

## Japan's Victory? Myths of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905

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All historians in the English language will say that Russia was defeated by the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War. They even claim that Japan's victory led them to such a level of confidence that they would soon attack the United States in 1941. Some even claim that the anti-colonial movements were ignited by this alleged victory (cf Storry 1979 or Connaughton 1998). Once the “white man” was seen as less than invincible, anti-colonial movements sprang up all over Asia.

Like almost everything believed by the Anglo-American historical establishment, much of this is false. History is a weapon, but journalism is the ammunition. Russian and then later, European newspapers, were full of false accounts of Japanese victories, defeated Russian armies and a humiliated emperor. As far as this writer knows, it's never been challenged in English.

It's going to far to say that Russia won this war, but you wouldn't know this by the demonstrations in Tokyo against the Japanese government who “lost” the possibility of victory. When the Japanese commander of the infantry at Port Arthur killed himself due to his humiliation there, no one in Japan saw this as a victory. Whether it be The Crimean War, the war with Japan or the First World War, journalists invented stories of “humiliating defeat” that remain unchallenged to this day. These accounts were supposed to delegitimize the Russian crown and drive it out of power, bringing an Anglophile oligarchy in its place.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an active rivalry between the leading European states in regions far from home: the Middle East, Africa and Asia. In this rivalry, both for Russia and France, the main competitor was Great Britain. Russian and English interests clashed in Turkey, Central Asia and the Far East. Germany at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not yet considered the main adversary by either France or Russia. Russia and France were not brought together by a common hostility towards Germany, but by competition with Great Britain (Emerson, 1998).

According to Sergei Witte, “the Sovereign considered the British our sworn enemies.” In 1896, Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich wrote in a review for M. Tsazi's book, *The Russian Navy: Its Current State and Mission*, he indignantly noted that the author considers England to be Russia's main enemy. Nicholas II, in the margins, wrote, “I completely accept this, as does any Russian who knows his native history.”

Britain considered Russia its main adversary as well. During the parliamentary debates of 1885, Prime Minister Gladstone said: “The Russian nightmare must be eliminated by some decisive blow.” In 1896, during a European tour, Nicholas II paid a courtesy call to his close relation, Queen Victoria. The royal family spent two weeks visiting her at the incredibly beautiful Scottish castle of Balmoral. There took place very important negotiations between Nicholas II and Lord Salisbury on the issues of the Black Sea Straits and the British occupation of Egypt. Of particular concern to the British ruling class was the security of her Indian possessions, which Russia could supposedly threaten. Nicholas II hastened to reassure the English side that the Russian presence in Asia is no threat to the British (Lukoyanov, 2008).

In London, at first it was hoped that the young and inexperienced Tsar would become the

vehicle of British interests. Queen Victoria tried to influence Nicholas II, hoping that warm kindred feelings would help advance British security, since she was his wife's grandmother. She convinced the Tsar "that it's so important that England and Russia work together, because they are the most powerful empires and therefore a guarantee of peace. . . Lord Salisbury and I want us, England and Russia, to understand each other and live in friendship" (Lunev 2008).

However, the Tsar was convinced that "Politics is not that of home or private affairs, and one cannot be guided by personal feelings and relationships in it." This is evident from the letters of Nicholas II to his "dearest grandmother." In May 1895, Queen Victoria complained to him about the inadmissible, in her opinion, tone of some Russian newspapers regarding England and asked the Tsar to influence them. In response, Nicholas II said "I have to say that I can't forbid people to openly express their opinions in the press. Have I often been upset by the rather unfair opinions about my country in English newspapers? Even in books, who are constantly sending me from London, falsely reporting on our actions in Asia, our domestic policy, etc. I am sure that in these writings there is no more conscious hostility than in the articles mentioned above." So much for the myth of Russian press censorship. That exists only in liberal and communist states. The very fact that Victoria would ask something like this as a matter of course showed what the "free press" really means to the British ruling elites (Lukoyanov, 2008).

The advance of Russia into the Far East and its occupation in 1897 of Port Arthur contributed to the strengthening of England's hostility to Russia. In the fall of 1898, a war broke out between France and England over the French seizure of a small area of Fascoda in English Sudan, on the "White Nile." The British government presented an ultimatum to Paris, demanding they immediately clear the area of its military. On June 28, French Foreign Minister T. Delcasse rejected this ultimatum and a diplomatic crisis erupted. In London, military preparations against France were rapid (Emerson, 1998).

Under these conditions, Emperor Nicholas on October 15, 1898 called on the his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count M. N. Muravyov in Paris. In a conversation with him, President Faure stated that "the real enemy of France is not Germany, but England. England is everywhere the enemy of France in Africa, it is the same enemy in relation to Russia in the Far East. We must be guided by this consciously in our policy."

On December 6(18), 1898, General A.N. Kuropatkin presented to Nicholas a report on measures to put the military in the Turkestan and Amur Districts, the Trans-Caspian Region and the Kwantung Peninsula on alert. Nicholas II approved them by writing a resolution on the report: "Some visible preparations on our part, in my opinion, would not be useless at all. Why is England alone entitled to arm herself so boldly in the midst of universal peace?" Nicholas was ready to join military operations only in the event of an attack by England on France or on Russia. However, the Tsar believed that "the bold behavior of England would not last long." On January 18, 1899, Nicholas told the French Ambassador Montebello: "The situation is still very alarming, but I believe that today England has no desire to start a war" (Emerson, 1998).

On July 2, 1900, in Paris, at a meeting of the French and Russian high commands, an important amendment was made to the Russian-French military convention of 1893. The obligations of Russia and France in the event of war with the Triple Alliance were extended to England. True, in this case the obligations did not spread automatically, as against Germany, but only on condition that both governments would make a special decision "on mutual assistance in a possible war with England" (Lunev 2008).

