



**ODUMUNC 2014**  
Issue Brief for the  
Historical Crisis Committee (HCC)



***Resolving the Russo-Japanese War of 1905***

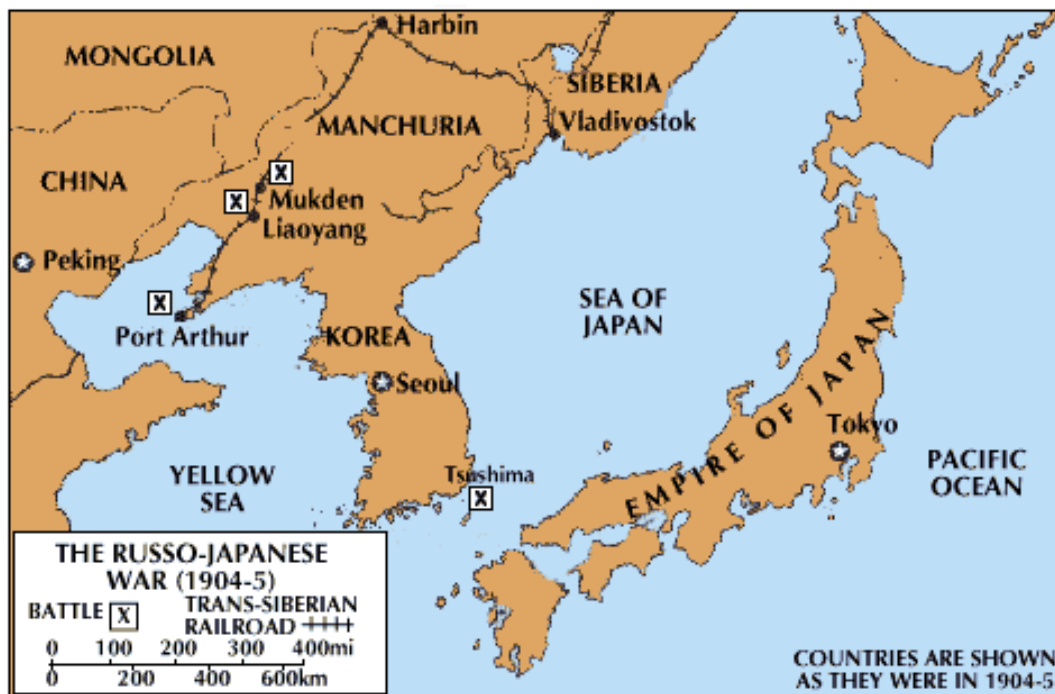
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**Introduction**

In what historians often refer to as ‘the first great war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’ or ‘World War Zero,’ the Empire of Japan and the Empire of Russia set the stage for the warfare and its industrial and economic implications for the rest of the century. Japan, physically insignificant compared to the sheer landmass of the Russian Empire, would challenge the enormous nation over a land dispute and show the West what it was capable of. The enormous nation of China became a battleground as great powers fought for dominance, the future of Asia and the world.

**Figure 1. The East Asian Cockpit: China, Japan (including Korea) and Russia**



The official beginning of the war came as a shock to the Russian Empire, who had recently assigned a fleet to the newly acquired city of Port Arthur. On February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1904, without any declaration of war, two Japanese fleets preemptively struck the harbor of Port Arthur, breaking the Western ‘rules of war’ and setting the Russian military on its heels. While not a necessarily effective strike, the Japanese Empire proved to the Russians that the laws of conventional warfare would not apply to this unexpected enemy.

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Another benefit of this surprise attack allowed a separate fleet of Japanese ships to occupy a major section of the Korean peninsula, which would serve to fortify their troops in later land battles. As the Japanese forces began to creep up the peninsula, arguments broke out between the military and political leaders of the Russians regarding how invested the Japanese were in the war past the claiming of Korea. The Japanese took this opportunity to deliver a coordinated strike over the Yalu River, thus confirming the fears of the Russian military that the Japanese were interested in more than land.

The war continued, with the theme of Japanese warfare being a ceaseless succession of strikes at fortifications with little regard for conservation of forces. The Russian Empire, conditioned to wars of attrition, managed a tactical but unsuccessful series of retreats in order to preserve troop numbers.

Russian troop conservation caused the loss of much land as the war went on, but soon the tactic served to slow the Japanese land invasion. While the Russians had seemed to stall the Japanese front on the mainland, sea battles led to the death of a Russian admiral mid-battle, throwing Russian resistance into confusion and forcing a retreat to Port Arthur, where the war would once again return.

