

# The Final Nail: The Russians in 1916

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*Abstract: The events of 1916 broke Tsarist Russia, putting it on an unavoidable path to revolution, but it was not the revolutionaries that set the empire on that path. Instead, the combination of a small-scale defeat at Lake Narotch, the success of the Brusilov Offensive, the addition of Romania as an ally, and economic changes fundamentally altered Russia's socio-economic foundation. This negative shift provided the fertile ground the revolutionaries needed to expand beyond being manageable annoyances. As a direct result of 1916's wartime events, Russia's longstanding radical sentiment finally began to boil over into actual revolutions in 1917.*

## Introduction

Winston Churchill once wrote “the very rigidity of the (Russian) system gave it its strength and, once broken, forbade all recovery.”<sup>1</sup> In this respect, 1916 was the decisive year for the Russian Empire as it broke the Tsarist system. World War I's first two years went poorly for Russia, but circumstances shifted in 1916, offering the Russians their best chance for victory; their economy had significantly improved and their enemies believed they had broken the Russian Army. New leaders with fresh ideas emerged to challenge the Central Powers like never before and with victory Russia gained a new ally, Romania. The Russians finally seemed to have reached parity with their enemies and the ability to fully assist the Allied cause.

It was the make-or-break year for Russia. Given such changes in fortune, why did 1916 break both the Russian Army and the Tsarist government? The confluence of changes and events, even positive ones, simply overwhelmed Russia. New stresses—massive military losses, a new ally that further taxed Russia's already strained forces, and economic changes—

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<sup>1</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Unknown War: The Eastern Front* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 376.

fundamentally altered the Russian war effort and put Russia on the unavoidable road to revolution.

### **After 1915**

The disasters of 1915 laid the foundation for Russia's decisive year in the war. Germany's Chief of the General Staff, General Erich von Falkenhayn, believed the Russian Army had been broken to the point that "recovery would hardly be possible."<sup>2</sup> Believing that revolution was imminent, the Germans started moving west, leaving the Austro-Hungarian Army to control most of the Eastern Front. The Austro-Hungarian Army had seemingly improved in the war's second year with successful operations against the Russians, but they remained inferior to German forces. As such, the Russians would focus their attack against them the following summer.<sup>3</sup>

German field marshal Paul von Hindenburg agreed with Falkenhayn's sentiment but remained less confident about Russia's demise as Germany had failed to strike a deathblow. He did believe, however, that Russian losses in the Great Retreat had reduced Russia as a significant threat, but remained cautious. Activity in the Russian rear remained high though it took place away from Russia's best railways, but near locations that Hindenburg also believed were vulnerable points in the German line. One could never underestimate Russia, a fact history repeatedly demonstrated. Still, after the Central Powers' great victories in 1915, there was reason to believe Russia had moved closer to collapse.<sup>4</sup>

While the Gorlice-Tarnow Offensive's effects were significant, they were not decisive. Field Marshal August von Mackensen, for all his success, failed to envelop and crush the retreating Russians. Had the Germans annihilated Russian forces in 1915, the Eastern Front's strategic face would have been

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<sup>2</sup> Erich von Falkenhayn, *General Headquarters 1914-1916 and its Critical Decisions*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1919), 193-94.

<sup>3</sup> Falkenhayn, *General Headquarters*, 193-95, 216-17.

<sup>4</sup> Paul von Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, vol. 1, trans. F. A. Holt (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1921), 184-86.

drastically altered. Industrial era warfare required an enemy's eradication; massive defeats no longer sufficed. Even in light of this, events on the Eastern Front appeared to be moving in the Central Powers' favor and their confidence in victory was high.<sup>5</sup>

