



The End of Tsarist Russia: The March to World War I and Revolution

By Dominic Lieven

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One of the world's leading scholars offers a fresh interpretation of the linked origins of World War I and the Russian Revolution

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Based on exhaustive work in seven Russian archives as well as many non-Russian sources, Dominic Lieven's work is about far more than just Russia. By placing the crisis of empire at its core, Lieven links World War I to the sweep of twentieth-century global history. He shows how contemporary hot issues such as the struggle for Ukraine were already crucial elements in the run-up to 1914.

By incorporating into his book new approaches and comparisons, Lieven tells the story of war and revolution in a way that is truly original and thought-provoking.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A Russian scholar opens up new, even startling historical connections." ---Kirkus Starred Review

About the Author

Dominic Lieven is a senior research fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, and a fellow of the British Academy. He previously taught Russian Studies at the London School of Economics for thirty-three years. His last book, *Russia Against Napoleon*, won the 2009 Wolfson Prize for History and the Prix Napoleon.

Born and raised in Southampton, England, Shaun Grindell is an accomplished actor who trained at the Calland School of Speech and Drama and the Lee Strasberg Actors Institute in London. An AudioFile Earphones Award-winning audiobook narrator, Shaun has narrated many titles in different genres.

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INTRODUCTION

As much as anything, World War I turned on the fate of Ukraine.* To an English-speaking audience, this statement will seem final confirmation that most professors are crazy. No Allied soldier believed he was risking his life over Ukraine. Few of them had heard of the place. The same was true of German soldiers in 1914. In connection with the war's centenary, a flood of books will be published in English. Very few will mention Ukraine. Most of these books will be about the experiences of British, Dominion, and American soldiers and civilians during the war. Many others will debate the impact of the war on the society and culture of the English-speaking world. Ukraine's fate had nothing to do with any of this.

Nevertheless, my statement is not as far-fetched as it seems. Without Ukraine's population, industry, and agriculture, early-twentieth-century Russia would have ceased to be a great power. If Russia ceased to be a great power, then there was every probability that Germany would dominate Europe. The Russian Revolution of 1917 temporarily shattered the Russian state, economy, and empire. Russia did for a time cease to be a great power. A key element in this was the emergence of an independent Ukraine. In March 1918, the Germans and the Russians signed a peace treaty at Brest-Litovsk that ended World War I on the eastern front. In this treaty, Russia was forced to recognize Ukraine as an independent country in principle and a German satellite in practice. Had the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk survived, Germany would have won World War I. To win the war, Germany did not need outright victory on the western front. A draw in the west combined with the eclipse of the Russian Empire and German domination of east-central Europe would have sufficed to ensure Berlin's hegemony over the Continent. Instead, Allied victory on the western front resulted in the collapse of German hopes for empire in the east. As part of the armistice that ended World War I, Germany had to renounce the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and abandon its conquests in eastern Europe. Soviet Russia moved back into the vacuum, reconquering Ukraine and re-creating the basis for a Russian Empire, albeit in communist form.

This underlines a basic point about World War I: contrary to the near-universal assumption in the English-speaking world, the war was first and foremost an eastern European conflict. Its immediate origins lay in the murder of the Austrian heir at Sarajevo in southeastern Europe. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand on

June 28, 1914, led to a confrontation between Austria and Russia, eastern Europe's two great empires. France and Britain were drawn into what started as a conflict in eastern Europe above all because of fears for their own security: the victory of the Austro-German alliance over Russia would tilt the European balance of power decisively toward Berlin and Vienna. It is true that victory in World War I was achieved on the western front by the efforts of the French, British, and American armies. But the peace of 1918 was mostly lost in eastern Europe. The great irony of World War I was that a conflict which began more than anything else as a struggle between the Germanic powers and Russia to dominate east-central Europe ended in the defeat of *both* sides. The dissolution of the Austrian Empire into a number of small states incapable of defending themselves left a geopolitical hole in east-central Europe. Worse still, the Versailles order was constructed on the basis of both Germany's and Russia's defeat and without concern for their interests or viewpoints. Because Germany and Russia were potentially the most powerful states in Europe, the Versailles settlement was inevitably therefore very fragile. It was no coincidence that World War II also began in eastern Europe, with the invasion of Poland, one of the key creations of Versailles, by its German and Russian neighbors in September 1939. After a generation's truce, World War I in many ways truly ended when the Soviet army took Berlin in May 1945.

This book places Russia where it belongs, at the very center of the history of World War I. Above all, it studies Russia's part in the war's origins but also in the way that the conflict developed and in its long-term consequences. But if this book might be called a Russian history of World War I, it is also an international history of the Russian Revolution, concentrating mostly in this case too on the revolution's origins. Russia was crucial to international relations in Europe, but the same was true in reverse. Russia's struggle to be a European and then a world power has had an enormous influence on modern Russian history. Probably no other factor has had a greater impact on the fate of the Russian people. Never was this truer than in the years between 1904 and 1920 that this book covers. Without World War I, the Bolsheviks might conceivably have seized power in Russia, but for many reasons explained in this book, they would most likely have been unable to retain it. Yet if the war played a huge part in the history of Russia's revolution, the opposite was also true. The Russian Revolution offered Germany its best chance of winning World War I. More important, the October Revolution in 1917 ensured that Russia did not participate in the remaking of Europe at Versailles and remained a revisionist power in the interwar period. Deep suspicion and antipathy between the Russians and their former British and French allies undermined efforts to check Adolf Hitler and avoid a second world war.

There are many reasons to write a Russian history of World War I. No event in history has been researched more minutely than the origins of this war. Although western European historians may come up with new interpretations of the war's causes, they are unlikely to unearth major new evidence. In this sense, Russia is the last frontier. In the Soviet era, diplomatic and military archives were closed to Western historians. Limitations existed on what Russian historians could write or sometimes see. It was therefore much to my benefit that I was able to spend the best part of a year researching for this book in the key Russian archives. The most crucial of these archives was that of the Foreign Ministry in Moscow. It closed one week after I finished my research because the building is subsiding rapidly into the Moscow metro. It has not yet reopened and is unlikely to do so in any near future. The materials I found in the Foreign Ministry archive and six other Russian archives offer a much fuller and sometimes distinctly new understanding of Russian foreign policy and of the forces that lay beneath it.

It is important to study World War I from a Russian angle because Russia played not only a crucial role in international relations in that era but one that is often misunderstood or sidelined. But that is far from the whole story. A Russian perspective encourages one to see and interpret World War I as a whole in very different ways than do historians who examine these years on the basis of British, American, French, and German viewpoints and assumptions. This book is therefore by no means just a study of Russia's World War I. On the contrary, it is a study of the war as a whole from an original standpoint. If Russia necessarily

occupies center stage, a good third of the book is devoted to other countries and to the European and global context.

In the communist era, the Russian angle on World War I was a Marxist-Leninist one. The war—so it was argued—occurred as a result of imperialist competition between the great powers for colonial markets, raw materials, and sites for investment. Neither I nor many other serious historians of World War I today subscribe to this view. On the other hand, I do believe that the war had a great deal to do with empire and imperialism as I understand these terms. In my view, empire is first and foremost about power. Unless a state is (or at least has been) a great power, it cannot be a true empire. But empires are great powers with specific characteristics. These include rule over huge territories and many peoples without the latter's explicit consent. For me, imperialism means simply the ideologies, values, and policies that sustain the creation, expansion, and maintenance of empire.