This marked the end of the year, and the coming year would be one of Russian turmoil. Two days after the New Year, the siege of Port Arthur finally ended with a Russian surrender. The Japanese had secured the most influential port of the war, but 64,000 of the forward army had been lost, a staggering amount for the time period. Besides the thinning number of troops available, the Japanese Empire was also quickly running out of money and food for the war effort.

The Russian Empire, mustering its troops and finally resolving the disagreements within the chain of command, would have been able to turn the tide of war against the weakening Japanese military, but social disturbances cut those hopes short. On January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1905, in the streets of St. Petersburg, protesters of the Tsarists were fired upon in what would be called "Bloody Sunday." Due to this political shock, Nicholas II lost sight of his victory against the opposing empire.

Soon the Japanese pushed towards Mukden, and Russian resistance mirrored the other land battles of this war. After attempting to fall back to more secure positions multiple times, the Russians were barely able to escape a massacre as the Japanese moved to completely encircle their ranks. The sheer size of this battle set it apart from the rest; both sides sent almost 300,000 troops into the fray.

After the last of the fleet of the Empire of Russia sank en route to a safe position, Nicholas II had no choice but to surrender. With the United States as a mediator, both empires met to discuss and sign the Treaty of Portsmouth, securing a victory for the Empire of Japan.

Though the outcome of the Russo-Japanese War was due to years of land and naval battles, many deciding factors for the conflict were due to political events. Rampant anti-Semitism in the Tsarist regime led to many oppressed Jews seeking to aid the cause of the Japanese Empire. Mutual agreements between Britain and Japan allowed the two to spy on the Russian military in tandem, fostering the relationship of the two empires.

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**Figure 2. Russia enjoys the opening stages, while China and America watch helplessly**



### **Historical Background**

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, relations between the empires of Russia and Japan had been souring for nearly 200 years. Like many expanding empires, the prospect of opening trade with a reclusive East Asian country was too great to ignore, and the Russians were eager to send ambassadors.

Having already established trade with the Dutch, the Japanese Empire viewed the involvement of other nations or missionaries as a possible threat to the political power of the shogunate. After turning Russian proposals of trade, border agreements, and treaties away repeatedly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Japan became aware that the other empire could possibly be preparing to extend its influence to the region of Hokkaido, causing the Tokugawa shogunate to quickly annex the region without the blessings of the current landowners.

This move helped put the shogunate at ease in relation to Russian threats, but in doing so the social climate of Japan began to change. As the control of the shogunate expanded, so did the modernizing of the nation, but the Russian interest in trade was not stifled. In 1806, small Russian detachments landed at the Kuril Islands in the sea between Siberia and Japan, raiding the nearby villages in an effort to force the shogunate into giving in to the threat of Russian encroachment. This prompted a short lived agreement between the two nations for the purpose of cultural exchange and translation of Dutch literature into Russian, but the aggressive nature of

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the Kuril Island raids left a shadow over the agreement, and soon the two empires would return to seclusion.

Forty years later, after the British Opium Wars had ended in China and Russia returned to Siberia, Japan became aware that Western powers would once again be approaching. These fears were validated in 1852 when Commodore Perry shook the shores of Japan. Noting that the British and Russian empires were also in the process of sending ambassadors, the Japanese developed a government position titled the “maritime defense official,” in charge of managing the empire’s response to western ‘barbarian’ influences.

At the end of the year, Japan signed a treaty with Commodore Perry, and the next year, with the Russian Empire. Most defining about the Russo-Japanese treaty was the lengths it went to define Japanese territory, which to this time had not been established legally. Over the next few years, Japan would begrudgingly sign commercial treaties with the Americans, the British, the French, the Dutch, and finally the Russians.

Despite the proximity of other Western nations, Japan regarded Russia as the only true threat. Several small naval battles and island raids ensued on islands in a grey area defined by the territory agreements, resolved by Japan asking for British involvement into the argument. This military weakness was in part due to the crumbling of the last Japanese shogunate, which in 1868, shattered and gave rise to the Meiji restoration, returning the emperor to the head of state.

1876 marked a year the which Japan signed treaties with Korea in an effort to wrest the peninsula from Chinese control. This action piques the interest of the Russian Empire, which began the construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad, sending Russian influence directly into China and Port Arthur, a critical location for the Russian naval forces. Japanese strategists realized the importance of Port Arthur and launched the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, a two year operation which removed Chinese soldiers from the remainder of Korea and granting Japan full access to Port Arthur, as well as declaring Korea an autonomous nation to be occupied by their forces.