Not all World War I leaders felt the way that Germany's leaders did. Churchill believed that Germany's strategic position was worse. In his mind, the Russian Army remained a "first-class" power, one whose manpower reserves and vast territory could negate the advantages the Germans had gained throughout 1915.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the shell crisis, the overall lack of artillery munitions, which hit all countries had subsided, and despite the Great Retreat, the Russian lines held. The Germans failed to gain an actual advantage and rested on their overconfidence in the strategic landscape. It appeared to them as though it would take only a little more persuading to bring Romania into the Central Powers' fold and with it vast amounts of food, fuel, and troops. Romania's entry would further destabilize the Eastern Front, and even possibly force Russian capitulation. Churchill believed that this overconfidence led Falkenhayn to dismiss the Eastern Front and plan an offensive against perhaps the strongest point in the French lines, Verdun. In yet another mistaken decision, Churchill continued, the Germans believed that Austro-Hungarian forces on the Eastern Front were more capable than they really were. As such, Falkenhayn largely placed Austro-Hungarian forces in charge of the front, allowing Germany to transfer divisions to France.<sup>7</sup> This overconfidence set the stage for 1916's battles and afforded the Russians an opportunity to achieve a great and potentially decisive victory.

In terms of materiel, the Russians developed a strong foundation for 1916's campaigns. The shell crisis of 1915 jumpstarted Russia's industry in ways the war had otherwise not. New factories opened and more employees joined the Russian war

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<sup>5</sup> Richard L. DiNardo, *Breakthrough: The Gorlice-Tarnow Campaign, 1915, War, Technology, and History*, ed. Robert Citino (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 134-143.

<sup>6</sup> Churchill, *The Unknown War*, 351-57.

<sup>7</sup> Churchill, *The Unknown War*, 351-57.

effort. Even as conscription forced more men to the front lines, the economy grew 13.7% when compared to a 1913 baseline, and machinery output increased by nearly 146%. Economic historian Peter Gatrell notes that Russian industry's production of shells, artillery, and firearms increased dramatically as did individual worker efficiency. This provided a stark contrast to Russia's early war effort, especially as 1916's production levels of many munitions types increased three and four fold over the course of that year. This meant that the Russian Army no longer faced significant materiel shortages that plagued their earlier operations. The number of frontline troops also increased. Previously, Russia had fewer men on the frontlines than did France, despite having a population nearly four times larger and a significantly longer front. Despite this change, the Tsarist government still had to balance their demands for troops with their precarious relationship with the Russian people. Since a close partnership between the people and the Tsarist government simply did not exist, the government feared that placing too large a burden on the massive peasant population could create enough unrest to threaten the government.<sup>8</sup>

Those who saw the Russian Army firsthand agreed that Russia's war effort improved. Major General Alfred W. F. Knox, a British observer on the Eastern Front, wrote that the Russian military situation going into 1916 improved beyond the expectations of its allies. Not only did ammunition, artillery, and firearm output increase, but soldier morale and the number of reserve troops did as well. The Russian Army stood better prepared than ever before.<sup>9</sup> With Germany's attention turned westward and the improvements in Russia's war-making ability, the Russians held a distinct advantage.

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<sup>8</sup> Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914-1917* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 194-217; Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 120.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Knox, *With the Russian Army, 1914-1917*, ed. Harmon Tupper and Harry W. Nerhood (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1971), 2:421-27.

Even with these improvements, Russia still faced a number of critical problems. Its internal infrastructure, namely its railroad network, strained under the yoke of war. It lacked the capacity to transport both troops to and around the front and Russia's vast resources to factories. Furthermore, Russia's remaining lackluster leaders organized campaigns in areas that its allies believed to be of less strategic importance, such as the Caucasus, rather than areas of greater strategic importance like Galicia. French and British leaders also feared that after Russia's 1915 setbacks that another revolution was brewing, much like how Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War brought about the 1905 Revolution. Russian general Yakov Zhilinski<sup>10</sup> surprised Allied leaders at Chantilly when he stated that Russia eagerly supported a unified Allied offensive in 1916. The plan involved a French and British attack along the Somme with Russian forces attacking somewhere along the Eastern Front. Theoretically, all areas would become vulnerable and subject to breakthrough, paralyzing any effective response. While Zhilinski's bravado sounded reassuring, Russia's internal problems would stifle such plans in 1916. The Russians could not hope to support their operations with a defunct logistics network and its associated problems.<sup>11</sup>

Russian leadership would prove to be another fundamental issue as the war entered its third year. Zhilinski, like many Russian generals, was a failed leader, one whose ideas and planning contributed to the massive defeats at Tannenberg and Masurian Lakes. This stemmed from Russian military thinking that remained "intellectually impoverished" according to Peter Kenez.<sup>12</sup> The Russians failed to study their own military history,