Empires and imperialism defined in this way dominated most of the globe before 1914. For the core, imperial people, empire was seen as a source of glory, status, and a meaningful role in mankind's history. The geopolitical basis for the age of imperialism was the conviction that continental-scale territory and resources were essential for any truly great power in the twentieth century. For a European country—and Europeans still dominated most of the globe in 1914—such resources could only be acquired through empire. Some parts of the globe were annexed; others were dominated to varying degrees as protectorates and spheres of political and economic influence. A key problem in international relations by 1900 was that almost no unclaimed territories remained that the imperialist predators could share out among themselves. The European powers bargained with each other over territory, status, and influence. Behind this bargaining always lay calculations about power and about the readiness of the rival states to go to war in defense of their demands. Although most of the great powers claimed that they were advancing the cause of civilization, none were inclined to consult the wishes of the peoples they subjected. Looming on the horizon by 1900 was nationalism's challenge to empire. If imperialism seemed the wave of the future in terms of a state's global reach and power, ethnic nationalism appeared to be the best way to consolidate political communities and legitimize their governments. The growing clash between imperialism and nationalism is what I describe as the key dilemma of modern empire.¹

Imperialism, nationalism, and the dilemma of modern empire were at the core of World War I's origins. To anglophone ears in particular this sounds strange. The words "empire" and "imperialism" suggest that the war's causes lay above all in Asia or Africa. The point here is that in British and American understanding, modern empire is mostly something that happens outside Europe. This partly reflects the fact that the British Empire did indeed exist almost entirely outside the Continent. For Lenin, and after him for most Marxist historians, modern imperialism was by definition the last phase in capitalism and was linked to the struggle between the developed countries of western Europe for colonial markets and raw materials in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In contemporary British and American history departments, the study of empire is closely entwined with questions of race, gender, and so-called postcolonial studies, because these are seen as central to contemporary British and American society, not to mention relations between the First and the Third Worlds. Once again this tends to exclude empires within Europe from the picture.

The idea that empire in the twentieth century was something that happened outside Europe also feeds easily into deeper assumptions about a fundamental division between Europe and its white former colonies, on the one hand, and the nonwhite world, on the other. A shorthand for that assumption are the terms "First World" and "Third World." The idea of a "Second World" disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. One goal of my book is to resurrect the term "Second World" and to apply it to Europe's periphery before 1914. This Second World stretched from Ireland and Iberia in the west to Italy and the Balkans in the south and the Russian Empire in the east. Although very diverse, these countries shared certain problems as they confronted the era of mass politics that was just emerging for all of them by 1900. Russia's problems

are sometimes clarified by comparisons with those of its Second World peers, as I hope to show in this book.

The Balkans was quintessentially a Second World region. Did elites in London and Berlin regard this region as fully European? More to the point, how did rulers in Vienna view the region? It is one of this book's arguments that Austrian policy toward Serbia took similar forms and was underpinned by ideas similar to those defining European imperialism across the rest of the globe. In the 1960s, when Yugoslavia headed the nonaligned movement, it was easy from Belgrade's perspective to see Serbia's wars between 1912 and 1918 as the triumph of a national liberation movement. Serbia's struggle against Germanic imperialism could be equated to the fight for independence of, for example, the Algerian and Vietnamese peoples. The tale took on a particular resonance because Serbia suffered higher casualties relative to its population than any other people involved in World War I except for the Armenians. Thanks partly to the atrocities perpetrated by Serb nationalists in the 1990s and partly to the general delegitimation of heroic nationalist narratives among contemporary Western historians, this Serbian interpretation now appears indefensible to most Europeans. Nevertheless, to view World War I's origins in the Balkans through the prism of empire does offer interesting insights. The basic point was that Austrian imperialism in the Balkans faced more risks than similar policies in other continents. For this, there were many reasons, most of which boil down to a single word: "Russia."

The Balkans became an enormous source of international tension because of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled most of the region since the fourteenth century. This empire had sprawled across Europe, Asia, and Africa; by 1900, its demise appeared imminent on all three continents. Bosnia, where the archduke Franz Ferdinand was murdered, had been an Ottoman possession until 1878 and formally still belonged to the Ottomans until it was annexed by Vienna in 1908. The crisis that followed the annexation was a major stage on the road to 1914. So too was the Italian invasion of Ottoman Libya in 1911, which in turn sparked off the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. The Austrian attempt to crush Serbia in August 1914 was the direct result of these wars, which had resulted in the triumph of Balkan nationalisms over the Ottoman Empire. Vienna hoped to confine its action to the Balkans in 1914. Instead, the conflagration spread across Europe.

One reason why the crisis of the Ottoman Empire caused so many headaches to the European powers was that the ultimate prize—namely, possession of Constantinople and the Straits—appeared to be coming rapidly into view. Russia in particular had great economic, strategic, and historical interests at stake as regards this prize, which it came very close to acquiring during World War I. A number of historians have recently stressed both Russia's ambitions at the Straits and how these contributed to the tensions that led Europe to war in 1914.² They are correct. To understand the origins of World War I, one must study the sources of Russia's ambitions in the region and examine the debate within Russia's elites and government over how far its ambitions should stretch. That is another key aim of this book. But Russian ambitions at Constantinople and the Straits have to be seen within the context of an imperialist age, in which the British took over Egypt to secure their hold on the Suez Canal and the Americans seized the Isthmus of Panama in order to control the key strategic and commercial highway between the Atlantic and the Pacific. As we shall see, the Straits on balance mattered more to Russia than even Suez or Panama did to the British or the Americans.

The Austro-Russian clash in the Balkans that led to war in 1914 was in one sense a traditional battle between empires to secure clients, power, and prestige. But by 1900 what I call the dilemma of modern empire was becoming crucial to the growing confrontation between Petersburg and Vienna. To a degree seldom recognized in English-language works, this conflict had much to do with the future of the Ukrainian people, roughly three-quarters of whom were Russian subjects in 1914, the remainder living in the Habsburg monarchy. For some of Russia's most perceptive and influential observers in 1914, this source of Austro-Russian conflict was much more important than anything that happened in the Balkans. This takes us back to

the crucial significance of Ukraine for European geopolitics at that time, a theme that I underlined in the first sentence of this introduction and one that runs throughout this book.

Nevertheless, the immediate cause of World War I was Austria's attempt to destroy the independent Serbian state, which the government in Vienna saw not just as a strategic threat but also as a potentially fatal source of subversion among the Habsburgs' Slav subjects. On the whole, the present tendency among historians is to play down the nationalist threat in the early twentieth century both to the Habsburgs specifically and to empire as a whole. There is certainly considerable merit in challenging the nationalist narratives that have dominated so much of the writing of history. Even declining empires were much tougher than they seemed to many contemporaries, as the sterling performance in World War I of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires (among others) was to show. In contemporary Asia, the existence of multinational states such as India, Indonesia, and Iran is a reproach to anyone who believes that the triumph of European-style ethnic nationalism is an inexorable law of modernity. But one must not push the argument too far: ethnic nationalism has been an extremely powerful force in modern history. It played a big role in undermining all the great empires that existed in 1900 both inside and outside Europe. The dilemma of empire and nationalism helps to place World War I within the broader context of twentieth-century global history.

Maybe in retrospect most Europeans exaggerated the power of nationalism and attached undue significance to blood, language, and ethnicity, but the fact that they so often did think this way mattered enormously to politics and international relations before 1914. Neither the domestic politics nor the foreign policies of the Austrian and Russian empires, to take but two examples, make much sense unless this factor is taken into account. The ties of Germanic solidarity that bound together the Central Powers (that is, Germany and Austria) were in one sense a figment of the imagination, in another sense a crucial geopolitical reality. The same was true of the bonds that linked the English-speaking peoples in the twentieth century. Any study of Russia's path to World War I has to investigate the idea of Slavic solidarity, in other words the so-called Slavophile tradition in Russia and its impact on concepts of Russian identity and on Russian foreign policy. Aspects of Slavophilism were both unique and of vital importance to Russian policy before 1914: in this book, I will attempt to explain how and why this was the case. But it is also important to see ideas of Slav solidarity in the context of a world that also believed in the solidarity of the Anglo-Saxons and of the Germanic peoples. Russia was neither as unique nor as exotic as either its admirers or its detractors claimed. More important, belief in the strength of transnational ethnic solidarity played a crucial role in pushing international relations toward the disaster of 1914. The myth of the inevitable clash between Slav and Teuton, for example, was nonsense but dangerous and powerful nonsense for all that.

