PROPOSAL

While often eclipsed in popular culture by the First World War, the Russo-Japanese War was the first international conflict of the twentieth century. While initially dismissed as just another regional conflict between a European power and a much less developed neighbor, the war quickly became anything but. Due to both belligerents having signed many treaties with other countries, the war soon evolved into an international war, with all of the great powers involved economically. The war chests of both countries were in large part supplied by non-belligerent powers in Europe and abroad.

Of particular importance was that of the United States, formerly a secondary power that was quickly establishing its own empire, with the acquisition of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. While not formally supporting either side, private interests within the United States provided the funds necessary for the conflict. In this thesis, I will examine who these interests were and their motivations for offering assistance to the belligerent powers. This war started a trend in American foreign policy that continued throughout the entirety of the twentieth century: the financing of foreign wars for economic gain. Understanding the root of this trend enables us to see the formation of Russian-American relations immediately prior to the Bolshevik revolution.

In order to understand Russo-American relations in 1905 when the war began, it is helpful to view the way Americans wrote about the war. While the historiography of the war certainly changed over the years, as the relationship between the United States and Soviet Union evolved, examining early accounts of the war provides a perspective on how Americans viewed both Russia and Japan. Many of the first and most popular publications about the war were
anecdotal sources, such as correspondences from war reporters in newspapers or other publications. Eclipsing almost any others were the writings of George Kennan. A war correspondent, Kennan quickly became the eminent expert on the Russian Empire, particularly after his book, *Siberia and the Exile System*, was published. Kennan's reports were very critical of the Tsarist government, particularly of its system of exile. His expertise and eminent status meant that many Americans viewed the war as a struggle between the noble Japan and barbaric Russia that he described in his reports. This is problematic for a few reasons. As Kennan was by training and trade an explorer and journalist, not a historian, his articles were primarily anecdotal with statistics and empirical data included as an afterthought. His bias was plain to see: Russia was a brutal country of the worst kind. Thus, as his books and articles found themselves in the bibliographies of histories written shortly after the war, much Western scholarship took a decisively anti-Russian stance.

Early histories of the conflict were oftentimes concerned with a top-down view of the war, and also placed particular importance on international law. An interesting examination of the war can be found in Amos S. Hershey's 1906 book *The International Law and Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War*. Hershey argues that while Japanese war aims were vital to her survival as a country, Russian involvement in the war was simply a matter of glory, a great power attempting to use conflict to display its imperial superiority over a secondary power like Japan. While Russia certainly possessed the land mass to raise enough food to support her populace, and thus did not need to expand to sustain her population, this is a gross simplification of war aims. Japan's hopes of gaining status as an imperial power can be seen in its attempts to keep Korea within its sphere of influence. Hershey claims that Japan's attack on Port Arthur, which
occurred before the declaration of war, can and should be attributed to Russia ignoring the inevitability of conflict, and was not a surprise attack by the Japanese. Using the logic that the Russians should have known that an attack was coming based on the termination of diplomatic relations, Hershey exonerates the Japanese fleet from the guilt of launching a sneak attack.

A different argument with similar implications comes from Theodore Greyson in November of 1905. While he dismisses the argument used by Hershey, that the termination of diplomatic relations implies war, he excuses the illegality of the Japanese sneak attack by giving other examples of nineteenth century conflicts where countries attacked before announcing a formal declaration of war. Therefore, according to this logic, Japan's surprise attack at Port Arthur was nothing more than a modern military action, due to such illegal military actions becoming commonplace. These publications, which downplay the significance of the obvious breach of international law by the Japanese, clearly suggest a favorable bias of Japan by the authors.

A study of American newspapers also exposes popular opinion of Russia and the war. By using primary sources of periodicals published in America during the war, I will be able to prove that an anti-Russian, and thus pro-Japanese, sentiment pervaded American society, and undoubtedly influenced the economic contributions that Americans made to Japan. Many newspapers portrayed Japan as an occidental, democratic power, while at the same time claiming Russia to be an oppressive, oriental giant. This type of comparison was commonplace among American newspapers at the time, playing off of American sentimentalism, the almost national tendency to support the underdog.

This bias did not just exist within the vacuum of the printed word, however. Anti-Russian
biases were prevalent throughout the country. These biases were particularly prevalent within the Jewish community. Jacob Schiff was a Jewish financier who loaned over $200 million to the Japanese war effort. His motivations were plain to see. Schiff saw the war as an opportunity to exact revenge on Russia for its persecution of its Jewish population. By examining Schiff's memoirs and congressional records detailing his economic activities, I will be able to prove this motivation, as well as potentially shed some light on the anti-Russian stance of the Jewish community and the consequence of that stance. While he was just one man, I believe that Jacob Schiff's actions can provide a clear example of how America's economic assets were used to influence the tide of the war.

The impact that economy had on the war is elaborated upon in Sergei Witte's memoir. Witte was the Prime Minister of Russia and their chief diplomat at the Portsmouth Peace Conference. His memoirs provide a firsthand account of the Russian situation at the end of the war, not only economically, but also in relation to the United States. Witte clearly states that he saw America as being the financier for the Japanese war effort, as well as generally favoring Japan as the just belligerent in the war. The memoirs of a diplomat who was highly involved in the war effort and the peace process provide valuable insight to the political landscape of the war.

Another tool which will provide a unique perspective are the Red Archives. These documents, written in the Russian language, are records and diplomatic cables published by the Soviet government following the fall of the Russian Empire. Using my Russian language skills, I hope to use these to further expose much of the Russian perspective of the war, unavailable elsewhere. In addition to the war, they also provide documentation of Russian imperial interest in East Asia, and the interests of competing political powers, including the United States.
It is this imperial interest that I believe provided an impetus for official American involvement in the war. I hope to use the primary and secondary sources listed above to offer an explanation as to why the United States, and its citizens, took such a vested interest in a war that occurred thousands of miles away at a time when isolationism was the dominant political philosophy in America. While it may be obvious that America did, although informally, support the Japanese war effort, the reasoning behind this may provide an understanding of how popular opinion and national bias in America can be used to harness the economic power of the country to affect the outcome of a foreign war. A look at modern American history will clearly show that this concept is just as necessary to understand American foreign policy now as it is to understand policy at the time of the Russo-Japanese War.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES