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<sup>10</sup> Each Russian name has a variety of spellings based on the transliteration. I will maintain consistency in how I spell their names with the exception of direct quotes and bibliography entries.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Neiberg and David Jordan, *The History of World War I: The Eastern Front 1914-1920: From Tannenberg to the Russo-Polish War* (London: Amber Books, 2008), 85-88; Knox, *With the Russian Army, 1914-1917*, 2: 421-27. Hereafter Neiberg and Jordan's work will be referenced as *The Eastern Front*.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Kenez, "Russian Officer Corps Before the Revolution: The Military Mind," in *Russian Review* 31, no 3 (July 1972): 226-28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/128044>.

examine preceding conflicts in depth, or analyze how modern weaponry changed warfare. As they fought in the first modern war – the Russo-Japanese War – Russian military leaders should have gained a distinct advantage over their adversaries during the interwar years. Sadly, the Russian generals' lack of intellectual curiosity ensured that any lessons would remain unlearned while Russia's enemies studied them in depth. Furthermore, the Tsar's refusal to dismiss hapless generals like Aleksei Kuropatkin, the architect of Russia's failed effort against the Japanese, meant that Russia would face a competent foe with incompetent leaders. Many of these generals believed that Russia had no prospects for victory and as a result cared more about maintaining their reputations and social standing than winning a war.<sup>13</sup> Their incompetence and defeatist attitudes would be impossible for Russia to overcome.

Nevertheless, Russia did have a few competent leaders, ones who understood how to fight a modern war. New and able officers rose through the ranks as Russia replenished its losses. These men, Stone writes "were thoroughly discontented with 'the system'—men of high military competence." By 1916, they had gained enough influence to affect change on the officer corps, but it would not be enough to overcome the damage caused by entrenched leaders. This would prove to be the Russian Army's greatest challenge going forward, especially as later conscripts decreased in quality, knowledge, and skills while their susceptibility to revolutionary agitation increased.<sup>14</sup>

Chief among these bold, competent leaders was General Aleksei Brusilov. He assumed command of the Southwestern Front in early 1916 and led Russian forces in what some historians believe to be World War I's most effective operation: the Brusilov Offensive. Brusilov believed Russia possessed the ability to achieve victory on the Eastern Front, especially as Russian troops

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<sup>13</sup> Neiberg and Jordan, *The Eastern Front*, 86; Kenez, "Russian Officer Corps Before the Revolution: The Military Mind," 226-28; W. Bruce Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon: The Russians in War and Revolution 1914-1918* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 238-39.

<sup>14</sup> Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 224-25.

remained healthier than in previous wars and their morale remained high. Furthermore, they finally had sufficient ammunitions, shells, artillery, and firearms to sustain offensive action. He viewed 1916 with optimism as he wrote, “we had every cause to reckon on being able to defeat the enemy and drive him across our frontier.” Brusilov placed other competent generals under his command, ones whom he trusted to carry out his plans. They would help provide Russia its greatest chance for victory during the war. It would be the other generals, in spite of Brusilov’s successes, who would squander Russia’s last chance for victory.<sup>15</sup>

The right combination of events and circumstances in 1916 provided the foundation for Russian war time success and the potential to stem the growing revolutionary sentiment. Historian W. Bruce Lincoln argues that Russia had a chance to avoid revolution that year, but only if their military situation changed dramatically. The year was a balancing act, where the changes Russia made would either restore the country's strength or destroy it; everything hinged on the year’s military outcome. Given the strategic climate, it certainly seemed plausible that Russia could shift the tide of the war in its favor.<sup>16</sup> German plans, however, quickly changed everything.

### **The Lake Narotch Offensive<sup>17</sup>**

The German attack at Verdun derailed Russia’s plans for 1916 before Russia even had a chance to exploit its positive changes materiel production. Churchill recorded that Allied planners at Chantilly argued against any “side-shows” during the 1916 campaign season so they could focus on a unified plan to keep the Germans occupied on all fronts.<sup>18</sup> Germany’s unexpected attack at Verdun meant that Russia’s first action would be such a sideshow.