In trying to place both World War I and European history in a broader perspective, I may seem to be challenging Europe's uniqueness. That is very far from my intention. In reality, World War I could probably have broken out only in Europe. No world war could erupt in the Western Hemisphere because in that half of the world American hegemony was unchallenged by 1914. Despite British fears, the same was still true of British domination of south Asia. A world war was unlikely to erupt over Africa because no European power cared enough about the continent to risk a global conflict over an African question. Faced with British resistance in 1898, Paris retreated from its confrontation with London over east Africa. The emperor William II made it clear to all that he would never risk a European war over Morocco. Nor would European powers willingly fight each other over an east Asian or Pacific question. Before a world war could start in the Asia-Pacific region, its leading states—Japan, China, and the United States—would first have to become modern great powers. Before 1914, a world war was always likeliest to originate in Europe, where six of the eight great powers lived in proximity and where their most essential interests were to be found.

The European international system of six independent great powers was always at risk of breakdown and war. Great-power relations in the pre-1914 era were an inherently risky game that included significant elements of bluff and gambling. As already noted, behind the exquisitely polite facade of *ancien régime*

diplomacy, the game largely revolved around calculations about the power of rivals and their willingness and ability to back up their claims with force. The so-called balance of power was both a key element in reality as regards European stability and a vital element in the calculations of diplomats about how to preserve peace and security in Europe. This basically meant that the five continental powers existed in a state of rough equilibrium, with each determined never to allow any other country to dominate the Continent. Should any continental country seem too powerful or aggressive, then Britain—Europe's semi-detached offshore great power—would throw its weight into the balance against it.

By 1900, this system was facing a number of challenges. German unification in 1871 had greatly strengthened Prussia, traditionally one of Europe's weaker great powers. The Industrial Revolution, moving from west to east across Europe in the nineteenth century, had further complicated calculations of power. In 1914, it was rational to believe that if Germany was today's potential hegemon, then Russia would probably be tomorrow's. To confuse matters further, by 1900 Europeans lived in the first period of what one might describe as anglophone liberal globalization. Obsessive chatter in Germany about "world power" and "world policy" reflected awareness of this fact. Maybe, some believed, it was now out of date to think of a European balance of power, and one should instead use a global measure, in which case the vast potential of the United States represented an obvious challenge to all European countries. Russian critics of their country's foreign policy before 1914 sometimes made this point in an effort to undermine the logic of a balance-of-power policy that saw Germany as a threat. British elites were in turn divided as to whether Germany was a bigger threat in Europe than Russia was in Asia and on how best to react to this double challenge. A perennial problem in international relations is that calculations of power entail assessments of rivals' intentions as well as of their capabilities. In addition, in the last resort power can be measured only by war. Much of the present book is taken up with questions of power. This means not only Russia's power and potential but also how these were judged by allies and enemies. It means too how the Russian government and elites judged the power and the intentions of other countries. Assessments of rivals' power were a constant source of fear and insecurity, not least because the elements at the core of these assessments were so uncertain.

If international relations were just about diplomatic exchanges and military power, then this book would have been much easier to write. In reality, a state's foreign policy is always influenced to varying degrees by domestic factors. I spend a great deal of time in this book explaining how the Russian system of government worked and which people and institutions made and influenced foreign policy. As we shall see, these are complicated issues that can be understood only on the basis of deep immersion into the ways of Russian institutions and the values and behavior of the Russian elites. A point to note is that "public opinion" played an important role in influencing and constraining Russian foreign policy in the prewar years and was on the whole hostile to Germany. But this public opinion reflected the views of upper- and middle-class Russians, never of the mass of the people, who would bear the heaviest burdens in the event of war. Studying Russian public opinion helps one to understand both why Russia entered World War I and why it was defeated.

Although the Russian case is unique, in this respect too international comparisons are nevertheless very important. In the two generations before 1914, European society as a whole had been transformed more fundamentally than in centuries of earlier history. It was hard for anyone to keep his balance amid dramatic economic, social, and cultural change; predictions as to where change might lead in the future could inspire even greater giddiness. A common feature across Europe was the growth of civil society and its impact through the press, lobbies, and political parties on governments. In contemporary parlance, civil society is always supposed to be on the side of the angels. As regards international relations in pre-1914 Europe, this was not true. Civil society, meaning above all the press, often played a big role in stoking international conflict. This might be just a question of pandering to public prejudices and thirst for sensations, but it rattled and bedeviled policy makers nonetheless. More serious were systematic efforts to use foreign policy as a means to generate nationalist support for governments at home, in the process undermining the rational calculations on which diplomatic bargaining was based. No great power, Russia included, was entirely

innocent in this respect.

Whereas the nationalism of the dominant people might inject dangerously irrational and unpredictable elements into foreign policy, nationalist movements among minorities might put an empire's very existence in question. In 1914, the Irish question was distracting the British government's attention from foreign policy. The Ukrainian issue was threatening to have a big impact on future Russian relations with Austria. Only in Vienna, however, was minority nationalism perceived in 1914 as an immediate existential threat that foreign policy might resolve. Nothing can excuse the manner in which Austria's leaders tipped Europe into an unnecessary war. In mitigation, all observers believed that nationalism posed a uniquely serious threat to Austria. Great powers in decline are seldom comfortable neighbors, especially if the declining great power is also an empire faced by an acute nationalist threat. In 1956, the British and French empires met their "1914 moment" at Suez, when they sought to reassert by force their fading power and prestige in the face of Arab nationalism. They acted with a combination of desperation, arrogance, and miscalculation very familiar to historians who have studied Austrian behavior in 1914. The Suez adventure faced more public opposition in London and Paris than Austria's policy had in Vienna in 1914. Nevertheless, what stopped the Suez adventure in its tracks was not democracy in Britain and France but the firm veto of their senior partner in Washington. The contrast with Berlin's behavior in 1914 was fundamental.

One way to impose some order on the many factors that explain Russia's descent into World War I and revolution is to think in terms of levels of analysis. At one extreme, there is what I like to call the God's-eye view. Viewed from high in the stratosphere, all "details" such as individual human beings and their personalities, all elements of chance and contingency, or indeed even any narrative of events simply disappear. At this level, one finds only long-term, structural factors such as the ones already outlined in this introduction. They include globalization and geopolitics, the European balance of power, and the dominant ideologies and values of the era. No study of why Russia and Europe went to war in 1914 can ignore these hugely important matters. But it bears remembering that in 1914 war occurred after a diplomatic crisis lasting less than two weeks. If the archduke Franz Ferdinand had not been assassinated in June 1914, it is unlikely that Europe would have gone to war that year. A war postponed might have been a war avoided. Alternatively, a war fought two years later over a different issue might, for example, not have involved Britain and might have ended in German victory, thereby radically changing the path of subsequent European and Russian history. In July and August 1914, fewer than fifty individuals, all of them men, made the decisions that took their countries to war. To study what these men did in this brief period, day by day and sometimes hour by hour, falls within the worm's-eye view. Personality, chance, and chronology loom very large. Although the worm dominates my story most completely as regards July 1914, the crisis that took Europe to war cannot be studied on its own. It was the last—and in many ways the product—of a series of crises and developments that stretched back to 1905 and require the worm's careful attention.

Between the eye of God and the eye of the worm, there are intermediate levels. It is impossible to name all the questions that belong here, but together they connect the structural factors visible in the stratosphere and the worms who made the decisions that ended in catastrophe. Obvious intermediate-level elements are the systems of government that determined who made decisions and the institutions that influenced how these decision makers thought and acted. The worm's narrative tells the story of what decision makers did and said: the intermediate level explores their underlying assumptions, values, and mentalities, linking individuals' and groups' thinking and instincts to the global and Russian ideological and cultural currents visible from the stratosphere. How did decision makers understand the meanings of power and the nature of international relations in this era? How did they envisage a future European war? These questions underpin much of the narrative of diplomatic and military decision making but lurk too far removed from the day-to-day decisions for the worm to take them fully into account. At the intermediate level, one needs to carefully probe terms such as "great power" and "balance of power" that tripped so easily and frequently off the tongues of statesmen and diplomats. The meanings of these terms take one to the core of international

relations in this era. Above all, two elements dominated Russian foreign policy before 1914: The first was commitment to something called a balance of power. The second was a conception of Russian identity and of the Russian people's place in Europe and in history. The poor worm cannot hope to delve into such matters as he pursues his narrative. The worm's-eye narrative is also in a sense the story of the winners—in other words, of those who held power and actually made state policy. To judge a country's policies, one also needs to listen to the critics, men who put forward alternative policies and questioned the assumptions, the judgments, and sometimes even the core values that underpinned a government's actions. This too belongs to the intermediate level of analysis.

