ultimately manifested in Nicholas’ policies, which sadly resulted in “the combination of an Emperor so devoted to his Empress that her word was law, and of an Empress led unconsciously by the worst possible ad-

39 Sophie Buxhoeveden, “Gathering Clouds,” *Alexandra Feodorovna: The Life and Tragedy of Alexandra Feodorovna, a Biography* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), accessed October 14, 2016. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/2006alix/index.html>.

40 Mossolov, “Chapter 3,” *At the Court of the Last Tsar*.

41 Ibid., “Chapter 2”.

42 Tsarina Alexandra’s political actions progressed from protecting Rasputin through the dismissal of certain ministers to advising her husband during the build-up and beginning of World War I. Pierre Gilliard, “February-September 1915,” *Thirteen Years at the Russian Court* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1921), accessed October 14, 2016, <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/2006pierre/bio.html>.

43 Gossip greatly tarnished Nicholas II’s reputation, leading history to focus more on his violent failures than his peacemaking actions. Ibid., “Travels Abroad, Palace Life”.

44 Buxhoeveden, “On the Standart, 1905-1912,” *Alexandra Feodorovna: The Life and Tragedy of Alexandra Feodorovna, a Biography*.

45 Mossolov, “Chapter 2,” *At the Court of the Last Tsar*.

visers, brought about their ruin and that - for the time being - of their country.”<sup>46</sup> Beyond the influences of personality, familial concerns, and marital pressure, the circle of people around Nicholas II recorded the general reactions to and motives of his major domestic policies.

### Personal Accounts of Nicholas II as Peacemaker

From the October Manifesto and resulting Duma to the Willy-Nicky telegrams on the eve of the outbreak of World War I, several recollections of the motives behind his political actions reveal their resulting responses from the tsar and his people. Concerning Nicholas II’s motives for suppressing the violent revolution following the October Manifesto, A.A. Mossolov noted that the tsar’s ultimate desire existed as the prevention of bloodshed.<sup>47</sup> Gillard and Hanbury-Williams applauded the institution of the Duma as a progressive step towards a peaceful Russian society and definite prevention of war, suggesting that Nicholas II remained plagued by the terrible thought of the possibility of war and wanted to attempt prevention at all chances:

The Duma was in every way worthy of the occasion. It expressed the real will of the nation, for the whole of Russia smarts under the insults heaped upon it by Germany. I have the greatest confidence in the future now. . . . Speaking personally, I have done everything in my power to avert this war, and I am ready to make any concessions consistent with our dignity and national honour. You cannot imagine

how glad I am that all the uncertainty is over, for I have never been through so terrible a time as the days preceding the outbreak of war. I am sure that there will now be a national uprising in Russia like that of the great war of 1812.<sup>48</sup>

Following mentions of domestic and international policies in select memoirs reveal Nicholas II’s hesitancy to declare war in general, as he claimed his unwillingness at signing a formal declaration of war against Bulgaria at the outbreak of World War I.<sup>49</sup> The tsar had attempted to prevent the use of violence through personal correspondence to Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany, known as the Willy-Nicky Telegrams. Due to the German ancestry of his wife, Alix of Hesse, and the distant blood relation of third cousinship to the Kaiser himself, the Russian rumor mill depicted the Russian court as pro-German, something inherently opposite of the popular anti-German sentiment in Russian society.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, the rise of nationalism, sectarian violence within the Balkans threatening pan-Slavism, and the catalytic murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand reflected the diplomatic discrepancies between Russia and Germany, necessitating the tsar to act against the German plot for war. Nicholas II quickly reached out to the Kaiser, pleading on behalf of their personal friendship and kinship to prevent any violence.

Anna Vyubova, close confidante of the tsarina, insisted on the peaceful motives of the tsar as he tried “begging his old friend and relative to stop mobilization, offering to meet the Emperor for a conference which yet

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48 Gilliard, “August 1914,” *Thirteen Years at the Russian Court*.

49 Ibid., “September - December 1915.”

50 Charles Johnston, “What Happened in Russia: Told from Official Documents,” *The North American Review* 205, no. 739 (June 1917): 865, accessed November 10, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25121539>.

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46 Hanbury-Williams, “Emperor and Empress,” *The Emperor Nicholas II as I Knew Him*.