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<sup>15</sup> A.A. Brussilov, *A Soldier’s Note-Book 1914-1918*, The West Point Library, ed. Thomas E. Griess and Jay Luvaas (1930: repr., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1971), 199-200.

<sup>16</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon*, 237.

<sup>17</sup> Also spelled Naroch and Narocz.

<sup>18</sup> Churchill, *The Unknown War*, 358.

In the grand scheme of the war, the Lake Narotch Offensive appears inconsequential but this small and largely obscure battle had far-reaching effects. While the economic and industrial changes during 1915 provided Russia the materiel and men necessary for victory in 1916, Lake Narotch reshaped Russian fighting attitudes with devastating results.

After the opening German salvos at Verdun on 21 February 1916, French marshal Joseph Joffre pleaded with the Russians to change their offensive timetable to relieve pressure on the Western Front. Given Russian generals' overall reluctance to fight and the compressed timeline with which they now had to plan an offensive, the results were catastrophic. Led by the feuding Kuropatkin and General Aleksei Evert – another failed general – the Russians amassed 350,000 troops against fewer than 100,000 Germans. With the past year's production improvements, the Russians also enjoyed superiority in the number of shells, but poor planning negated that advantage. They launched the offensive in late March, coinciding with the spring thaw. It was neither an ideal nor intelligent time to fight.<sup>19</sup>

Predictably the offensive failed from the start. Mismanagement, poor Russian communication, and infighting between the Russian leaders made certain the offensive became an utter disaster. The spring thaw slowed operations as Russian troops slogged through water and mud in frigid weather. Unable to move troops effectively and comprehend confused orders issued by the feuding commanders, Russian forces lost 100,000 men without gaining any territory while the Germans lost 20,000.<sup>20</sup> Whatever help the Russians did provide to the French, if any, was hardly worth the cost.

The Russians became a victim of their own overconfidence in their numerical superiority and rushed planning. Given Zhilinski's bluster at Chantilly, the ostensibly prepared Russians could not refuse to answer their ally's call for help. Russia's poor execution meant that the Germans, despite vastly superior Russian

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<sup>19</sup> Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon*, 185-87.

<sup>20</sup> Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon*, 185-87; Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 231.



numbers, only needed to transfer three divisions to counter the offensive, none of which came from the Western Front. The Russians accomplished nothing except needlessly losing men and expending materiel.<sup>21</sup>

The Lake Narotch Offensive had far-reaching effects on Russia's 1916 war effort. Stone argues that the offensive was "one of the decisive battles" of World War I as "it condemned most of the Russian army to passivity."<sup>22</sup> It solidified a defeatist mindset for many Russian generals, believing that if their superiority in men and shells could not bring victory, nothing could. The Russian Army's Chief of Staff, General Mikhail Alekseev, perpetuated this belief as he observed the French routinely refused to go on the offensive without having approximately four times the shells per gun that the Russians had when they launched their failed operation. Alekseev believed that the Russians could not hope to accumulate matching numbers. Rather than work to make the Russian logistics system more reliable, Stone argues they "would have no stomach for attack" going forward.<sup>23</sup>

The Lake Narotch Offensive's consequences remain vitally important to understanding the coming summer campaign. When one combines their defeatist spirit, dearth of military intellect, and poor planning, it paints Russian military leaders as men who wished to enjoy their aristocratic military rank without its commensurate duties and responsibilities. Without men willing to confront and accept the war's harsh realities and their role in it, Russia could no longer hope for victory in 1916.

Despite this, the Lake Narotch Offensive offered a silver lining. It validated German beliefs regarding the Russians' incompetence and inferiority. As a result, the Central Powers, already bogged down against stiffer than expected French resistance at Verdun, committed more and more men and materiel to the Western Front. While German planners still worried about the abilities of their Austro-Hungarian allies, Verdun consumed their attention. They believed that even the inferior Austro-

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<sup>21</sup> Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 227-31.

<sup>22</sup> Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 231.

<sup>23</sup> Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 227-31.

Hungarian troops could withstand any future Russian offensive should the Russians, after such a disaster, attack again.<sup>24</sup>

The Lake Narotch Offensive had significant effects on the Eastern Front going forward. But how would those effects manifest themselves and influence a summer campaign? Would they be a boon to future Russian operations or relegate them to failure? To understand this and the overall effect the offensive had on future operations, historians must examine the most consequential operation on the Eastern Front: the Brusilov Offensive.