Thinking in these terms goes far toward explaining the structure of this book. The first two chapters express the God's-eye view. Chapter 1 looks at the great questions of international relations, politics, and ideology from a global and European perspective. Chapter 2 provides a Russian angle on these questions. It both introduces the reader to core issues of Russian politics, identity, and foreign policy and places them in an international context. Chapter 3 is the longest one but is divided into five sections. It is here that one finds the intermediate level of explanation. Trying to grasp some of the topics raised in this chapter may at times be a "hard chew" for newcomers to the Russian field, but it is essential to understanding the narrative told in the four following chapters. This narrative begins with defeat and revolution between 1904 and 1906 and ends with the outbreak of World War I.

I begin my worm's-eye analysis of events in chapter 4 in 1904 because Russia's defeat and revolution would create the domestic and international context in which Russia descended into war in 1914. Within Russia, this means the new semi-constitutional political system but also the new government policies that emerged out of defeat and revolution, not to mention the new mood that these disasters created in Russian society. As regards the international context, both Russia's temporary eclipse in 1904–6 and its rapid subsequent resurrection were of great importance in destabilizing international relations in Europe and bringing on the disaster of 1914. Chapters 4–7 constitute a narrative that takes the reader through the twists and turns which led Russia and Europe from 1904 to the outbreak of war in 1914. Chapter 6 provides insight into the immediate context of the July crisis, which necessarily includes the impact of domestic political developments on the tiny group of Russian foreign policy decision makers. Chapter 7 tackles the July crisis itself. The final chapter looks at World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917. Of course it makes no attempt at a detailed narrative. That would require two further volumes. The years 1914–17 were a harsh test of the correctness or otherwise of Russian prewar policies and of the values and assumptions on which they were based. One aim of this chapter is to illustrate how problems and weaknesses identified earlier in the book resulted in Russia's disaster in 1914–17. Another is to show how war and revolution were tightly entangled.

So this book is really three books. It is a history of Russia's descent into World War I. This is a fascinating, dramatic, and hugely important story and one that deserves to be told with more insight and on the basis of much fuller documentation than has generally been the case in the anglophone world. But the book is also, second, a very different interpretation of World War I as a whole from the one usually to be found, in part precisely because it approaches the war with insights drawn from an unfamiliar Russian angle. Third, the book is an introduction to the origins and consequences of the Russian Revolution from an unexpected international angle, which may encourage a number of original insights into Russia's fate in the twentieth century. Integrating these three books into a single narrative that placed war and revolution in the broader context of Russian, European, and global history was sometimes difficult but always rewarding. I learned an enormous amount and spotted connections that I would never have seen had I concentrated on just one of these three angles. I hope my readers will feel similarly rewarded.

A key premise of this book is that World War I was the source and origin of most of the catastrophes that subsequently afflicted twentieth-century Russia. Understanding why the war happened is therefore crucial.

From the war came revolution, civil war, two famines, collectivization, and Bolshevik dictatorship and terror. By depriving Russia of the opportunity to shape the postwar Versailles settlement, the 1917 revolution also contributed enormously to international instability between the wars and to Europe's descent into further catastrophe in 1939. If we consider all these disasters together, the decisions that took Russia into World War I killed over fifty million subjects of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, not to mention countless millions of foreigners. This is a tragic story, and the reader will forgive me if at times it takes on a somber tone and even on occasion requires some concentration on complicated and unfamiliar issues.

CHAPTER 1

A WORLD OF EMPIRES

In the first half of 1914, the Ulster crisis dominated British politics: the Conservative Party encouraged armed opposition to home rule in Ulster, suggested that King George V dismiss the elected Liberal government, and supported the refusal of senior military officers to uphold the law against Ulster rebellion. From the moment in the 1880s when Irish home rule came on the agenda, it was perceived by Westminster partly as an imperial issue. Belief that Irish home rule was the thin end of the wedge in the undermining of Britain's empire and global power was an important reason for the bitterness with which home rule was fought. British political elites did not need to read the works of Friedrich Ratzel, the father of German geopolitics, to realize that the core metropolis of the British Empire was already perilously small given the empire's size and its dispersal across the globe. Now home rule was threatening to weaken this core yet further. Before World War I, Britain would never have conceded Irish independence without a fight. The basic point is simply that empire mattered hugely to all Europe's ruling elites. Regardless of the rights or wrongs of the various sides in the Ulster crisis, it was certainly true that in time the dilemma of empire would destroy British global power and lead to the breakup in part at least of the United Kingdom itself. Nor would this process occur without major wars. If the pressures within the British Empire did not themselves bring about a world war, that was largely because until well into the twentieth century international geopolitical realities meant that a truly global war could only start on the European continent, where Britain itself had almost no empire.¹

One key reason why it appeared by 1900 that the future belonged to empire was the rise of the United States. The Union had survived the great crisis of the Civil War, and in the following decades the American economy and population grew immensely. It was clear to all observers that no purely European country could hope to match its potential power, though Russia and Britain might do so in the future if they could consolidate and develop their existing empires. For other European countries that sought to remain great powers, there was the even more daunting challenge to create new empires.² This was the most basic geopolitical factor underpinning the "age of imperialism," but it was not the only one. Technology, and especially the railway, now made possible the penetration, colonization, and economic exploitation of continental heartlands, huge regions that until now had been too remote from coasts or navigable rivers to be of much value. It was above all the impact of the railway that persuaded the father of British geopolitics, Halford Mackinder, to prophesy in 1904 that the Columbian age, in which sea power had dominated the globe, was coming to an end.³

The scramble for empire was also spurred by the fact that many great powers were now in on the game. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Britain had not only by far the greatest overseas empire but also the world's only industrialized economy. By 1900, this was no longer true. Russia, France, Germany, and even

Japan, Italy, and the United States had now entered the competition for empire. As a result, “empty” territory was fast disappearing. Roughly one-quarter of the world’s land surface changed hands between 1876 and 1915, as the rival imperialist great powers grabbed “unoccupied” corners of the globe.⁴ One incentive to do so was that with the major exception of Britain the great powers were moving away from free trade and toward protectionism. In that context, it made sense to seize direct control over territories, raw materials, and markets before being shut out by a rival power. The British foreign secretary, the Earl of Rosebery, described this in 1893 as pegging out stakes for the future. When one first pegged out these stakes, it was often impossible to know whether the effort would be worthwhile, but great powers could not afford to take chances, because the rapid development of technology was fundamentally altering geopolitical realities by turning many regions previously of little interest to anyone into potentially crucial sources of wealth and power.⁵

In southern Africa, for example, the British had been prepared to tolerate the evolution of the Boer republics toward near de facto independence until they were discovered to be sitting on the world’s richest treasure trove of gold and diamonds, a trove that deep-mining technology could now exploit. Such resources must in time make the republics the center of southern Africa’s economy, and this was all the more dangerous because more than half the white population of Britain’s Cape Colony were Boers and other great powers were now beginning to take an interest in Africa. Having allowed the Boer republics to float free in the 1880s, Britain fought an expensive and brutal war to reimpose control between 1899 and 1902. The other European powers ground their teeth in frustration as overwhelming naval supremacy insulated British aggression in southern Africa from outside intervention. At a rather high level of generalization, there are parallels between British moves in 1899 and Austrian policy toward Serbia in 1914. From Vienna’s perspective, the Serbian kingdom was acting as a magnet that might attract the monarchy’s South Slavs and wreck Austria’s geopolitical position in the Balkans. It therefore had to be brought under imperial control. The key difference between the Austrians and the British was geography rather than morality: aggression and expansion on the European continent could never be isolated from the intervention of neighboring rival great powers.⁶

The clash between empire and Irish nationalism was of much more than purely local importance. The fate of the British Empire affected every corner of the globe. Above all, the empire was widely perceived as not only the most powerful but also the most modern in the world. Its admirers saw it as the embodiment of material progress and liberal principles. Now it faced a challenge from the nationalism of a small people living in the empire’s core. How the struggle between empire and nationalism was resolved in Britain had implications for the many similar conflicts that were spreading across Europe and already in a few cases overseas as well.