In 1900, Nicholas supported the South African (Boer) states against England. In a letter to

Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, Nicholas II admitted that “I sincerely wish the Boers even greater successes than they have so far.” Addressing his sister, Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna, the Emperor noted that he cannot but express his “joy over the news just confirmed” that “during General White’s attack there were two British battalions and a mountain battery captured by the Boers!”

Meanwhile, from March to June 1900, a turning point in favor of Great Britain took place in the Boer War. The British invaders unleashed bloody terror against the Boer civilian population, carrying out the scorched earth tactics in South Africa. For the first time in history, they created concentration camps that contained civilians, hostages – including women and children – suspected of assisting Boer partisans (Romanov, 1994).

The barbaric conduct of the war by the British could not leave Nicholas indifferent. The Tsar instructed the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count V.N. Lamsdorf, to prepare his thoughts on the possible diplomatic counteraction of the British aggression. In the summer of 1901, Lamsdorf appealed to Europeans and argued that “only the joint representation of the continental powers with Russia in favor of the Boers could persuade England to stop the merciless reprisal against a completely ruined enemy.”

On June 28(July 11) 1901, Lamsdorf informed the Ambassador in Paris, Prince Urusov, that the Emperor was convinced of the need for an appeal by the Powers to Great Britain in order to provide “possible assistance to alleviate the plight of the Republic of South Africa.” Russia was not supported by any European state. The war with the Boers was coming to an end and the winner was obvious. According to European concepts, it was not worth wasting time, especially since in 1902 the Boer states recognized the British protectorate over themselves.

The most profound contradictions between Russia and Great Britain were revealed in the Far East. March 25(April 6) 1895, Minister of Foreign Affairs A. B. Lobanov-Rostovsky reported to Nicholas: “Our main and most dangerous opponent in Asia is undoubtedly England. The feelings of hostility and envy with which she looks at every step we take forward in the Far East are beyond doubt. As soon as any Asian difficulties arose, the friends of England were always our enemies and vice versa.”

On January 8(21) 1901, Queen Victoria died. The queen saw the growing danger of Germany who she thought was led by an unpredictable and malicious emperor. The new king, Edward VII, was a political Russophobe, something that had already become normal in England. In turn, Nicholas considered Edward “the most dangerous and deceitful schemer in the world.” Under the new king, Great Britain embarked on a reconciliation with France and an even greater confrontation with Russia, attaching special importance to new diplomatic combinations due to “historical necessity” (Lunev 2008). Recall that being in an alliance with a country doesn't make them allies.

After the plans of the British government to draw closer to Germany failed, it decided to abandon the policy of isolation. England sought to find a European ally that could provide her support in the event of a colonial or other conflict. France was a contender (as they had been in Crimea), and in 1904 they entered into an agreement on the division of spheres of influence, which went down in history as the Entente (Emerson, 1998).

Having achieved the neutralization of France and Germany, England could now begin to oust Russia from the Far East. London was well aware of the importance of the Chinese, Korean and Japanese markets. Russian diplomacy was increasingly active in Manchuria and China. Russian investment in the Chinese economy was constantly growing. The accelerated construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway promised in the near future the possibility of a quick

transfer of Russian goods to the Far East, as well as military equipment and soldiers. After Russia acquired Port Arthur, the danger of the Trans-Siberian Railway for England became even more obvious. In March 1899, Nicholas II told Montebello: "I am convinced that England will show much less arrogance everywhere when our railway is built up to Port Arthur, and when we connect it to the Trans-Caspian highway" (Lunev 2008).

In 1902, a military alliance was concluded between Japan and England directed against Russia. If Russia tried to counter Japanese aggression in Korea, then this could be addressed under this treaty. The desire to stop the advance of Russia in the Far East forced London to join forces with the United States. American President Teddy Roosevelt warned France and Germany: "In the case of an anti-Japanese combination in alliance with Russia, I will immediately side with Japan and will not stop in the future on anything that would be necessary in its interests."

The Russian financial agent in London, a railway engineer MV Rutkovsky, who, on instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visited the United States in 1907, wrote that the main reason for their support for Japan and England in 1904 was Washington's desire to capture "new territories on the Asian continent, which could serve as an excellent military base in future military operations." It was this desire that turned "the eyes of the United States to the Pacific Ocean and to the states washed by it" (Sergeev 1998).

China was in an advanced state of collapse. The Qing, or Manchu, Dynasty had been wracked by western-financed rebellions, wars and the buildup of Japan. After ruling Asia for 2,000 years, China was now entering a period of violent upheaval. Somehow, one of the most advanced civilizations in the world was suddenly turned into a "feudal tyranny." One of the most powerful scientific and literary countries in world history was now a "backwards satrap" in the eyes of the English press and therefore, the world. Russia sought to buttress Chinese power while the west was pleased with the power vacuum it created (Lunev 2008).

Had their initial isolation from western influence continued, it might have saved them, but "free trade" and liberal ideology more generally forced the country open and drugs from British India poured into China under its ideological slogans. A new form of conquest, one Machiavelli had never even dreamed of, was being created. The Opium Wars made English and Jewish traders even wealthier while destroying their adversary from within. Chinese revolutionaries were almost all educated in the west. Modern liberalism and internationalist economic theory was born during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and China's decline is essential to understanding Britain's policy in the area (Lukoyanov, 2008).