### **The Brusilov Offensive**

The Brusilov Offensive would be Russia's high water mark and it would also start Tsarist Russia's unraveling. The plan for a summer offensive caught many senior Russian leaders off-guard. Brusilov's predecessor on the Southwestern Front, General Nikolai Ivanov, had led the Tsar to believe that his troops would be unable to engage in any significant military action that year. Brusilov wrote that he surprised the Tsar with his push for specific, aggressive action only a few months later during a war conference with other Russian leaders. His Southwestern Front would be the main attack, with supporting offensives along the Northern and Western fronts. Kuropatkin and Evert commanded those fronts, respectively. With a propensity to shun decision-making, the Tsar urged Brusilov to present his plan to the Russian Council of War for further discussion. Brusilov's ideas shocked many generals as well. After submitting his plans, Brusilov noted that some leaders grew more optimistic about Russia's prospects for that summer. Brusilov eventually persuaded even Kuropatkin and Evert though they still harbored some doubts, even as Alekseev assured them they would have the necessary resources. The fact that they needed such assurances shows how Russian leadership began to believe that effective operations were impossible without an overwhelming superiority in both men and shells.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Neiberg and Jordan, *The Eastern Front*, 90-92.

<sup>25</sup> Brussilov, *A Soldier's Note-Book*, 210-18; John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 303-04

Brusilov agreed with their concerns about resources to a point, but he also saw no reason not to attack. Russia, he argued, must seize the initiative and restore hope. If all Russian fronts attacked in unison, they could prevent the Germans from transferring troops to specific areas to repel piecemeal Russian attacks. With the Germans and Austro-Hungarians engaged both at Verdun and along the Italian Front, and the British and French about to launch a joint offensive along the Somme, the Russians had an opportunity to negate Germany's central location and stretch German forces thin. Alekseev eventually approved the operation with Kuropatkin and Evert agreeing to support the offensive, but they did so only in hopes of maintaining their favor with the Tsar, not supporting Brusilov. Their combined unwillingness to lend Brusilov active support guaranteed that Russia would squander its best chance for success.<sup>26</sup>

Brusilov needed more than confidence to achieve victory. After carefully studying previous offensives, he concluded that many failed because operations focused on fronts which were far too narrow. Russian artillery lacked the experience, numbers, and accuracy of enemy artillery units, leaving enemy positions largely unmolested. This allowed the enemy to easily concentrate their firepower and reserves on that narrow front as Russian troops funneled through. Brusilov realized that he needed to attack on a broad front with a massive, but short, bombardment. With such a large attack, the enemy would be paralyzed and unable to focus their efforts and reserves against any one sector.<sup>27</sup>

The Russians had every opportunity for success when their guns opened fire on 4 June 1916, especially as they caught Austro-Hungarian troops unaware as they were celebrating Conrad von Hötzendorf's – their army's chief of staff – birthday. Believing the Russians were largely defeated, the Central Power's leadership dismissed Brusilov's opening attacks. Given the failure of Lake Narotch, they believed that they could easily halt the new Russian operation, but this offensive would be different. The Russians possessed little numerical advantage this time as they amassed

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<sup>26</sup> Brussilov, *A Soldier's Note-Book*, 210-18.

<sup>27</sup> Neiberg and Jordan, *The Eastern Front*, 92-93.

some 650,000 troops against 500,000 enemy troops, the vast majority of which were Austro-Hungarian. While Austro-Hungarian forces proved capable of repelling poorly-led Russian attacks, Russian troops under Brusilov quickly overwhelmed and destroyed Austro-Hungarian units, sending German and Austro-Hungarian leaders into a panic. Russian forces captured some 40,000 troops in the first two days. After a week, the Russians had captured nearly 200,000, or one third of Austro-Hungarian forces on the front. The Russians also had pushed nearly twenty-five kilometers west from their original front lines.<sup>28</sup> This was a feat nearly unheard of in a war where armies routinely slaughtered hundreds of thousands of men for no gain.