47 Mossolov, “Chapter 1,” *At the Court of the Last Tsar*.

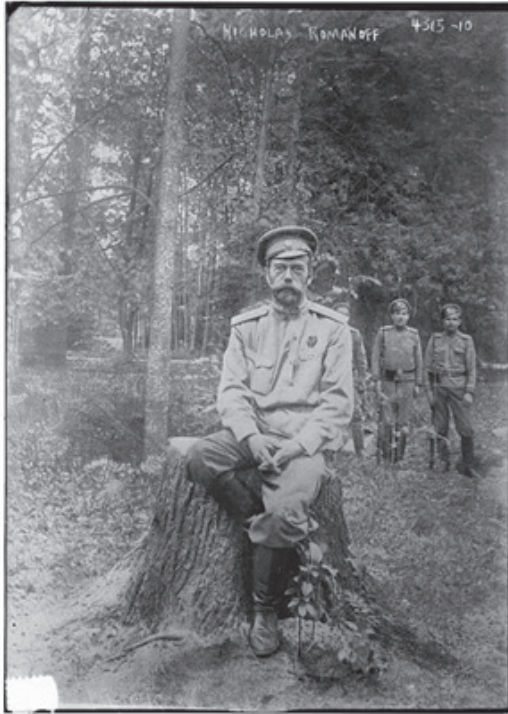


Figure 3. Nicholas II at Tsarskoye Selo, after his abdication in 1917, courtesy of Library of Congress.

might keep the peace,”<sup>51</sup> but regretfully having to proceed with war preparations as the tone of the telegrams wilted into angry formality. Within the words of the documents themselves, Nicholas quite literally begs Wilhelm to avoid a European war,<sup>52</sup> which the Kaiser himself

51 Most likely inspired by the tsar’s earlier Hague sentiments and resulting system of international arbitration. Anna Vyrubova, “1914 - The Great War,” *Memories of the Russian Court* (London: Macmillan, 1923), accessed October 15, 2016, <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/russiangourt2006/index.html>.

52 Isaac Don Levine, ed. “The Willy-Nicky Telegrams: Tsar to Kaiser, July 29, 1:00 A.M.” *WWI Document Archive: 1914 Documents*, London: Hodder and Soughton Ltd, 1920, accessed October

predicts as “involving Europe in the most horrible war she ever witnessed.”<sup>53</sup> The telegrams start with urgent familiarity that quickly degrades to a formalized blame-game; the messages clearly reveal a push for peace on behalf of the Russian tsar and portray the discrepancy in international diplomacy that quickly led to war. After yet another failure of tsar-promoted peace measures, the tsar proclaimed, “The friendship is dead, it must never be mentioned again,”<sup>54</sup> paralleling the dying system of peace he had tried to incorporate at both domestic and international levels.

### Pragmatism Must Ultimately Triumph to Achieve Peace

The social instability within his domestic domain often led to Nicholas II’s indecision on an international level precluding the first World War. Scrambling to preserve whatever shred of peace or non-war that he could, the final tsar continually adjusted his domestic policies to try to meet the high bar he had set for international relations.<sup>55</sup> Even as his highly reserved personality, malleable will, family, and advisors interfered with matters of state, Nicholas II continued to attempt to impose a system of peaceful relations for Europe and his homeland. Finally, the shift of the Russian State Duma to the Provisional Government of 1917<sup>56</sup> led to the tsar’s abdication, arrest,

16, 2016, [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The\\_Willy-Nicky\\_Telegrams](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Willy-Nicky_Telegrams).

53 Ibid., “Kaiser to Tsar, July 29, 6:30 P.M.”

54 Hanbury-Williams, “1915 Diary,” *The Emperor Nicholas II as I Knew Him*.

55 Leopold H. Haimson, “‘The Problem of Political and Social Stability in Urban Russia on the Eve of War and Revolution’ Revisited,” *Slavic Review* 59, no. 4 (2000): 859-861, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2697422>.

56 Sir Peter Bark, “The Last Days of the Russian Monarchy -

and, later, execution, tragically snuffing out most of his plans for peace. The success of the first Hague Convention borne from the Disarmament Proposition of 1899 bears the fruit of the tsar's labors for peace, standing as a modern reminder for historians and citizens alike that the intent for peace may be just as important as its practical applications. In conclusion, history may understand the final Russian tsar, Nicholas II, as a fateful figure posed against violence and warfare, ultimately a promoter of peace crushed by the weight of his predecessors' actions in spite of his best efforts against the political odds stacked against him.

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Nicholas II at Army Headquarters," *The Russian Review* 16, no. 3 (July 1957): 36-40, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/125942>.