A week had not passed before the Russian Empire retaliated to the Japanese claim of Port Arthur. Unwilling to cause a direct confrontation in fear of other Western responses, Russia urged Germany and France to aid in convincing Japan to relinquish control of the Korean peninsula. The Meiji government resisted, asking only to keep Port Arthur, but their pleas were dismissed and the Japanese were left with nothing to show for the resolution of the previous war. Now in control of Port Arthur, the Russians completed the massive railway, and fortified their naval forces in the Yellow Sea.

### **Principal Actors**

In this historical crisis simulation, role players serve as the war cabinets of the governments and their military leaders. Underlined titles reflect the position the character will fill at the beginning of the simulation. The roles of heads of state - the Japanese Emperor and Russian Tsar - are not included here as they will be serving as the Chairs for each committee. Foreign leaders, if they become relevant, will be played by Old Dominion University crisis staff.

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**Russians**

**Yevgeni Ivanovich Alekseyev** – Viceroy of Russian Far-Eastern Possessions - In 1903 Alekseyev, having been promoted to Adjutant General after his involvement with suppressing the Boxer Rebellion, was given a very vague appointment by Nicholas II to oversee military possessions in the far East, including Manchuria. Though his position was not clearly defined in terms of power, Alekseyev utilized his political standing to push for aggressive military action into Korea without regard to Japanese claims of the land.

**Oskar Stark** – Commander of the Russian Pacific Fleet - Before the war, Oskar Stark served as Vice Admiral, and oversaw the military operations at Port Arthur. Later, as the war drew closer, Stark was eventually given command over the entirety of the Russian Pacific Fleet. By the time of this appointment, Stark had been in the Russian military for 38 years, and was a strong supporter of the tsar.

**Mikhail Alexeev** – Major General - Serving as commander of the Russian 3<sup>rd</sup> Manchurian Army during the Russo-Japanese War, Mikhail Alexeev was a strong proponent of Russian expansion into the far east and the annexation of Manchuria before the war. While hostilities brewed between Russia and Japan, Alexeev was tasked with preparing a campaign to combat Japanese invasion should war erupt, and believed that Russia would be better off striking first.

**Zinovy Rozhdestvensky** – Chief of the Main Naval Staff - Rozhdestvensky had served previously in the Russo-Turkish war and received a St. George's Cross for the combat he saw during the conflict. After assuming command of the Baltic Fleet before the War began, Rozhdestvensky was sent to Port Arthur to protect the naval base from possible attack.

**Sergei Witte** - Chairman of the Committee of Ministers - Sergei Witte, a Russian politician, statesman, and fiscal genius, garnered as many enemies throughout his career as he did honors. Though recognized for his work in developing railways, including the massive Trans-Siberian Railroad, Witte opposed the idea of expanding into the Korean peninsula after the Japanese lost their claim.

**Nikolai Nebogatov** – Rear Admiral - As the war became closer, Russian command transformed the Baltic Fleet to the Second Pacific Squadron. Russian officials worried that there was a need for a larger Navy, leading to the creation of the Third Pacific Squadron, with Nikolai Nebogatov accepting commandership. Previously a Rear Admiral in the Baltic Fleet, Nebogatov was a calculating and experienced leader.

**Nikolai Zarubaev** – Deputy Commander of the Siberian Military District - History preserves Zarubaev as an intelligent, fair, and reliable leader. Having served the military during wartime in locations that prevented him from ever seeing actual combat, his over-cautiousness in preparation and battle had yet to be discovered.

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**Aleksey Kuropatkin** – Imperial Minister of War - Kuropatkin was staunchly against military action against the Japanese Empire. As Minister of War, Kuropatkin attempted to create a better command structure for the Russian military, efforts which began to show his tendency towards indecisiveness and organizational mistakes. Despite his inability to enact these programs effectively, he was sure that morale was the biggest weakness of the Russian Army.

**Vladimir Kokovstov** – Minister of Finance - Noted for his history of assisting the creation of effective Russian economic reforms, Kokovstov became Minister of Finance after serving as an assistant to the position for 8 years. Though his opinions of the war may not have been strong, Kokovstov was often preoccupied in ensuring that relations with European nations like France and Germany were positive.

**Vladimir Lamsdorf** - Minister of Foreign Affairs - Lamsdorf was far more concerned with safety at home than expansionist policies held by the more militant advisors of the tsar. Lamsdorf held the belief that continued expedition into Korea was taking away from the more contested Manchuria, and that the Far East was a problem that could be handled once troubles at home were resolved.