In its first decades, nationalism in Europe often rested on the belief that only “big” peoples such as the Germans and the Italians were viable nations. In the German and Italian cases, nation-states had been created by the efforts of a core state—Prussia in the German case and Piedmont in the Italian—that had conquered and united the other German and Italian kingdoms and duchies. Having created complex but viable nation-states, the Germans and the Italians then aspired to acquire their own empires. In the German and Italian cases, metropolitan nationalism and imperialism would support each other. By 1900, however, nationalism had become a nearly universal phenomenon in Europe. Nationalist movements spread to subject peoples of the Russian, Austrian, and Ottoman empires, including not just “historical” peoples such as the Poles but also groups such as the Armenians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, and Czechs who had not enjoyed independent statehood for centuries, if at all. Irish nationalism was the precursor of these movements, drawing on historical myths and memories, hatred of the rule of alien landlords and governments, and questions of religion, language, and ethnicity. In Ireland as elsewhere, the sense of commitment, sacrifice, and intransigence that these issues evoked made many observers equate nationalism with a new form of religion. To short and humdrum individual lives, the nationalist faith could add a touch of the heroic and a sense that

one belonged not just to a community but also in meaningful terms to the sweep of history. To be sure, in much of Europe even in 1900 nationalism had little hold beyond the educated classes. Nor was intelligentsia nationalism by any means always committed to independent statehood in Ireland or elsewhere. Nevertheless, the Irish example was telling. The hold of nationalism appeared to strengthen as societies modernized. It was the product of civil society, mass literacy, and urbanization. In other words, it seemed, like empire, to be the wave of the future.⁷

Eighteenth-century Ireland's British rulers had known that they were hated by the native Irish. Having destroyed the old Catholic landowning class and replaced it with a Protestant Anglo-Irish elite, London was nevertheless confident that nothing short of a major French invasion could shake its hold on Ireland.⁸ In the nineteenth century, the modernization of Ireland's economy and the emergence of a vibrant Irish civil society transformed the situation. British policy in nineteenth-century Ireland often combined repression and concession in intelligent fashion. It never attempted to simply ignore and repress the political implications of modernization. It compromised with the Catholic Church, handed over local government to the new Catholic middle classes, and bought out the Protestant landowning class, which was only possible because in that era Britain had the richest taxpayers in the world. But British policy could not head off ever-growing demands for Irish autonomy. From the mid-1880s, the two main British parties—Liberals and Conservatives—were divided on how to respond to this demand. Liberals argued that “home rule” would satisfy Irish aspirations, not least because most Catholic Irishmen of the professional classes welcomed Ireland's connection to the world's greatest empire; their Conservative and Unionist opponents insisted that it would give power, confidence, and patronage in Ireland to a movement that was driven by deep cultural and historical enmity toward England and that would never be satisfied with anything less than independence. Similar debates about whether devolution and federalism would strengthen or weaken imperial unity were to occur in other empires in the twentieth century.

From the 1880s down to the eve of World War I, Joseph Chamberlain stood at the epicenter of the struggle between British empire and Irish nationalism. In 1885, he abandoned the Liberal Party over the question of Irish autonomy, by so doing making a mighty contribution to Conservative domination of British government in the next twenty years. Chamberlain was the most charismatic figure in British politics in these years. His handsome, arrogant, monocled features, his fiercely committed rhetoric, and the orchid in his buttonhole were instantly recognizable not just in Britain but also anywhere in the world where newspapers were read. Chamberlain seemed above all to be a politician driven by big ideas. Having split the Liberals over Ireland, he very nearly did the same to the Conservatives in the twentieth century by his advocacy of the consolidation of the white British Empire into a coherent greater British polity. A first step toward what Chamberlain saw as the great challenge of the era was to create a system of imperial economic preferences. This policy faced big political and constitutional obstacles in both Britain and the white Dominions. Above all, the British mass electorate was loath to accept the higher food prices it entailed. The Conservatives lost the elections of 1906–11 in large part on this issue. But Chamberlain's followers had by no means given up on this cause by 1914. As Lord Selborne, a key Tory minister and supporter of Chamberlain, put it, “If this country is to maintain itself in the years to come in the same rank with the U.S., Russia and Germany, the unit must be enlarged from the U.K. to the empire.”⁹

Support for a British white empire-nation often had an additional element, which was belief in a tacit alliance between the two great Anglo-Saxon powers to dominate the globe and even to remake it in their own image. Married to an American, Joseph Chamberlain not merely believed passionately in the Anglo-American alliance but also embodied it. Anglo-American solidarity, so it was believed, would guarantee global peace, order, and progress. Few educated Englishmen doubted the superiority of Anglo-Saxon civilization or the benefits that its dominion would bring to mankind.¹⁰

British enthusiasm for Anglo-American solidarity by the turn of the twentieth century was a new

phenomenon, especially in upper-class circles. For the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, Britain and the United States had been geopolitical rivals in the Western Hemisphere. Britain's enemies in Europe had looked to the United States for support. As the Napoleonic Wars reached their peak in 1812, Washington went to war with London. During the American Civil War, Russia was the only European power to support the Union unequivocally, on the principle that the United States was the natural ally of any enemy of England. Some British statesmen wished to intervene on behalf of Confederate independence. Lord Salisbury, the Conservative prime minister for most of the years between 1885 and 1902, continued to regret that they had not done so. William Gladstone, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, commented in 1862 that Confederate independence seemed assured not just by the South's military victories but above all because the Confederacy had proved itself to be a true nation. His statement was reasonable. Over three-quarters of white male Southerners of military age served in the armed forces, and a third of them died, an exceptionally high level of commitment by any comparison. The myths and memories of war create nations. Had the Confederacy survived on the battlefield, the immense sacrifices made by Southerners in its cause would have guaranteed the consolidation of a Southern nation-state for generations. Instead, the Confederacy was destroyed in one of the most important and brilliant examples of nation killing in history. Above all, defeat was owed to the massive mobilization and intelligent direction of Northern military and economic power and to the hold of American nationalism on the Northern imagination. No amount of military or economic power would have sufficed to destroy the Confederacy unless backed by the willingness of Northern young men to die in massive numbers and far from home in the cause of an American nation that they believed must include all the territories of the Union and would stretch from ocean to ocean. As is always the case, military victory needed to be reinforced by a political settlement, and in the American case this meant accepting a wide degree of autonomy for the South within the Union, thereby abandoning the Southern blacks. White racism helped to make this settlement acceptable to the great majority of Northerners. Although the domestic consequences of a Northern victory were thereby flawed, the success of the American federal system in reintegrating the defeated South into the nation was in historical terms remarkable. In global and geopolitical terms, the North's military and political victory was of immense significance. The present world order rests historically on the alliance of a continental-scale United States and the British Empire. Had the Civil War ended differently, the result could easily have been a divided American continent racked by rivalries and resentments between Northern and Southern nations and the British.¹¹

Until 1865, London believed with reason that it could defend its position in the Western Hemisphere by force if necessary and thereby sustain a balance of power in the region. By 1900, growing American strength clearly made this impossible. Britain faced an increasing number of competitors at a time when it had long ceased to be the only industrial economy in the world. In these circumstances, any confrontation with the United States would be a disaster. In the twenty years around the turn of the century, Britain conceded hegemony in the Western Hemisphere to the United States, appeasing the Americans by giving way on a series of issues concerning competing interests in Brazil, Venezuela, and Panama. German observers noted sourly but correctly that the British tolerated behavior and rhetoric from the Americans that would have led to furious protests and even war had they come from continental Europeans. Although British wooing of the Americans was by no means always reciprocated on the other side of the Atlantic, the Germans knew that in a competition for American goodwill the English had many advantages, beginning but by no means ending with their shared language.¹²