Brusilov's momentum had the potential to strike a catastrophic blow to the Central Powers. With Austro-Hungarian forces in full retreat along the Southwestern Front and German leadership scrambling to respond, Brusilov needed Kuropatkin and Evert to launch supporting offensives. The likelihood of a massive Russian breakthrough was high; the Central Powers were simply overwhelmed. With nearly 1.5 million additional men sitting idle on the Northern and Western Fronts, even limited attacks would help tie down all Central Powers forces.<sup>29</sup> Brusilov's attacks produced such a crisis that Hindenburg wrote "for a moment we were faced with the menace of complete collapse!"<sup>30</sup> Along such a colossal front, against such a massive number of troops, concentrating forces at any one point would have proved impossible. Brusilov achieved considerable success but he needed active support before he exhausted his finite resources. Kuropatkin and Evert made excuses, however, and repeatedly delayed their offensive plans with dubious claims of insufficient troops and materiel. These details did not matter to Brusilov. He needed them to attack immediately because the Germans were rushing in reinforcements. Brusilov wrote, "even if

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<sup>28</sup> Timothy Dowling, *The Brusilov Offensive*, Twentieth-Century Battles, ed. Spencer C. Tucker (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2008), 62-78, 88-92, 160-70.

<sup>29</sup> Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon*, 253.

<sup>30</sup> Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 1:194.

Evert and Kuropatkin's attacks should not be crowned with success, the mere fact of their taking the offensive in force would prevent the enemy opposite them from moving for a fairly considerable time, and would give him no chance of transferring reserves from their fronts to mine."<sup>31</sup>

Under Alekseev's orders, Kuropatkin and Evert launched their supporting attacks, but only perfunctorily. Their unwillingness to fight demonstrated the lingering and decisive effects of Lake Narotch. Even when presented with the first true prospects for victory, both local and potentially war-changing, entrenched Russian leaders failed to seize the advantages. As a result, the Germans effectively transferred twenty-five divisions to aid beleaguered Austro-Hungarian forces, including eight from the Western Front.<sup>32</sup> Facing more and better troops, Alekseev eventually transferred four corps from other fronts to aid Brusilov.<sup>33</sup> The campaign continued until mid-September, eventually capturing nearly twenty-five thousand square kilometers of territory but at high costs. In all, the Russians inflicted some 1.5 million casualties on the Central Powers while suffering approximately a half million themselves.<sup>34</sup>

The Brusilov Offensive had significant consequences for both the Central Powers and the Tsarist regime. With losses topping three-quarters of a million troops, Austria-Hungary broke. Germany quickly propped up the dying empire, transforming it into a German puppet state. This stretched German forces thin as Germany now had to provide men and materiel to replenish Austro-Hungarian losses. Austro-Hungarian morale shattered.<sup>35</sup> One would expect the exact opposite on the Russian side but despite the disparity in the numbers of casualties, Russian losses

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<sup>31</sup> Brusilov, *A Soldier's Note-Book*, 243-44.

<sup>32</sup> Dowling, *The Brusilov Offensive*, 166; Nicholas Golovine, *The Russian Army in the World War*, Economic and Social History of the World War, ed. James T. Shotwell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 241.

<sup>33</sup> Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon*, 254-57.

<sup>34</sup> Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon*, 257.

<sup>35</sup> John Schindler, "Steamrolled in Galicia: The Austro-Hungarian Army and the Brusilov Offensive, 1916" in *War in History* 10, no. 1 (January 2003): 27, 59, <http://wih.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/10/1/27>.

had a disproportionate impact on the Russian Army and the Russian people.

The territory gained proved another strain as it created a massive salient, one that required additional troops to secure, further stretching Russian forces after suffering heavy losses. During 1915's Great Retreat, Russian losses yielded an unexpected bit of assistance. As they retreated, the Russians eliminated their massive salient, cutting the length of their front in half, which required fewer men and less materiel to hold the line. This allowed Russia to reconstitute its forces for action in 1916. By doing the opposite, Brusilov's victory actually hurt the Russian war effort.<sup>36</sup> It is possible that had the other front commanders attacked as planned the salient would not have existed or that it would have been smaller, straining Russian forces to a lesser degree.