**Vyacheslav von Plehve** – Minister of the Interior - Starting his rise to power studying law, Plehve served as a lawyer before becoming a Director of the Police in Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs. After the assassination of his superior, Plehve became the Russian Minister of the Interior. Suspected widely throughout Russia of anti-Semitism, Plehve thoroughly supported the regime of Tsar Nicholas II.

**Roman Rosen** - Ambassador to Tokyo - Rosen travelled the world during his duties as ambassador to many European and western nations, including the United States and Mexico. Having previously been assigned to Japan in 1897, Rosen was responsible for a peace agreement between Russian and Japan that he hoped would ease tensions between the two empires.

### Japanese

**Kuroki Tamemoto** – General - Having fought on the side of the Emperor-supporting samurai clans to create the Meiji Restoration, Kuroki was rewarded with a high status in the Imperial Japanese Army once the Emperor regained control of the nation. For his successes in the following Sino-Japanese War, he was granted the rank of general.

**Oku Yasukata** – General - After the Emperor had been reinstated; Oku Yasukata was given the rank of commander in the Imperial Japanese Army, and rose to the rank of general after the Sino-Japanese War. History holds Oku as a tactical mastermind, but independent and relatively uninterested in staff meetings.

**Nogi Maresuke** – Lieutenant General - A leader trained in Western styles of engagement due to military studies in Germany, Nogi Maresuke oversaw many incredible victories for the Japanese Army during the Sino-Japanese War. During the war, his stringent adherence to the samurai code

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of honor became apparent during the battles, and his dedication placed him among the key players in the Imperial Japanese Army.

**Nozu Michitsura** - Inspector General of Military Training - Having been awarded the title of count by the Emperor after decades of military service, Nozu Michitsura served many commanding and managerial positions in the Imperial Japanese Army after the Sino-Japanese War. He served as a military councilor, and his age and esteem for the empire garnered respect from his peers.

**Oyama Iwao** - Field Marshal - Oyama Iwao served as a commander for Imperial armies in battles starting in the Boshin War, and had a direct hand in establishing the Imperial Japanese Army. Trained in western tactics by the French, Oyama was selected as Commander of the Second Army in the Sino-Japanese War, and his effort earned him the position of Field Marshal.

**Togo Heihachiro** - Commander of the Standing Fleet - Undisputedly, Togo Heihachiro had the most illustrious naval career of any Japanese officer of his time. Studying and serving in the English Navy led to an incredible amount of experience on the water and variance in military study, and upon returning, Heihachiro participated in both the Franco-Chinese and Sino-Japanese War. For his outstanding skills and service, he was promoted to Commander of the Standing Fleet.

**Sone Arasuke** - Minister of Finance - A product of pre-Restoration dedication and French education, Arasuke served a wide array of positions in the Japanese government. Previously the Minister of Justice, Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, and ambassador to France, he was appointed Minister of Finance under the latest Prime Minister and tasked with maintaining loan management with Europe.

**Komura Jutarō** - Minister of Foreign Affairs - A graduate of Harvard Law School, Jutarō served as a member of the Supreme Court before his involvement with Beijing, where he set in motion plans that would lead to the first Sino-Japanese war and helped write the treaty that would end it. Upon becoming the Foreign Minister in 1901, he would go on to seal the Anglo-Japanese Alliance a year later.

**Ito Sukeyuki** - Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff - Ito Sukeyuki had been involved in naval warfare since before the overthrowing of the Shogun, but his success took him to the top of the ranks when he served as Commander in Chief of the Combined Japanese Fleet during the Sino-Japanese War. Due to this, he was granted the illustrious position of Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff.

**Yoshikawa Akimasa** - Home Minister - Having been a major member of the Meiji government since 1872, Yoshikawa Akimasa accepted the position of Home Minister after his predecessor, Katsura Taro, fell ill in the December of 1903. Though his plans to reform Tokyo and Japanese Education were mostly successful, Akimasa was a conservative under the more progressive Meiji government.

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**Takahira Kogoro** - Ambassador to the United States - As part of the Ministry of Foreign affairs in the position of Ambassador to the United States, Takihara Kogoro was intrinsic in managing the relations between the small island nation and the immense Western power. Having witnessed the United States crush the island chain of Hawaii in the Pacific, Kogoro's duty was more important than ever in keeping tensions at a minimum.

**Sir Ian Standish Monteith Hamilton** - Quartermaster-General to the Forces - Though not a member of the Japanese Military, Sir Hamilton held esteem among his Japanese counterparts as a successful naval officer from an allied nation, operating as Quartermaster-General to the Forces in nearby India. As tensions grew between Russia and Japan, Hamilton's expertise in Western strategy was becoming an important resource to his allies.

**Figure 3. Britain supports Japan, while America calmly watches**





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