The Anglo-American alliance in the twentieth century was indeed never simply a matter of Realpolitik and shared geopolitical interests. On the contrary, what gave this alliance its strength was that common strategic interests were intertwined with ethnic and ideological solidarity. It was precisely around the turn of the century that the English-Speaking Union and a number of similar organizations were created to emphasize the deep cultural bonds that spanned the North Atlantic. The steamship and intermarriage brought East Coast and British elites closer together. When Britain's survival in 1940 depended on American support, it helped that its leader, Winston Churchill, had a famous American mother, Jennie Jerome. So too did the whole

ideology of Anglo-Saxonism, which drew on increasingly widespread and fashionable racial and biological interpretations of human society and historical progress. In the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, British elites had compared their “mixed constitution” to unstable, irrational, and aggressively expansionist American democracy. By the 1890s, however, Britain itself had evolved toward a full-scale democracy. London and Washington could celebrate ideological solidarity while often feeling in their hearts that only male, Anglo-Saxon Protestants had the self-discipline and the rationality to make democracy viable. Lord Salisbury had sometimes regretted the United States’ survival, but for Arthur Balfour, his nephew and successor as Conservative prime minister, Anglo-American solidarity became the key to sustaining global order and Western civilization.¹³

British elites at the turn of the twentieth century were more globally and imperially minded and less European than had been the case in previous generations. Then as always, however, British security rested crucially on events on the European continent. A small island kingdom off the northwest coast of Europe could not control a vast global empire unless it could get away with paying a relatively small price for the security of the British homeland.¹⁴ This in turn depended on the European balance of power. The existence of four continental states of roughly equal power meant that no one of them was likely to conquer the entire continent and mobilize its resources against Britain. Although in principle a continental alliance against Britain was conceivable, in practice the continental states usually feared each other more than they envied or disliked the British. Their own interests and fears therefore drove them to play the major role in sustaining the balance of power that served British security and overseas imperialism so well. From the mid-eighteenth century down to 1914, the four continental great powers were France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia (Germany). Spain was the sixth and least of the great powers in 1750, but it had been succeeded by Italy in a similarly awkward role a century later.

A basic law of geopolitics was that it was easier for European states to create empires outside their continent than within it. In Europe, any would-be empire had to face the inevitable opposition of a coalition of hostile great powers whose war machines had been honed by generations of conflict at the cutting edge of not just military but also fiscal and administrative development. Outside Europe, these war machines faced weaker enemies and also could operate beyond the reach of most of their European rivals. Not surprisingly therefore, Europe’s greatest empires tended to be created by states lying on the Continent’s periphery: Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, France, and Russia. Geography was always likely to frustrate German empire builders rooted in the Continent’s center. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars provided a classic example of European and global geopolitical realities. The most basic reason for France’s defeat was that British sea power locked French imperialism into Europe. Fueled by the power unleashed by the Revolution and by Napoleon’s military genius, the French made a heroic but ultimately unsuccessful bid for empire on the European continent. Meanwhile, the British made huge advances overseas—for example, consolidating their empire in India. Their rewards were not small: in 1815, the revenues of British India were greater than those of the Russian or Austrian empire, let alone of Prussia.¹⁵

Napoleon faced the fundamental geopolitical reality that would also stand in the way of German efforts to dominate Europe in two world wars. Even if a would-be European emperor could conquer the Continent’s core—in other words, the French, German, Italian, and Dutch lands that formed the basis of Charlemagne’s empire and of the European Union—he still faced two formidable concentrations of power at the western (Britain) and eastern (Russia) peripheries of Europe. These two peripheries were almost certain to gang up against any would-be emperor because his power inevitably threatened their own security and ambitions. To mobilize both sufficient naval power to defeat Britain and a military-logistical power capable of defeating Russia was a huge challenge that baffled not just Napoleon but in due course twentieth-century Germany.

It is nevertheless important to realize that this challenge was extremely difficult but not impossible. That in a way was Europe’s tragedy: the prize sometimes seemed tantalizingly close. Napoleon could have defeated

Russia in 1812, and most experts expected him to do so. He was foiled by his own mistakes, bad luck, and the skill and courage of the Russian armies. He also, however, played into Russian hands by relying on a purely military strategy of blitzkrieg. Given Russia's huge scale and resources, a mixed military and political strategy was always more likely to succeed. Napoleon failed to exploit the Russian Empire's internal political weaknesses, which included Polish nationalism and the possibilities of peasant rebellion. Hitler adopted the same strategy of blitzkrieg and failed for many of the same reasons. By contrast, in World War I the Germans adopted a more intelligent mixed strategy, and Russian power disintegrated because of internal political problems. For that reason and despite appearances, imperial Germany came closer to winning hegemony in Europe during World War I than was the case with either Napoleon or Hitler.¹⁶

At the Congress of Vienna in 1814–15, the victorious great powers—Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia—went about creating peace and security in Europe more intelligently and successfully than their successors at Versailles a century later. France was not severely treated despite twenty years of aggression but quickly reintegrated as an equal into international relations. On the other hand, unlike in 1919, the victorious powers created a military alliance pledged to defend the Vienna settlement against any attempt by the French to overthrow it. In 1814–15, the European great powers formed what can justly be called a system of international relations rooted in some conception of common norms, interests, and restraint. They could do this in part because all had suffered from a generation of warfare and dreaded its recurrence. The continental powers were also united by what might be described as an antidemocratic peace theory. With some justice—particularly as regards France—they believed that revolution would bring to power regimes bent on external aggression and certain to further destabilize the Continent. Britain never subscribed fully to this theory nor to the European concert, partly out of liberal principles and partly because of its traditional wish to keep the continental powers divided.

The European order created by the Congress of Vienna was finally destroyed by the Crimean War (1853–56). By far the most important result of the war was that it undermined the solidarity among the three conservative monarchies of east-central Europe. Russia had previously supported the Austrian position in Germany and had rescued the Habsburgs by intervening in 1849 against the Hungarian Revolution.

Defeat in the Crimea weakened Russia and reduced its willingness to risk war in Europe for a generation. Austria's policy of rewarding Russian help in 1849 by supporting its enemies in the Crimean War turned Petersburg firmly against Vienna. As a result, Otto von Bismarck was able to unite Germany in two wars against first Austria and then France with the benevolent neutrality of Russia. German unification transformed the European balance of power. But the conservative monarchies of Piedmont and Prussia that had created a united Italy and a united Germany not only altered the European map; they also forged a new model for conservative statecraft by mobilizing liberal and nationalist support for the royal state through a foreign policy that promoted the nation's cause. No longer would nationalism primarily be an ideology on the left in European politics.

The Congress of Berlin, 1878. The European great powers in concert.

Nevertheless, Bismarck was determined to restabilize Europe after his wars of 1864–71 and to reassure Germany's neighbors that Europe's new potential hegemon was a sated power with no further territorial ambitions. As one perceptive German observer later commented, this reassurance was necessary. The same historical arguments used to justify the German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in 1871, for example, could also have justified taking much of Switzerland. In geopolitical terms, the Netherlands were not much more

than the estuary of Germany's most vital artery, the river Rhine. German security in the east might have been served by pushing back the Russian frontier, and German nationalists might have welcomed the annexation of Russia's Baltic Provinces, whose elites were German and Protestant. Only Bismarck had dissuaded William I and his generals from demanding the annexation of the Sudetenland as tribute from Austria for the victory of 1866. As a result of Bismarck's moderation, commented the writer Paul Rohrbach in 1903, no European government now believed that Germany hankered after its territory or had ambitions to expand within Europe.¹⁷