The Russo-Japanese War was largely a result of the opposition of a number of states (Japan, England, the USA) to the Russian and Chinese desire to implement a Great Asia Program. England and the United States openly welcomed the Japanese attack on Russia. The British *Daily Mail* wrote in the winter of 1904: "Russia must be destroyed. This heavy mastodon, ready to swallow all of Asia, has gone too far."

England made it clear that it was inclined to provide Japan not only financial assistance, but also military assistance. Irish corps officers received orders to immediately leave for India, fleet reservists were to report their addresses to the London Admiralty, and the British company Gibbs purchased Chilean and Argentinean armored ships for the Japanese government. London believed that it would be beneficial to end the war in the Far East when Japan's successes were not too significant, or, conversely, until Russia defeated the Japanese army (Lunev 2008).

On March 25 (April 8) 1904 in Copenhagen, King Edward VII in an interview with the Russian ambassador said: "The conclusion of the Anglo-French agreement gives me hope to achieve the same methods, but the great results, the conclusion of a similar agreement with

Russia, whose opinion is always was and continues to be the object of my sincere desires.”

Nicholas correctly assessed this statement of the king as an attempt to impose English mediation on Russia in concluding peace with Japan. In his letter to Edward VII, the Tsar recalled that Russia did not intervene in the Boer War. The king was very unhappy with this comparison, believing that England was only interested in the Transvaal, while a number of states were interested in the Far East (Nish 1985). In his letter to Nicholas II, the English king argued that England would remain neutral, but emphasized that Britain would protect Russian interests in Manchuria if Russia were to pull out of Korean region. The initiative of the English king did not lead to any results. Both sides, Russia and England, recognized the impossibility of negotiating any cooperation during the war.

On the night of October 8(21) to October 9(22) 1904, in the North Sea, not far from the English port of Gull, ships of the II Russian squadron were attacked by destroyers, whose affiliation could not be established, as they sailed with lanterns in heavy fog. These destroyers deliberately surrounded themselves with fishing boats. When the squadron returned fire on the destroyers, the civilian craft were in the way and several were hit. Upon the discovery of these civilian boats, Vice Admiral ZP Rozhdestvensky ordered the guns not to be fired. It was a dirty trick.

The visible result of the incident, which the whole world soon learned about, was two dead English fishermen, six wounded and a sunken fishing trawler. Thus, the Japanese and British destroyers, using heavy fog, without identification, came under the cover of the fishing fleet in close proximity to the Russian squadron and provoked its ships to open fire – then disappeared. The press never asked why Russians would fire on fishermen to begin with.

On October 10(23), the British Reuters news agency reported on an “attack by a Russian squadron on English fishermen,” and the number of those killed was doubled, then tripled. The event caused an outburst of indignation in English public opinion, but little serious questioning. The press, as always, showed its true colors. “An attack on fishermen,” wrote the English historian RM Cannegton, “was perceived as an attempt on the status and dignity of England, mistress of the seas and great power.” The press of the whole world started talking about the almost inevitable war between Russia and England. Nicholas noted on this occasion: “What abominations, in the sense of lies and slander, are spread by English newspapers about Russia!”

Nicholas II sent a telegram to the English king Edward VII with words of regret and condolences. The same was done orally by the ambassador in London, Earl Benckendorf. Nevertheless, the Tsar abstained from an official assessment until receiving information from Rozhdestvensky. When on October 14(27) this information was received, it turned out that the picture of events was fundamentally different. Nicholas II was sure that on the part of England this was a deliberate provocation in favor of Japan. Meanwhile, calls for war with Russia were in full swing in the English parliament. “War can be a matter of several hours,” The *Times* wrote, “England has only one way left.” Few people even know about this today.

These were not empty words. Back in mid-1904, the English General Staff developed plans for an attack on Russia. They included the conduct of hostilities in the Baltic and Central Asia. These plans became known to Russian intelligence. The Russian Foreign Ministry also knew that they were preparing to land an English landing on the Caucasian coast of Russia. In a conversation with M. Bompard on November 19(December 2) 1904, Nicholas II remarked: “We need to expect everything from England, I am also preparing for everything” (Sergeev 1998).

The “Gull Incident” in the North Sea almost led to a Anglo-Russian war. Under these conditions, Nicholas used the proposal of Wilhelm II to conclude a Russian-German union treaty to put political pressure on France, forcing her to give London an ultimatum demanding no aggression against Russia. London hastened to agree to the Russian proposal to transfer the Gull Incident to the resolution of the international convention and refused all attempts to detain the Russian squadron of Rozhdestvensky.

The prospect of a Russo-German alliance greatly alarmed Great Britain, in which anti-German sentiments were gaining strength in the press, and the conviction that it was necessary to join the Russo-French alliance was gaining strength. In addition, England was also alarmed by the prospect of Japan growing more powerful, which meant that she should have stopped or significantly reduced aid to them (Papastratigakis 2011).

The Russian-English rapprochement, which began immediately after the Algeciras Conference and ended with the agreement of 1907, was accepted to be perceived as Russia's accession to the Entente, that is, the creation of a military alliance of England, Russia and France against Germany, but, as NV Grekov correctly observes, “Tsarist diplomacy perceived this agreement only as an element of the policy of non-alignment and maneuvering between the two blocs of powers.” Defining the policy of Emperor Nicholas of this period, Grekov emphasizes that “the tactical tactics of Petersburg unnerved both London and Berlin. Both groups sought to attract Russia to their side, as it still possessed the largest army in the world. Petersburg, relying on the support of either Berlin or London, tried to strengthen its external security.” Russia's foreign policy stability demanded that the Treaty with William II be balanced by agreements with London (Papastratigakis 2011).

