

CHAPTER II

Russia before the Cold War

This chapter elaborates the history of Russia before the cold war era, particularly the era of Tsar and the rise of Soviet power. These also become the underpinning chronology of the dynamics of Russia's history.

A. Nicholas II, the End of Romanov Dynasty (1894-1917)

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the status of the Russian empire in the international arena changed dramatically. After 1812 it reached the pinnacle of prestige and influence, but in the mid 1850s Russia endured a military defeat that exposed the internal weaknesses of the country, throwing into doubt its viability as a great power. Tsars Alexander I (1801–25) and Nicholas I (1825–55) reveled in Russia's enhanced status, but both seemed to sense that political and social changes would be necessary to retain that status.¹⁵

All of the Russian Tsars, from the time of Ivan the Terrible, drew their political power away from the nobility, either by force or through diplomacy which allowed the nobility greater control over the occupants on their land. This political power grabes by the Tsars increased until the nineteenth century when both of these relationships came increasingly under attack.

A revolt in 1825 by young, reformist military officers attempted to force a constitutional monarchy by preventing the accession of Nicholas I, but failed. Russia

¹⁵ Ascher, Abraham. *Russia: A History*. England: Oxford. 2006, p. 80.

became more industrialized as the twentieth century approached, and the inadequacies of autocratic Tsarist rule became increasingly evident. At the same time, Russia expanded its territory and power considerably with borders extending to Afghanistan and China.¹⁶

Alexander III was the father of Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia. Alexander III came to the throne as Tsar on March 1, 1881 after the assassination of his father, when he was only 36 years old. During Alexander III's reign, capitalism was strengthened and an industrial revolution was developing. But his domestic policy was particularly harsh against both revolutionaries and liberal movements which developed from the policies of the preceding Tsars.¹⁷

Nicholas II, the last Russian Emperor and eldest son of Alexander III, was born on May 6, 1868.¹⁸ Ironically, this particular day is the Orthodox feast day of Saint Job the Suffer, whose image appears to have mirrored Nicholas's troubled life. He was called little "Nickey" by his mother, Marie Fyodorovna Romanov, a petite brunette and his father, the giant and intimidating Alexander Alexandrovich Romanov.

The Romanov men throughout the 19th century were well known as being physically large and imposing figures, an image well adapted to their roles as Russian Tsars. But Nicholas took after his mother instead of his father in stature, and was only about 5'-6" tall, and the other Romanov men towered over him. Nicholas tried

¹⁶ History of Russia, The Path to Revolution, Internet URL, <http://www.interknowledge.com/russia/rushis06.htm>

¹⁷ Cited from St. Petersburg Times©1995, The Czars, Alexander III, available at Internet URL <http://www.sptimes.com/Treasurers/TC.2.3.18.html>

¹⁸ Cited from St. Petersburg Times©1995, The Czars, Nicholas II, available at Internet URL=<http://www.sptimes.com/Treasurers/TC.2.3.19.html>

to compensate for his lack of stature by working out with weights and other athletic equipment, but he remained slight and wiry in physique. His legs were short, but he appeared quite regal when mounted on a horse, which was one of his loves in life, others being large cars and collie dogs.

Tsar Alexander III realized that the problems facing a 20th Century Tsar would be quite different from those of the past, so he arranged an excellent education to prepare Nicholas for his role as Russian Tsar, ensuring that Nicholas was probably the best educated European Monarch in his time.¹⁹ As time progressed, the Romanov dynasty had become more Europeanized through intermarriage with European royal families. It was estimated that Nicholas II was only 1/256 Russian.²⁰

Terrorism was a real threat to the Tsars, and this caused Nicholas to be isolated from his future subjects and also to be cut off from any liberal thinking. This isolation deprived Nicholas of any interaction with the intellectual and artistic communities, and caused a dearth of ideas about honor, service, and tradition which would later hinder his ability to govern Russia.

Nicholas achieved the rank of Colonel in the Life Guards while he was the Tsarevich, heir to the throne. He enjoyed these years as a military officer and also the friendships of the other officers. These were relatively stress free times, and in 1893 he became engaged to a German princess, Alix Victoria Eleanor Louisa Beatrice (Alexandra Fedorovna) and married her. However, in the Fall of 1894, Tsar

¹⁹ Cited from Alexander Palace Time Machine, Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov, available at Internet URL=<http://www.travclogix.com/EMP/BATCHISON/AlexPalaceNRbio.html>

²⁰ Palaces of St. Petersburg, Introduction, Internet URL=<http://www.palaces.org/intro.html>

Alexander III developed a serious nephritis condition, which is a chronic inflammation of the kidneys, and died on October 20, 1894 at only 47 years of age.²¹

After he became Tsar, Nicholas quickly learned that he was surrounded by deceit and the self-interest of bureaucrats and sycophants. He realized that he could trust very few people besides his wife and became cynical and mistrustful of human nature.²² This fear was not without cause since Nicholas II's ministers were very reactionary and created an unstable political situation for him.²³ Nicholas II loved Russia first, then his family, a trait of a good ruler. He was a hard and diligent worker, but unfortunately, he was unable to see the whole picture because he tended to focus greatly on details.²⁴

Nicholas became a strong supporter of the right of the sovereign despite growing pressures from revolutionary groups with practical desires. At the beginning of the 20th century, Russia had many anti-tsarist political movements. One of them, the Cadets (liberal Constitutional Democrats) advocated constitutional monarchy and representative government.