The problem, added Rohrbach, was that both Germany and the world had changed fundamentally and at great speed since Bismarck's heyday. The Germany created by Bismarck in 1871 had a population of forty million. By 1925, it was estimated that the population would probably reach eighty million. When the German Empire was founded, it was self-sufficient as regards food production. By the first decade of the twentieth century, much of its food and essential raw materials for its industry came from abroad. The present and, even more, the future prosperity of the German people depended on their industrial exports and on global trade networks. If these networks were broken for any length of time, "the consequences would be unthinkable . . . [A]lmost every branch of the German economy would be dragged into a catastrophe, which would entail extreme privation for half the population."¹⁸ Germans therefore could no longer afford to think in purely European terms. They and their government had to think globally and have a "world policy." The term "world policy" in Germany became as fashionable as and even more ill-defined than our own contemporary references to globalization. In fact, the terms "world policy" then and "globalization" now reflected a similar reality. Since the mid-nineteenth century, there had been a vast growth in commercial, financial, and intellectual linkages binding the major nations of the world together far more tightly than before. Germans in the early twentieth century lived in what one could describe as the first phase of modern globalization, whose hub was London, from where so many of the financial, shipping, and other services underpinning the global economy were coordinated. Almost destroyed by two world wars and the 1930s Great Depression, globalization reemerged after 1945 in its second phase under new American leadership but based on many of the same liberal and Anglo-Saxon principles and mechanisms that had operated before 1914.¹⁹

German and British thinking on geopolitics and the future of global power had similar premises and made many similar predictions. No one doubted that the world of the future would be dominated by those countries which controlled human and material resources on a continental scale. One of these powers would be the United States. Only slightly less certain was Russia's place among the great powers of the future. Whereas German discussions of American or British power were expressed in the coolly rational language of political economy and academic history, where Russia was concerned, a much more vivid and sometimes even an apocalyptic tone was often present.²⁰ This derived partly from a long-standing German sense of cultural superiority but also fear about a more primitive people who were often defined as semi-European at best. Most western Europeans shared the cultural arrogance but were less fearful than the Germans for the simple reason that Russian power lay farther from their borders.

Dislike of Russia was reinforced in the nineteenth century by liberal and socialist Germany's distaste for the tsarist regime. The German Jews had a particular dislike for the land of the pogrom, but German émigrés in Berlin from Russia's Baltic Provinces (today's Estonia and Latvia) probably had a bigger overall impact on German perceptions of Russia. They brought to Germany a vision of racial conflict between Slavs and Germans that could then be applied to struggles between the German and the Slav peoples of the Austrian monarchy as well. This played a big role in pan-German thinking but had an influence beyond their ranks. Paul Rohrbach was a key "public intellectual" of Baltic origin who strongly influenced German opinion about international relations and Russia. He disliked both tsarism and Russians. He stressed the glaring weaknesses of the Russian economy and society and argued that an aggressive foreign policy was almost the only means for the regime to cling to its fading legitimacy. But although he expected major convulsions in

the near future in Russia, he did not doubt that in the longer run the country would be a formidable world power, noting that on current projections by the second half of the twentieth century Germany would face an eastern neighbor with a population of more than 300 million.²¹

German attitudes to Britain were much more complex and contradictory. A yearning to emulate the British was, for example, combined with a sense that in terms of economic power and successful modernity Germany was quickly overtaking its rival. British and German male elites often had very similar conceptions of personal honor and of service to the nation; indeed, the cult of manly and patriotic heroism gripped male elites across Europe as a whole. If the British upper class's traditions were somewhat less military than those of the Prussian Junkers, the ethos of elite British public schools in 1900 was still much closer to the regiment than to the countinghouse. Count Harry Kessler had an Anglo-Irish mother but moved in the highest circles of Prusso-German society and knew all the key decision makers. He was also a man of exceptional intelligence and aesthetic sensibility. He wrote to his sister, "There is no more hollow Utopia than eternal peace, and a mischievous one into the bargain. All nations have become what they are by war, and I shouldn't give two pence for a world in which the possibility of war was abolished. Indeed I cannot in the least doubt that we ourselves in our own lifetime shall see another great war . . . and I cannot say I very much deplore this perspective."²²

Many former public-school boys would have agreed. On the other hand, because the British had more or less created globalization, it is not surprising that they found its ways easier to comprehend and assimilate. The very rich British aristocracy had long since forged an alliance with high finance and the City of London, many of whose leading figures were Jews. The far poorer Prussian gentry had historically much narrower horizons and a more vulnerable—purely agricultural—economic base. The City bred "gentlemanly capitalists," but respect for parliamentary government was also deeply rooted in British aristocratic tradition in a way that was not true of Germany, let alone of Prussia. For aristocrats such as the Russell family—the dukes of Bedford—and their peers, liberty and constitutional government were almost seen as family heirlooms invented at their estate of Woburn Abbey and then donated first to England and thence to the world. The tradition of parliamentary politics bred a pragmatism and spirit of compromise that were not natural growths of the regimental mess, the Junker estate, or even the university world where most of the Prusso-German elite's values were formed.²³

In today's world, at least in the West, rulers know too little about history and defer excessively to the academic gurus of free-market capitalism. One hundred years ago in Germany, precisely the opposite was true. Wilhelmine Germany spent too much time for its own good pondering how the British had risen to global preeminence. One lesson it learned from British history was that the wealth, power, and status achieved by Britain's successful foreign, colonial, and commercial policy in the eighteenth century played a big role in consolidating national unity and confidence. Prince Bernhard von Bülow, Germany's chancellor between 1900 and 1909, followed this line. Copying the eighteenth-century British in early-twentieth-century Germany had its problems, however. The British elites had been operating before the onset of mass politics or the emergence of a powerful socialist movement with a compelling alternative vision of modernity. Germany, with its two religions, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, and maze of petty localisms, was a very different realm from the Protestant Anglo-Scottish union. Above all, risking war in the cause of mercantilism and colonial conquest had far higher costs in the industrial era than had been the case a century or more previously. In view of the ways that the global economy had evolved in the nineteenth century, a continental war was also much less necessary. Worst of all, given Germany's position in the middle of Europe, it was less likely to succeed.²⁴

Friedrich Ratzel, the founder of German geopolitical thinking, commented that "Perfidious Albion" was the true heir of ancient Carthage's ruthless mercantile strategy, for which the term "Punic loyalty" (that is, total faithlessness) had been coined. He meant this as a compliment to the British. In Ratzel's view, ruling a world

empire displayed and preserved the vibrant energy and the virility of the English race. Like Ratzel, historians and professors of “national economy” who directed their attention to England were often talking about the mercantilist country of the eighteenth century, rather than the contemporary hub of liberal, global capitalism. They failed to take into account either the powerful interests or the idealism that underpinned the British public’s support for free trade.²⁵

German businessmen usually knew better. Hugo Stinnes was one of the kings of German industry. He was anything but a “softy,” and he was a strong German nationalist. Nevertheless, he told one of the pan-German leaders in 1911 that an expansionist foreign policy was counterproductive because in the modern world it was economic power that mattered and just a few more years of peace would anyway ensure Germany the economic domination of Europe. In reality, the British and German economies were both integrating to their mutual benefit. As to Germany’s other supposedly deadly rival, the boom of the Russian economy before 1914 was sucking in an ever-growing volume of German industrial exports. In 1913, the last year of peace, Germany was by a wide margin Russia’s most important trading partner. One of the traditional arguments for German colonialism was that the country’s future power depended on ending immigration to the United States and finding space for colonists under the German flag. In fact, by 1913 this was completely untrue: the booming national economy had sucked in all available labor, leaving no surplus for colonization and almost ending German immigration to America.²⁶

A German pessimist might no doubt have argued that the good times would not last. Liberal-capitalist globalization might implode, as was indeed to happen in 1929. For those inclined by ideology or temperament to see international economic relations in mercantilist or Darwinian terms, the greater the successes of the German economy, the likelier foreign countries were to attempt to choke it by imposing political constraints on its export markets.²⁷ Joseph Chamberlain might triumph, and the British might move toward protecting their home and imperial markets. The vast American domestic market was already protected by high tariffs, and the formidable American industrial corporations might in time compete to devastating effect in Germany’s export markets. Growing German penetration of the Russian market was arousing resentment in Russia, especially given the high barriers created against Russian agricultural exports to Germany. There was a strong possibility that Petersburg would adopt more stringent political and economic countermeasures in the future. One could advance many such doomsday scenarios to justify a push toward the creation of a closed German-dominated trading bloc. Of course the parties and lobbies that advocated territorial expansion and the conquest of closed trading areas were driven by much more than just ideas about geopolitics and the future global economy. Hunger for status and recognition within German society motivated individuals and groups, as did domestic political calculations. Moreover, “world power” was a vague concept that could mean many things. If it represented most of all a quest for status and a thirst for overcoming feelings of insecurity or exclusion, then “world power” might never be attainable in the real world. To the extent that the quest for “world power” was driven by fashionable but vapid metaphors drawn from biology about a political organism’s need to expand or die, the expansionist urge was both foolish and dangerous. But if “world power” meant Germany’s ability to equal the strength of the United States or a modernized future Russia, then on the contrary it was realistic to argue that its empire had to expand.²⁸