At the same time, neither Petersburg nor London, which until recently were potential opponents, did in any way seek to conclude a military agreement with each other. The Anglo-Russian convention of 1907 was caused by the desire of both states to differentiate the sphere of influence in Asia. The reason for the recognition of the need to seek mutual compromises was the Reich's stubborn desire to penetrate into the geopolitical regions of exceptional interest to both empires. Agreements with England on the delimitation of spheres of influence removed the possibility of an Anglo-Russian war from the agenda and paved the way for cooperation between the two countries. In the presence of an allied treaty with France, a real opposition to the aggressive Triple Alliance arose. However, at the same time, Nicholas not only did not want the agreement with London to take the form of a military alliance against Germany, but also tried in every possible way to achieve the same agreements with Berlin. After each agreement with England, the Tsar proposed an equivalent agreement with Germany (Nish 1985).

The historical context of the era is, outside of Europe, based around the rapid development of Japan. In such conditions, China and Korea, her closest and weakest neighbors, obviously became the object of Japanese expansion. In 1894, the Sino-Japanese War began, and the 1895 treaty gave Japan an indemnity, Taiwan, the Penghu archipelago and the Liaodong Peninsula (located today just to the west of northern North Korea and not too far from Peking, on the Yellow Sea). This is also where Port Arthur was located (Nish 1985).

The Great Powers closely followed these events, and in the spring of 1895 a special meeting was held at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs dedicated to the consequences of the war. The discussion was attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Lobanov-Rostovsky, the chief of the fleet and maritime departments, Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich, Minister of War, Wannowski, Witte and others. Lobanov-Rostovsky then bluntly said that the war was directed

not so much against China as against Russia. Having occupied southern Manchuria, he said, the Japanese will not stop there, but will undoubtedly develop their colonization further (Podalko, 2016).

Soon, Germany, Russia and France forced Japan to abandon the Liaodong Peninsula. In 1897, Germany occupied the Chinese port of Qingdao, and deployed its East Asian naval squadron there. The British, who leased Wei Hai Wei from China in 1898, turned it into a major naval base. Hong Kong by that time was for 50 years a possession of Great Britain. While Russian policy was condemned, neither the British nor the Germans were accused of adventurous actions while doing the same thing (Sergeev 1998).

Japan received far less from the Chinese war than she expected given Great Power competition. “The plans for dominating most of Asia, plans to take the fates of 450 million people into their own hands, create powerful armies and repulse Europe excite the mass of the Japanese,” wrote Adjutant General Kuropatkin, head of the Russian Foreign Ministry in 1902.

Petersburg's plans clashed with Tokyo's, and the two powers entered into long and difficult negotiations. Japan, among other things, demanded that Russia recognize her own predominant interests in Korea, while agreeing to recognize the interests of Russia in Manchuria, but only with regard to railways. St. Petersburg, yielding on the Korean question, sought to not use any part of the Korean territory for strategic purposes, and to consider everything north of the 39<sup>th</sup> parallel a neutral strip into which none of the contracting parties should send troops. This is where Japan held firm, worrying Russia. As the negotiations progressed, the tone of the Japanese became increasingly aggressive. It became clear that Tokyo was on a war footing and were looking for a pretext. In the end, Japan interrupted negotiations and, without declaring war, attacked the Russian squadron at Port Arthur (Papastratigakis 2011).

More than a century has passed since then, but even now, Russia is accused of aggressive actions, irresponsibility, adventurism, and all the rest. What is the reason for such a strange situation? To answer this question, we must remember that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a number of organizations did everything possible to undermine and overthrow Russian state power. Russophobia had reached an insane level. During the Russo-Japanese War in Russia, strikes at military factories were organized, terrorists attacked city governors, officers, killing the son of Alexander II, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, Count Shuvalov, the battleship *Potemkin* rebelled and the Polish city of Lodz revolted. All of this was to ensure a Russian defeat.

The Soviets later would popularize this as state doctrine. For 90 years, the myth of “the defeat of Russia and the Russian army” in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 continues, no differently than the myth about Crimea. Its appearance is explained by purely political considerations: the desire to prove the failure of the autocracy while protecting Russia from an external threat (Sergeev 1998).

The myth of the “unprecedented and shameful defeat of the Russian army and navy” was created and supported by all opposition parties and their press organs, from the parties of the major bourgeoisie (Cadets and Octoberists) to the socialist parties (Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks) all agreed, as usual.

The fate of the war was decided on the land battles of the Manchurian front. The course of the war at sea couldn't change this, since Japan had a predominance at sea even before the start of the war in Asia. This was still foreign territory to Russia, being so far from the capital. Japan managed to create, thanks to England and the USA, a powerful fleet that surpassed Russian naval forces in the Far East in the number of ships, type of armor, firepower and speed.

The weakness of the Russian fleet in the Pacific made it possible for the Japanese armies to land without hindrance. At Port Arthur, the fleet was locked up and sea dominance was achieved by the Japanese without much work. The naval battles of July 28-August 1, 1904, and the Tsushima battle could not affect the outcome of the struggle on the Manchurian front (Pavlov 2004).

Japan started the war due to Russia's unpreparedness in the Far East. The military-political leadership of Russia did not notice the growth of Japanese arms and failed to appreciate the Japanese transformation by 1904 into a powerful military and naval power. Few states did. Japanese preparation for the war was intense while Russia never saw it coming. By this time, the Japanese army numbered over 150,000, having increased its forces over the previous decade by 250 percent, and as the war developed, army could reach 350,000 well-supplied men (Warner, 1974).