For many troops and the Russian people, these casualties proved to be more than they could bear. Michael Kettle states that these losses "virtually ruined Russia as a military power." The offensive was the apex of the Russian war effort and paradoxically "set the Russian Army on the path to revolution."<sup>37</sup> Desertions spiked and officers increasingly questioned the competence of their generals and the Tsar.<sup>38</sup> Though they suffered two years' worth of deprivation and humiliating losses, the Russian Army stood strong, seemingly unbreakable. Yet when they finally achieved perhaps the greatest victory of the war, the Russian Army fractured.

The Brusilov Offensive broke Russia internally, both the state and the army. Despite the state's significant gains going into 1916, its position after the Brusilov Offensive was little better than it had been in 1914. War-weariness ignited latent revolutionary

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<sup>36</sup> Keegan, *The First World War*, 233.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Kettle, *The Allies and the Russian Collapse: March 1917-March 1918*, vol. 1, *Russia and the Allies, 1917-1920* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 34-35.

<sup>38</sup> Kettle, *The Allies and the Russian Collapse*, 34-35; Dowling, *The Brusilov Offensive*, 163-64, 176.; Peter Waldron, *The End of Imperial Russia, 1855-1917*, *European History in Perspective*, ed. Jeremy Black (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997), 154-55.

sentiment behind the front lines. This sentiment quickly metastasized, spreading into the ranks and fundamentally altering the relationship between the Russian Army and the Tsarist government.<sup>39</sup> Stories from home of food shortages, rampant inflation, and other hardships, led Russian soldiers to revolt. They were willing to defend their Motherland but had nothing to gain from further offensive action. Russian lieutenant general Nicholas Golovine wrote after the war that Russian troops viewed their losses as unnecessary and no longer believed further sacrifice would not benefit the Motherland. In their eyes, the war was lost and their leaders were doing nothing more than squandering their lives. With growing hopelessness, the Russian Army began to disintegrate. As the army broke, so did the last remaining bulwark of Tsarist power. In 1905, the army helped quell the revolution and, in some cases, helped crush the revolutionaries. It would be different this time around.<sup>40</sup>

The Brusilov Offensive, for all its tangible success, was little more than a Pyrrhic victory. The Russian Army lost a significant number of its new junior officers, ones who hoped to transform the army. While Russia could replace these men, it could not replace their competence and their desire to modernize both Russian military operations and thought. Furthermore, these losses forced the Russian Army to replace reformers with revolutionaries who would soon infect their fellow soldiers. New officers commanded little respect and could not instill discipline in their revolutionary-minded troops. Many regiments mutinied, even under penalty of death. Some officers refused to order their men into combat, fearing they would be shot.<sup>41</sup> John Morrow Jr.

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<sup>39</sup> Albert Sonnichsen, "On the Eastern Front During 1916," in vol. 2 of *The History of the First World War*, ed. B.H. Liddell Hart (New York: Grolier Incorporated, 1965), 608.

<sup>40</sup> Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon*, 259-60; Golovine, *The Russian Army in the World War*, 241-46; Sonnichen, "On the Eastern Front," 608; Ward Rutherford, *The Russian Army in World War I* (London: Gordon Cremonesi Publishers, 1975), 191-93.

<sup>41</sup> John H. Morrow, Jr., *The Great War: An Imperial History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 138-39; 206-07; Allan K. Wildman, *The End of Imperial Russia: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March-April 1917)* (Princeton:

concisely states that “upon the heels of their greatest victory, Russian soldiers plunged into the depths of despair.”<sup>42</sup> Once protected by the Russian Army, Tsarist rule became a target. The Imperial Guards and feared Cossack units, soldiers who helped crush revolutionaries in 1905, now helped facilitate the February Revolution as they protected demonstrators. In one instance, the Guards and Cossacks attacked the Petrograd police after the police opened fire on a group of protestors. With that, it became clear that the Russian Army would no longer submit to Tsarist rule. Without the army’s support, the Tsar had no choice but to abdicate.<sup>43</sup>

In many ways the Lake Narotch Offensive set the stage for the Brusilov Offensive. With Kuropatkin and Evert convinced of offensive futility, Brusilov’s action held little hope of becoming the decisive victory that Russia needed. Brusilov despairingly wrote that “a vigorous collaboration on the part of our three fronts would have given us every chance, even in spite of our technical inferiority to the Germans and Austrians, of driving all their armies a long way to the west.” As such cooperation did not exist, Brusilov was left “tortured by the thought that a victory on so grand a scale as that which our Supreme Command, had it acted wisely, might have won in 1916, had been quite unpardonably thrown away.”<sup>44</sup> As the troops broke, so did the Russian economy, fanning revolutionary sentiment around Russia. Romania’s entry to the war would compound the problem.