Even if one accepted this premise, however, the question was, where and how to expand? Only marginal elements in German politics dreamed of the military takeover of neighboring lands before 1912. Other factors aside, many pan-Germans remained loyal to Bismarck’s call for good relations with Russia. But the Habsburg Empire was increasingly seen by nationalists as a German borderland that had to be protected against the pan-Slav threat. The Balkan Wars of 1912–13 turned German attention away from maritime and colonial ambitions and eastward toward a possible land war against Russia and its Slav allies. Even so, when the Germans did actually conquer extensive territory in the east in 1915–17, their total unpreparedness to rule it was a striking proof of the lack of prewar planning.²⁹

Probably the most widely canvassed and realistic plan for extra-European expansion was linked to the construction of the Berlin–Baghdad Railway and the aspirational German economic domination of the Balkans and part of the Ottoman Empire. This contributed greatly to Russian paranoia and the growing strain in Russo-German relations. Paul Rohrbach was a great advocate of this plan. He wrote that “Germany, the Danubian Lands and Turkish Asia Minor complement each other as regards their level of economic development and their natural conditions of production so excellently that given a certain mutual understanding and accommodation a more or less closed and autonomous economic region for the production and consumption of goods can be formed.” This begged the question of whether the Turks would consent to come under exclusive German economic control. Even more to the point, the first step in the creation of this economic unit had to be a German customs union (*Zollverein*) with Austria-Hungary. A few German and Austrian statesmen sometimes regarded the idea as promising, but none of them saw it as remotely possible in the prewar political context. As with Chamberlain’s plans, simply too many interests and institutions stood in the way. If this was true even of a German-Austrian *Zollverein*, then hopes for a broader European trading bloc were clearly fanciful. In any case, such hopes faced an even greater obstacle that once again was similar to the problem confronting Chamberlain when he called for a British imperial trading bloc. Just as most British trade was in fact with countries outside its empire, so most German trade was with regions outside central Europe and the Middle East. The logic of liberal-capitalist globalization contradicted the demands of imperialist geopolitics.³⁰

Nevertheless, if an Austro-German economic union was beyond reach before 1914, in other respects the alliance between the two empires was close. As was the case with the British and the Americans, the Austro-German alliance came to combine shared geopolitical interests with ethnic and ideological solidarity. The first half of the twentieth century indeed revolved in part around the conflict between these Anglo-Saxon and Germanic blocs. Initially, Germanic “ideological” solidarity had a conservative, aristocratic, and antidemocratic tinge. In 1938–45, this Germanic world would be united by fascism. Before 1914, one could even have dreamed of a future Germanic socialist world in conflict with Anglo-Saxon liberalism, because the German-speaking lands (together with France) formed the core of the European socialist movement. Whatever ideological form the competition took, it would always have been infused on both sides with ethnic assumptions, values, and stereotypes.

To an even greater degree than was true of the Anglo-American bloc, Germanic unity represented a sharp reversal of a previous history of Austro-German competition and war, which had only ended with the Prussian victories of 1866 and 1870–71. In central Europe, geopolitical imperatives always imposed themselves more strongly than in London, let alone Washington. In 1870, the emperor Franz Joseph, the Austrian ruler, still hoped to join France in defeating Prussia and reasserting Habsburg preeminence in Germany. In the aftermath of France’s defeat in 1870–71, Prusso-German dominance of central Europe was an accepted fact, and Vienna increasingly saw the need for German support against its Russian rival in the Balkans.

Whatever Franz Joseph’s personal inclinations, the Austro-German alliance initially agreed in 1879 was never simply a matter of shared strategic interests. For many Germans on both sides of the border, it became a substitute for the dreams of a greater Germany (*Gross-Deutschland*), which Bismarck’s policy had reined in and which the empire of the Hohenzollerns could not satisfy. Catholic Germans were especially likely to welcome the alliance for this reason. The Austrian-Germans were the most powerful ethnic community in the Habsburg Empire, and for them the alliance with Berlin was increasingly seen as a bulwark against the Slav threat not just from without but also inside the monarchy. In a world shot through with ideas about ethnicity and race, the alliance with Berlin also simply seemed “natural” in Austrian-German eyes. Hungarian elites too saw the alliance as a crucial guarantee against Slav domination of their region. Governments in Vienna and Berlin by no means always saw eye to eye. Germany was, for example, Austria’s chief economic competitor in the Balkans. The Habsburg authorities also made many efforts to

conciliate their Slav subjects in a manner that annoyed Austrian-Germans and did so without too much concern for Berlin's opinions. Internal and foreign affairs remained separate on an everyday level. But even leaving aside common geopolitical interests, it was by now barely imaginable for Austria to remove itself from Berlin's embrace or join any anti-German international alliance. Equally unlikely was German toleration of the Austrian Empire's breakup or even of the radical weakening of the German-Austrian position within the monarchy. Potentially, the Germanic bloc in central Europe was less powerful than the Anglo-American one, but before 1914 in military and diplomatic terms it was far more closely united.³¹

Austrian perspectives were inevitably less global than in Berlin, let alone London, but Austrian diplomats in the United States were all too aware of enormous American potential power and its implications. At the turn of the twentieth century, Austria's representatives in Washington commented that as all eyes turned to global competition and the future of Asia, Austria-Hungary more and more seemed a second- or even third-class power. In the sixteenth century, the Habsburg monarch Charles V had threatened to dominate all Europe. Klemens von Metternich, the Austrian foreign minister, had stood at the center of the coalition that had defeated Napoleon and created a new European order at the Congress of Vienna. In comparison both to the Habsburgs' glorious past and to the great issues linked to mankind's future that were now on the agenda, the Balkan questions that had obsessed Austrian leaders in the 1880s were petty. The Anglo-Saxon powers had essentially fenced off Europeans in a continental enclosure from which they could only look out wistfully at goings-on in the great world. While Europeans lived on scraps in their continental zoo, the British and the Americans felt free to graze all across the globe's rich pastures. This was an insult to dignity as well as to more concrete European interests because Anglo-American power and arrogance meant that "outside the European continent anyone who isn't an Anglo-Saxon is a barely tolerated second-class human being." Americans knew that they could outcompete Europe in industry and agriculture. They were conscious of their country's enormous potential resources, as well as of the superior education and wealth of ordinary Americans when compared with the average European. All this went far toward explaining their offhand and dismissive attitude toward foreigners.³²

At least German leaders' hopes for the future could be sustained by their country's growing economic domination of Europe and by the vibrant self-confidence of German nationalism. In Vienna by contrast, it was difficult not to feel that history was against one. Austria had been the leading power in both Germany and Italy in the mid-nineteenth century. First France and then Germany had defeated it. Still worse, the defeats were not just a question of power and geopolitics. It was also generally believed that in the 1850s and 1860s Austria had been defeated not just by rival powers but also by the nationalist idea, which was then embodied in the new German and Italian nation-states. The nation seemed to represent the future, while the era of polyglot empires seemed part of the past. In 1900, all European empires were potentially threatened by the spread of nationalist ideas. These empires were sustained, however, by the strength of metropolitan nationalism. Austria was the exception. Germans made up less than one-quarter of the Habsburg Empire's population. Moreover, subjects of the Habsburg emperor who were German nationalists in many cases actually looked forward to the empire's demise and the unification of all German territories and peoples under the rule of Berlin.³³

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