Russian military leadership considered the Far Eastern theater secondary. Plans for military and naval construction there were to be completed only by the middle of 1905 at best. At the beginning of the war, the unpreparedness of the newest Russian battleships being built in the Baltic, the extreme insufficiency of the fortifications of Port Arthur fortress, the low carrying capacity of the Siberian Railway and the lack of available infantry in the Far East all harmed the war effort, a war that Japan was more than ready for. The Russian army amounted to fewer than 100,000 men. Of the 98,000 men at the beginning of the war in Port Arthur, 20,000 were in Manchuria and 19,000 elsewhere. Had Russia saw the war coming, it would have been different.

The Japanese war plan was based on Russia's relative weakness in the Far East. Japan relied on its fleet superiority very close to its home base, making it possible at the beginning of the war to damage the Russian flotilla at Port Arthur in order to gain supremacy at sea and thereby ensure the unhindered transfer of troops to the Asian mainland. Subsequently, the Japanese plan sought the capture, encirclement and destruction of the Russian army, but speed and surprise were paramount. The destruction of Russian ground forces at a cost that didn't impede their further aggressive expansion in East Asia was the ultimate goal of the war. If this wasn't done, then the war would be a failure by Japanese standards. Its for this reason that it cannot be called a "victory" for Japan.

The war was decided in three battles: Liaoyang (on the Taizi River), the Shaho River (along the Mukden–Port Arthur spur of the China Far East Railway north of Liaoyang, Manchuria), and Mukden (today called Shenyang, not too far northwest of the North Korean border). All of these are in far northeast China. In none of these battles was the Russian army defeated. The Japanese commander Marshal Oyama was unable to encircle the Russian troops, and the Japanese army suffered losses too large relative to Japan's relatively small population (Warner, 1974).

The Battle of Liaoyang took place in August 1904. By this time, the Russian army was concentrated in southern Manchuria under the command of General A.N. Kuropatkin and eventually reached a total of 140,000 men. They were attacked by three separate Japanese armies under the command of Marshal I. Oyama with a total number of 125,000 men. The Japanese attempt to encircle the Russian army or even to break through their positions failed over 12 days with great losses to Japanese infantry. However, Kuropatkin, exaggerating the strength of the Japanese and fearing to lose communication with the rear, ordered the troops to move north to Mukden. Kuropatkin's order for the general withdrawal of the Russian army was issued two hours ahead of the Japanese order to withdraw. Meanwhile, decisive action by the Russian army could have forced a total Japanese catastrophe. In other words, had the Russians held out for another few hours, they would've seen a Japanese retreat and could claim victory.



Russian troops withdrew in perfect order. The Japanese, having suffered huge losses, didn't pursue them. The Japanese failed entirely. The Japanese won only by occupying the city of Liaoyang, but this achievement didn't justify the sacrifices that they suffered in the battle. It was a symbolic victory. The balance of power didn't change. After the battle, the Japanese announced further mobilization, straining to replenish its army. Even those previously exempt for military service were called up (Pavlov 2004).

By the beginning of the next battle on the Shaho River, the number of men in the Russian army there reached 210,000 and the Japanese, 170,000. This battle took place in October 1904 and went on for two weeks. The stubborn discipline of both armies unfolded on a front that reached up to 40 miles. The Russian army had 42,000 casualties with the Japanese losing about half that (according to Japanese sources). The battle at Shaho showed that a balance was established between the forces of the parties, and both commanders were not up to the task (Connaughton 1998).

By the beginning of 1905, 300,000 Russian soldiers were concentrated in Manchuria. The Siberian road saw 14 pairs of trains per day instead of four at the beginning of the war. At the same time, Russia felt no economic and financial difficulties in connection with the war. Russia's loan, necessary to partially cover military expenses, was taken out at 5-6 percent, while Japan, despite all its successes, had to pay over 7-8 percent despite Jewish and British backing. Repayment and the odds of victory were more important than immediate political concerns. Russia was able to win a war of attrition the Japanese couldn't. Japan, which had previously used up all its forces, was slightly ahead. By the summer of 1905, this quickly changed (Warner, 1974).

The last battle of the war, Mukden, took place in February of 1905 with a front that stretched almost 125 miles and lasted almost a month. The Russian army numbered 330,000, while the Japanese army mustered 270,000, which was their absolute maximum possible at the time. The Japanese actually had numeric superiority because about 25 percent of the Russian forces were allocated for construction and other external purposes. In some cases, the combat strength of the army didn't exceed 58 percent of the total. In the Japanese army, such formations were organized in advance and support personnel were not included in the combat structure of the army. In addition, the decline in Japan's forces during the battle were immediately replenished from special reserves, which focused on the theater of war, but that was the furthest extent of Japan's demographic possibility at the time.

The Battle of Mukden was characterized by indecisive offensive and defensive operations by the Russian army and vigorous offensive operations of the Japanese, yet the Japanese failed to accomplish their objectives. After the Japanese made a deep cut into the right flank of the Russian army and, in addition, broke through their center, Kuropatkin ordered the army to begin a general withdrawal to the north, having lost faith in victory. Again, it came at a monstrous cost for Japan.

In total, the Japanese at Mukden were more successful here, although Russian losses didn't far exceed the Japanese. The total losses of Russians killed, wounded and captured are about 89,000, while the Japanese lost 71,000. At the same time, there are 59,000 killed or wounded in the Russian army against 70,000 Japanese. Mukden was not decisive and didn't decide the fate of the war. The Japanese failed to encircle and destroy the Russian troops near Mukden. Due to the lack of fresh forces and the exhaustion of the troops, the Japanese were unable to pursue the retreating Russian armies (Pavlov 2004).