Another group, the Social Revolutionaries, which were a revival of the populist revolutionary tradition of the 1870's, espoused a Russian agrarian socialism based on the collective, cooperative spirit of the mir. The Social Democrats hoped to apply the theories of Karl Marx to the Russian situation. The Social Democrats had a radical faction called the Bolsheviks, which included Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky, and planned on an industrial laborers (Proletariat) revolt, a small class in Russia since

²¹ Cited from Alexander Palace Time Machine, Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov, Op.Cit.

²² Alexander Palace Time Machine, Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov

²³ History of Russia, The Path to Revolution

²⁴ Alexander Palace Time Machine, Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov, Op. Cit

industrialization was still in a developing stage. This explosive political scene was noted by Tsar Nicholas II, and was part of the reason that Russia went to war with Japan. In 1905 Japan attacked Russia in a dispute over far eastern territories which caused Russia to suffer greatly, as the Russian logistical supply system broke down and food prices soared, public discontent spread rapidly.²⁵

Russia suffered a bad military defeat by Japan, and 400,000 Russian soldiers were killed, wounded or captured. Material losses were valued at 2.5 billion gold rubles.²⁶ Bloody Sunday occurred in January, 1905 when Tsarist troops fired on peaceful demonstrators who were petitioning Nicholas II for a redress of perceived grievances. Nicholas II was absent during this occurrence. This tragic event caused revolutionary outbreaks to erupt throughout Russia, which Nicholas II responded to by proclaiming the Manifesto of 17 October 1905.²⁷ This Manifesto guaranteed fundamental civil freedoms including personal inviolability, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association.

A national parliament was also created and called the Duma.²⁸ The right to vote in the Duma was severely restricted and it became a kind of debating society with no real voice in the Russian Government. After concluding the war with Japan, Nicholas II attempted to reverse the new freedoms, which resulted in a more

²⁵ Palaces of St. Petersburg, The Later Romanov Tsars, available at <http://www.palaces.org/tsar-l8r.html>

²⁶ St. Petersburg Times©1995, The Czars, Nicholas II

²⁷ Palaces of St. Petersburg, The Later Romanov Tsars available at Internet URL=<http://www.palaces.org/tsar-l8r.html>

²⁸ Manifesto of 17 October 1905, available at Internet URL=<http://www.dur.ac.uk/~dml0www/octmanif.html>

reactionary government and increased repression. It is not clear whether Russia was moving towards or away from a revolution prior to World War I.²⁹

Russia entered World War I on the Allied side against Germany on August 1, 1914. The war was being fought on Russia's borders with European nations, and Russia suffered badly in this war. Territory was lost to Germany, and Russia suffered massive casualties. Tsarist armies fared poorly in battles which they should have won but lost. This caused Nicholas II to go to the scene of the battles and take over the army, which left control of the government in the hands of Tsarist Alexandra and Rasputin.

This only created greater discontent and unrest in the Russian people who feared that their government was now controlled by a German Princess whose allegiance was to Germany. Loss of territory combined with massive war casualties caused civilian unrest and resulted in the Second Russian Revolution in February 1917.³⁰ Nicholas II was forced to abdicate on March 15, 1917. This was the end of the Romanov Dynasty. A provisional government was implemented after Nicholas II abdication, in an effort to try and maintain order out of the chaos in society, but this measure was unsuccessful partly due to the archaic political scene existing in Russia at this point in time.³¹

Tsar Nicholas II and his wife Alexandra, and their four daughters and their son were held as political prisoners for just over a year after Nicholas II's abdication.

²⁹ History of Russia, The Path to Revolution, available at Internet URL=<http://www.interknowledge.com/russia/rushis06.htm>

³⁰ Palaces of St. Petersburg, The Later Romanov Tsars available at URL=<http://www.palaces.org/tsar-18r.html>

³¹ History of Russia, The Path to Revolution available at URL=<http://www.interknowledge.com/russia/rushis06.htm>

Then, just after midnight on July 17, 1918, they were awakened by their captors and told to dress for a photograph, but instead they were to be executed. Yakov Yurovsky was the captor in charge of carrying out the execution of the imperial family. In addition to the imperial family, they were joined by their servants: Trupp, the valet; Demidova, the maid; and Kharitonov, the cook and Dr. Botkin, the family physician. Yakov Yurovsky and his accomplices carried out the execution of these eleven victims and ended the Romanov Dynasty of Russia.³²

This brutal murder of Russia's last Tsar ended the Romanov Dynasty of Russia and probably set the pattern for the Stalinists and their brutal treatment of the Russian people in the years following the Second Russian Revolution.