Afterwards, the Russians remained a formidable fighting force, but the Japanese were

exhausted. The Russian army emerged from the battle with heavy losses, but, replenished and rested, was ready to begin again. The Japanese were totally exhausted.

The myth of Mukden as an “unprecedented and shameful defeat” can be explained by political considerations, ie, the desire to prove the worthlessness of the Russian government. Marshal Oyama was never able to defeat the Russian army. The exhaustion of the Japanese after the battle of Mukden was so great that for six months from its end to the conclusion of peace, the Japanese did not undertake any major operations.

Afterwards, the Japanese forces began to disintegrate. The initial 425,000 Japanese (that is, in that part of Asia, not in the battle) were insufficient. Summoning almost a million men to cover the entire area, Japan was stressed to the breaking point. It instituted a strict draft, bringing up the youth and much older men. The moral strength of the Japanese was also exhausted. By the end of the war, they no longer showed its initial fanaticism and public faith in the state was strained (Jukes 2002).

If in March 1905 the Russian army in Manchuria numbered 364,000, but by August, it was 446,000 to 338,000 Japanese. Japan was drawing from forces intended for the defense of the home islands. The total strength of the Russian army in Manchuria amounted to 788,000. The Russians were anything but defeated. Russia fixed all supply problems and communications was brought to proper speed.

The war cost Russia about two billion rubles, Japan – almost the same – about two billion rubles equivalence, but the tax burden due to military spending increased in Japan by 85 percent, while in Russia it went up by only five percent. The burden of these costs was different in other ways. If for Japan, whose GDP was then one third of Russia's, these expenses were excessively high, as evidenced by a fourfold increase in their public debt, from 600 million yen to 2.4 billion, then for Russia it was not such a huge loss (Jukes 2002).

The number of victims was approximately the same. Russia lost 400,000 thousand men, of which 50,000 were killed. Japanese losses killed and died from wounds amounted to 135,000 with 554,000 wounded. Total losses of Russia amounted to 400,000. Japan was so exhausted by June 1905 that only the conclusion of peace saved her from collapse or total defeat in the fight against Russia.

The Japanese government has repeatedly tried to begin peace negotiations with Russia. Due to the depletion of its resources, Japan was afraid of the resumption of hostilities and went to the signing of a peace treaty on August 23, 1905. Russia was forced to conclude peace by the revolutionary movement that was expanding in the country. Russia remained a great Asian power. For 15 years after the end of this war, Japan, exhausted by the struggle to a much greater extent than Russia, did not embark on new conquests (Pavlov 2004).

The Japanese commander of the siege of Port Arthur, Gen. Maresuke Nogi, committed suicide because of his “victory.” He was ashamed to death for his failed siege that did untold damage to his forces. The emperor forbade him to make *seppuku* (*hara-kiri*) during his lifetime, but after his death, he was free to kill himself.

On January 14, 1906, reading a report to the emperor, he sat breathlessly on the floor and cried. He begged the emperor to allow him to die by making *seppuku*, but the emperor paused to ponder the question, and then he answered that very few heard and told about it only after the death of Nogi: “I perfectly understand the feelings that make you make *seppuka* and thereby apologize, but now is not

the time to die. If you insist on committing suicide, let it happen after I leave this world.”

Then he stated: “I have no excuse to offer to my sovereign and to my countrymen for this unscientific, unstrategic combat using [only] brute force. . .” Meanwhile, the siege of Port Arthur was a striking, gagging failure and defeat for the Japanese. As a result, the garrison of the fortress not only fulfilled its task, but repeatedly exceeded it, and achieved tremendous success.

Japan had one single obvious advantage over Russia: its geographical position. Japan is close to the theater of operations, and the main forces of Russia were very far away from their home base, but the longer the war dragged on, the greater the balance of power changed in Russia's favor. For Japan, literally every day and every soldier was counted, because the losses should not be calculated by absolute value, but by a fraction of the mobilization potential and in such conditions (Jukes 2002).

On August 19, 1904, the first assault on the city began. The Japanese suffered heavy losses, but Port Arthur did not fall. They had to abandon the idea of capturing the city by storm, but keep Port Arthur under siege and liberate significant forces against the Russian armies in Manchuria. The Port Arthur garrison was in a better position than the enemy, but if the defenders made an attempt to break through, they would have to leave the fortress. In this case, the Russians would lose their advantage, and now they themselves would have fallen into the position of attacking enemy fortifications. At the same time, it was clear that the blocked city is doomed to weaken, and if there are no reinforcements, food will gradually run out while disease would set in. That is, the Japanese could starve out the city with little blood, but they didn't do this.

After the defeat of the first assault, the Japanese received reinforcements and began to prepare for the second. On September 19, the Japanese again went on the attack, again suffered serious losses and again didn't achieve anything. The situation for the Japanese army was gradually becoming more and more difficult. Japanese military analysts were mistaken in that the potential of the Trans-Siberian Railway was significantly greater than they estimated. The Russian army grew stronger and faster than expected and on October 5, the offensive of Kuropatkin by the Shaho River began. The Japanese at this time were intensely preparing for the next assault, with large-scale sapper work underway, while the shelling of the city never stopped. Meanwhile, the battle at the Shaho ended only on October 18 without a clear winner.

On October 30, after a three-day artillery bombardment, the Japanese attacked for the third time with the same sad result. In November, the Japanese received another set of reinforcements, and at the end of the month the fourth assault took place, this time from two sides, but Port Arthur resisted again. The Japanese continued shelling, destroyed a significant part of the important fortifications, and then again attacked the city for a fifth time, which also failed. So how was Port Arthur a defeat? Because the press said it was. It was already clear from here that Gen. Nogi fought foolishly and had every reason to be shameful, and if we look at the price his “victory” was achieved, then it becomes clear why he committed suicide (Pavlov 2004).