B. The Power of USSR

The Soviet Union (Russian: Советский Союз, Sovyetskiy Soyuz), formally the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (or USSR) Sovietykykh Sotsialisticheskykh Respublik, abbreviated CCCP) existed 1917-1991, and then broke into 15 separate countries, most notably Russia. It was the most powerful established socialist states in history, coming to power under Lenin in 1918 and killing millions of its peasants to establish a ruthless Communist dictatorship under Joseph Stalin in the 1930s. After cooperating with the USSR (1939-41), the Nazi Germans under Adolf Hitler invaded in a war to the death.³³

³² Yakov Yurovsky, The Murders, available at Internet URL <http://shrike.depaul.edu/~mkaske/murders.html>

³³ See Wikipedia.com/ussr_history, updated on June 2, 2010.

The USSR defeated the Nazis in World War II (1941-45), and took control of most of Eastern Europe, turning formerly independent countries into Communist satellites. It was the primary antagonist of the United States during the Cold War (1947-1989), and then collapsed because of American pressure and its own internal economic and social failures. At its height the USSR covered one-sixth of the earth's land area stretching from Eastern Europe across north Asia to the Pacific Ocean.

Located in the middle and northern latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere, the Soviet Union's 22.4 million square kilometers included one-sixth of the earth's usable land area. Its western portion, more than half of all Europe, made up 25% of its area; this, however, was where 72% of the people lived and where most industrial and agricultural activities were concentrated. The largest region was the lightly populated Siberia, a land between the Urals and the Pacific that for centuries was infamous as a place of exile, a land of endless expanses of snow and frigid temperatures.³⁴

Extending for over 60,000 kilometers, the Soviet border was the world's longest national frontier, sharing a common border with twelve countries, six on each continent. In Asia, its neighbors were the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey; in Europe, it bordered Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, and Finland.³⁵ Approximately two-thirds of the frontier was bounded by water, forming the longest and, owing to its proximity to the North Pole, probably the most useless coastline of any country. Apart from Murmansk, which receives the warm currents of

³⁴ See Wikipedia.com/ussr_history, updated on June 2, 2010.

³⁵ See Wikipedia.com/ussr_history, updated on June 2, 2010.

the Gulf Stream, the northern coast is locked in ice much of the year. The search for a warm water port was a central theme in Russian history.³⁶

The USSR was divided into fifteen union republics -the largest administrative and political units- officially known as Soviet republics or union republics. Theoretically they were independent countries. In practice they were controlled by the Kremlin. Nationality, size of the population, and location were the determinants for republic status. By far the largest and most important was the Russian Republic, containing about 51% of the population. In 1989 Russians made up over 51% of the Soviet population and were politically, economically and culturally the dominant nationality, there are more than 100 other nationality groups that make up Soviet society. Fourteen other major nationalities also have their own republics: in the European part are the Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Belorussian, Ukrainian, and Moldavian republics; the Georgian, Azerbaijan, and Armenian republics occupy the Caucasus; and Soviet Central Asia is home to the Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen, Kirgiz, and Tajik republics.³⁷

Khrushchev was the first post-Stalin leader to rule the country for an extensive period (about eight years) and to leave a lasting and significant mark on Soviet history. Born in 1894 into a peasant family, Khrushchev joined the Communist Party in 1918 and advanced steadily through the ranks; by the late 1930s he occupied the position of first secretary of the Ukrainian party organization. Intelligent and sharp-witted, he was also a gruff and boisterous man given to expressing himself in

³⁶ See Wikipedia.com/ussr_history, updated on June 2, 2010.

³⁷ See Wikipedia.com/ussr_history, updated on June 2, 2010.

earthy language. A firm believer in communism and a highly ambitious man, he had faithfully carried out Stalin's orders.³⁸

The Soviet Union was established in December 1922 by the leaders of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) on territory generally corresponding to that of the old Russian Empire. A spontaneous popular uprising in Petrograd overthrew the imperial government in March 1917, leading to the formation of the Provisional Government, which intended to establish democracy in Russia. At the same time, to ensure the rights of the working class, workers' councils (soviets) sprang up across the country. The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir I. Lenin, agitated for socialist revolution in the Soviets and on the streets, and they seized power from the Provisional Government in November 1917. Only after the ensuing Civil War (1918-1921) and foreign intervention was the new communist government secure.³⁹

In 1928 Stalin introduced the First Five-Year Plan for building a socialist economy. In industry, the state assumed control over all existing enterprises and undertook an intensive program of industrialization; in agriculture, the state appropriated the peasants' property to establish collective farms. These sweeping economic innovations produced widespread misery, and millions of peasants perished during forced collectivization. Social upheaval continued in the mid-1930s when Stalin began a purge of the party; out of this purge grew a campaign of terror that led to the execution or imprisonment of untold millions of people from all walks of life.

³⁸ See Ascher, Abraham. *Russia: A History*. England: Oxford. 2006, p. 204.

³⁹ See Wikipedia.com/ussr_history, updated on June 2, 2010.

Yet despite this turmoil, the Soviet Union developed a powerful industrial economy in the years before World War II.⁴⁰

The Law on Cooperatives enacted in May 1988 was perhaps the most radical of the economic reforms during the early part of the Gorbachev era. For the first time since Vladimir Lenin's New Economic Policy, the law permitted private ownership of businesses in the services, manufacturing, and foreign-trade sectors. Under this provision, cooperative restaurants, shops, and manufacturers became part of the Soviet scene.

By the time Gorbachev ushered in the process that would lead to the dismantling of the Soviet administrative command economy through his programs of glasnost (political openness), uskoreniye (speed-up of economic development) and perestroika (political and economic restructuring) announced in 1986, the Soviet economy suffered from both hidden inflation and pervasive supply shortages aggravated by an increasingly open black market that undermined the official economy. Additionally, the costs of superpower status—the military, space program, subsidies to client states—were out of proportion to the Soviet economy. The new wave of industrialization based upon information technology had left the Soviet Union desperate for Western technology and credits in order to counter its increasing backwardness. Gorbachev's efforts to streamline the Communist system offered promise, but ultimately proved uncontrollable and resulted in a cascade of events that eventually concluded with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Initially intended as

⁴⁰ See Wikipedia.com/ussr_history, updated on June 2, 2010.

tools to bolster the Soviet economy, the policies of perestroika and glasnost soon led to unintended consequences.

The four principal elements of the old Soviet system were the hierarchy of soviets, ethnic federalism, state socialism, and Communist Party dominance. Gorbachev's programs of perestroika and glasnost produced radical unforeseen effects that brought that system down. As a means of reviving the Soviet state, Gorbachev repeatedly attempted to build a coalition of political leaders supportive of reform and created new arenas and bases of power. He implemented these measures because he wanted to resolve serious economic problems and political inertia that clearly threatened to put the Soviet Union into a state of long-term stagnation.

After years of stagnation, the new thinking of younger Communist apparatchiks began to emerge. Following the death of terminally ill Konstantin Chernenko, the Politburo elected Mikhail Gorbachev to the position of General Secretary of the Soviet Union in March 1985, marking the rise of a new generation of leadership. Under Gorbachev, reform-oriented technocrats, who had begun their careers in the heyday of "de-Stalinization" under Nikita Khrushchev (1958-1964), rapidly consolidated power within the CPSU, providing new momentum for political and economic liberalization. In January 1987, Gorbachev called for democratization: the infusion of democratic elements such as multi-candidate elections into the Soviet political process. A 1987 conference convened by Soviet economist and Gorbachev

adviser Leonid Abalkin, concluded: "Deep transformations in the management of the economy cannot be realized without corresponding changes in the political system".⁴¹

Elections to the new Congress of People's Deputies were held throughout the USSR in March and April 1989. Gorbachev, as General Secretary of the Communist Party, could be forced to resign at any moment if the communist elite became dissatisfied with him. To proceed with reforms opposed by the majority of the communist party, Gorbachev aimed to consolidate power in a new position, President of the Soviet Union, which was independent from the CPSU and the soviets (councils) and whose holder could be impeached only in case of direct violation of the law.

On March 15, 1990, Gorbachev was elected as the first executive president. At the same time, the constitution was changed to deprive the CPSU of political power.⁴² At home, perestroika was turning into something more than reform. It was nearing the edge of revolution. Power was flowing from Gorbachev to Boris Yeltsin, who, beginning in 1989, accomplished the once unthinkable, a political comeback by a man who had been exiled from the Politburo. He seized the opportunities opened up by Gorbachev's expanding reforms; he ran for a seat in Parliament in 1989 and 1990, and was elected speaker of the Russian parliament in 1990. Yeltsin set out to create an alternative government. In June 1990, the Russian parliament asserted its "sovereignty." Now there were two competing governments occupying the same Russian space. One year later, in June 1991, Yeltsin became the first freely elected president of the Russian Republic.

⁴¹ *Voprosy Ekonomiki* (Moscow), no. 2 (1988), p. 79. See Wikipedia.com/ussr_history, updated on June 2, 2010.

⁴² See Wikipedia.com/ussr_history, updated on June 2, 2010.