The Russian “surrender” at Port Arthur was considered a defeat in Japan. The blockade was successful, not the military operation. the Russians invented the mortar at that battle, and the Japanese never saw such a thing before. Here's the most important passage from the Shishov book:

The Japanese lost about 1000 men in the battle for Fort 3 but failed to capture it.

Camp Commandant Captain Bulgakov began to prepare a counterattack, but unexpectedly an order came from Lieutenant General A.M. Stessel to evacuate. . . With the fall both 2 and 3, the Japanese siege army managed to break into the fortifications, but even then, the Fort was able to hold on. There were still defenders and the military supplies were not exhausted. Most importantly, the courage of the defenders didn't wilt, which the enemy realized. A defense council was convened to discuss the issue. Of the 22 participants, 19 wanted to continue the defense. Only Colonel V.A. Reis, the chief of staff of the Kwantung area, stated that further fighting was pointless and negotiations with the Japanese were needed to surrender (Shishov, 2008).

Shishov describes how the high command was getting false information about the condition of the fort. They were ordered to evacuate while winning. The negotiations went well and the defenders were treated with honor. Several of the Russian high command were put on trial later for their early surrender of a fortress that was winning the fight and the Japanese said as much. Of all people, even Leo Tolstoy wrote: "The fall of Port Arthur pained me. . . I myself was a military man. In our time, this would never happen. To die for the people, but not to surrender. . . In my day, it would be considered a national shame and it would seem impossible to surrender the fortress, having reserves and a 40,000-strong army."

Shishov continues,

The importance of the defense of the Port Arthu during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 - 1905 is immense. The fortress was besieged by a massive ground force and almost the entire imperial [Japanese] fleet; during the siege, a huge amount of ammunition was spent. The Japanese lost a total of more than 110,000 men and almost 10,000 officers and 15 warships during the siege of Port Arthur. Another 16 ships received serious combat damage (Shishov, 2008).

In most respects, this needs to be considered a victory. Even if it's seen as a defeat, it was hardly a dishonorable one. The Russian press and, even worse, the press in Europe made it into a national humiliation that convinced many Russians who weren't there.

Many myths surround this war, but one of the more obnoxious is the myth is that the Russian government in every way provoked Japan, because she needed a "small victorious war" to distract from a "failing" economy. This is projection at its most absurd. The myth is based on the words allegedly spoken in January 1904 by the Minister of the Interior Vyacheslav Plehve: "In order to keep the revolution [at bay], we need a small victorious war" (cf for example Walder 1974). Plehve, by the way, probably borrowed this phrase from US Secretary of State John Hay, which proponents of this myth prefer not to recall, but he's the actual source of the story. He said this about Russia, not Plehve. He merely reported Hay's words (Ostaltsev 1997).

Not only did the Russian government try to end disagreements through negotiations, even making concessions in Korea, but the army and navy were not ready for war. The Japanese attacked at night, before the declaration of war, which was unexpected at the time. In St. Petersburg, many did not immediately believe the news. The situation was complicated by the fact that the number of troops in Manchuria shortly before this had been reduced, with the goal of "not provoking a war." So the famed story is a myth.

It is absolutely obvious that before the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway, Russia was not ready for war. The words of Minister Plehve have been misinterpreted. Russia simply could not stand the big and unwinnable war because of the revolutionary danger. That is exactly what happened as a result: the beginning of the revolution led to the need to quickly conclude peace on very unfavorable conditions (Shishov, 2008).

The British and the US strongly encouraged Japan to start a war. Loans were issued, military supplies were sent and even ships were provided. Moreover, Nicholas II himself was against this war. On March 26, 1903, a meeting was held by the insistence of the Emperor, attended by Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich, Witte, Plehve, Lamsdorf and General Alexei Kuropatkin. The latter writes that Nicholas II agreed “that one should avoid an argument for a quarrel with Japan, that war with her is completely undesirable.”

Also, some of his detractors often claim that the blame for the defeat in the war lies personally with Nicholas II. However, it should be noted that the Emperor at that time was not the Supreme Commander-in-Chief and was not in the area of the theater of war. Thus, many mistakes and failures during the war occurred solely due to the stupidity or inexperience of the local commanders. In addition, in January 1905, at the very height of the war, the revolution of 1905-1907 began, which stopped military factories throughout the country, disrupting the supply of weapons, and seriously distracted the authorities from conducting hostilities with Japan, and the main event that made Russia look for the strike of the railroad workers at the wrong moment became the world, which made the continuation of hostilities almost impossible (Shishov 2008).

During the war the Japanese made the most extensive use of misinformation and this contradicts Russian data received from the commanders of cruisers of neutral countries. The data of the neutral parties has not yet been published. Of particular suspicion is the fact that the number of shells fired by the Japanese, according to their data, is even less than that of the single ship the Russian *Varyag*, despite the fact that the Japanese had many more ships and thus, more barrels. This indicates a clear attempt to manipulate the data in order to overestimate the percentage of hits, since the ships of that time – having primitive rangefinders – were forced to determine the distance to the enemy in battle by the constant shooting method, so the guns of each of the cruisers participating in the battle could not make significant interruptions in shooting (Kowner 2007).

It should be added that the Japanese attack on Russian ships in the neutral port, as well as the landing there before the declaration of war, was a violation of international law, but under the influence of the British Empire and the United States, who stood behind “small but proud” Japan got away with it.

Another story is that the war was lost due to the technological backwardness of Russia, but Japan was able to successfully modernize her economy. The myth sometimes emerges even in the writings of relatively serious researchers who don't have a technical education, and is based solely on later Japanese and British propaganda. In fact, the bulk of the Japanese fleet and a significant number of land weapons were imported. It's enough to say that Japan didn't have a single armored cruiser by the start of the war.

This is not to say that Russian naval equipment was the very best in the world, but in general it was quite at the world level, and some samples, for example, reconnaissance cruisers of the Pearl type, were the best in the world in their class. It is also worth mentioning that Russia occupied the third place in the world in terms of fleet size. Another concern is that in naval battles the Japanese almost always had an overwhelming numerical advantage, which determined their results. In addition, the range of communications occupies an important place as its easier

and cheaper to fight and coordinate efforts at your own shores (Warner, 1974).

That Russia surrendered unconditionally is yet another myth. It is widely believed that Russia, having signed the peace in Portsmouth, ceded to Japan everything that it required, and as a result, Japan came out the absolute winner. However, a more detailed analysis leads to a different conclusion. On May 24, 1905, a meeting was held in Tsarskoye Selo on the martial law of Russia and Japan.

The general opinion of military dignitaries at the time was that Russia was ready to wage a defensive war against Japan, but Japan was straining as the war came to an end. At the same time, Russia was not able to continue the war due to internal unrest. It was decided to accept Japanese peace terms. If Japan were to put forward conditions unacceptable to Russia, then Russia will continue the war until victory. On June 29, Nicholas II appointed Sergey Witte the chief plenipotentiary for negotiating with Japan. At the same time, the emperor said that he “sincerely wants the negotiations to come to a peaceful solution, but only he cannot allow at least one penny of indemnity, nor the cession of one inch of land” (Kowner 2007).

At the talks, Russia agreed to end its influence on Korea and Manchuria if and only if Japan would do the same. Russia flatly refused to surrender the Sakhalin islands, to reimburse military expenses, transfer its remaining fleet to Japan or limit its fleet in the Far East. Russia agreed to pay the cost of maintaining Russian prisoners, to grant Japanese citizens the right to unlimited fishing along the shores of the Japan, Okhotsk and Bering Seas (except for river bays). Russia agreed to transfer the railway between Harbin and Port Arthur to Japan, as well as the rental rights of Port Arthur, Talien and the surrounding areas. Also, Russia agreed to limit the use of the Trans-Manchurian railway (Ostaltsev 1997).

As a result, after lengthy and difficult negotiations, Japan nevertheless agreed to many of Russia's demands. What was previously proposed by Japan and, as a result, was fully included in the peace treaty came to this:

1. Russia will cease to influence Korea;
2. Russia will leave Manchuria, stop its influence in this region, but, at the request of Russia, Japan also pledges to withdraw its troops too;
3. Rentals of Port Arthur, Talien and the adjacent territories of China are transferred to Japan;
4. Russia transferred the railway between Harbin and Port Arthur;
5. Only the few southern Sakhalin islands were to be transferred to Japan;
6. Russia's use of the Trans-Manchurian railway Russia would only be for commercial and industrial purposes;
7. Granting Japan fishing rights along the shores of Russian possessions in the seas of Japan, Okhotsk and Bering; and
8. Reimbursement of the costs of caring for Russian prisoners (Ostaltsev 1997).

What is not included in the treaty:

1. Reimbursement by Russia of military expenses of Japan;
2. Transfer of the remaining fleet of Japan;
3. The limitation of the Russian fleet in the seas of the Far East.

The final treaty is significantly different from the original Japanese plan. Russia lost only territorial acquisitions, but did not reimburse Japan's military expenses, which she badly needed, dependent as she was on foreign loans.

Whereas the Japanese losses amounted to 689,000 men, of whom 86,000 were killed, but in terms of population, the numbers differ sharply. In 1913, the population of Japan was 55 million people, while Russia in 1905 had a population of 144 million (without Finland). Russia could calmly continue the war if it were not for the outbreak of the revolution and, most importantly, the strike of the railway workers (Ostaltsev 1997).

As for the concession to southern Sakhalin, it should be borne in mind that before the Russo-Japanese war, Japan already had special economic activity rights on Sakhalin, similar to Russia's current rights on Svalbard. In this regard, it actually had an exchange: southern Sakhalin was transferred to Japan, but at the same time Russia established full sovereignty over the northern part of the island. The exchange was, of course, in favor of Japan, but this was not a direct concession to the territory. After a rather unfavorable peace for Japan, unrest began in its cities (Kowner 2007). S. Oldenburg writes:

Not such a world was awaited by the Japanese masses, delighted with news of victories. When the terms of the treaty were published, violent unrest erupted in Japan; cities were covered with mourning flags; barricades were erected on the streets, burning the building of the official newspaper Kokumin; but when it came to ratification in parliament, the protests fell silent: "The fact is really characteristic," the Japanese commander-in-chief Oyama said, defending the treaty, "that after a whole year, victoriously ending for us with Mukden, the Japanese army in for five and a half months did not dare to go on the offensive!"

There is only one conclusion: Russia lost the war (or at least didn't win it) solely due to domestic concerns, having made peace on fairly honorable terms. At the same time, Japan, although it acquired the lease rights of the Liaodong Peninsula, southern Sakhalin and the southern branch of the CER, also failed to achieve many of its main goals in the war. Among these were, reimbursement of military expenses, limitation of the Russian fleet in the Far East and many others. Nevertheless, although the "loss" for Russia was not too substantial, the Eastern program was curtailed for many years but the problems identified in the army resulted in the military reforms of 1905-1912. It was far from a defeat, but, given many external and internal factors, wasn't entirely a victory either.

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