### **The Romanian Debacle**

While the Brusilov Offensive broke Russia militarily and societally, Romania’s unfortunate entry into the war broke it externally. This ally did more to hinder the Russian war effort than bolster it. Now overlooked in the war’s grand schemes, Romania’s entry affected all of the war’s major belligerents but none more so

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Princeton University Press, 1980), 106-107; Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 244.

<sup>42</sup> Morrow, Jr., *The Great War: An Imperial History*, 138-39; 206-07.

<sup>43</sup> Morrow, Jr., *The Great War: An Imperial History*, 138-39; 206-07; Wildman, *The End of Imperial Russia: The Old Army and the Soldiers’ Revolt (March-April 1917)*, 106-107; Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 244.

<sup>44</sup> Brussilov, *A Soldier’s Note-Book*, 266-68.



than Tsarist Russia.<sup>45</sup> With a shared border, Russia became Romania's lifeline; however, as Russia already relied heavily on its Western allies for support, Romania's foray into World War I would tax Tsarist Russia beyond its means.

Romania's entry was opportunistic as they played a waiting game, carefully deciding which side might be the victor. Their main goal was to regain territory lost to Austria-Hungary in the late nineteenth century, especially in Transylvania, Bukovina, and Banat. With Russia in full retreat in 1915, the Allies needed Romania more than ever. Allied leadership acquiesced to Romania's demands, but still Romania held out for an even more favorable settlement. With Brusilov's success, Romania's leadership realized that they must act lest Austria-Hungary surrender to the Russians alone, wiping out any chance for Romania to reclaim territory. In early July, Romania joined the Allies but, despite Allied leadership having already conceded to Romania's demands, did not declare war until 27 August.<sup>46</sup> By then it was too late to aid Brusilov.

Not only did Romania join too late, their declaration of war became a burden. Stanley Washburn, an American war correspondent for *The Times* of London, spent the war with the Russian Army. He recorded that even before Romania joined the Allies that Russian leadership saw Romania as a liability. He wrote that Alekseev was furious over Romania declaring war too late to aid Brusilov. Alekseev also realized that Romania's entry could potentially extend Russia's southern flank some five hundred kilometers since it would no longer be anchored on neutral territory. Furthermore, Russian leadership knew nothing about the Romanian Army's capabilities or state of readiness. Washburn contended that perhaps Russian leadership's largest fear was that Germany would quickly overrun Romania and press on towards Kiev. This would negate Brusilov's achievements and

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<sup>45</sup> Glenn E. Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I*, Modern War Studies, ed. Theodore A. Wilson (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011), xi.

<sup>46</sup> Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield*, 4-12; Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 282.

allow the Germans to capture resource-rich Ukraine. The risks Romania's participation posed were more than the partnership was worth.<sup>47</sup> Already exhausted, the Russians could ill-afford more losses; they needed Romania to remain a buffer state, securing Russia's southern flank.

Even with the burden Romania's entry posed, it had the potential to benefit Russia. Had the Romanians not hesitated to join, they could have supported Brusilov's offensive from the start. Even with an unprepared army, Romanian assistance could have exacerbated the Central Powers' crisis that summer, long before Germany diverted troops to the Southwestern Front. This holds especially true as Romanian troops achieved initial success against Austro-Hungarian troops. Whether Romanian support at that critical time could have changed the offensive's outcome is speculative at best, but their late declaration of war ensured they could not provide any support whatsoever. Once the Romanian Army finally met German resistance, it crumbled. With an unprotected flank and broken troops, Romania's demise forced the Russians to commit already scarce resources to hold the extended southern flank. It proved to be too much for the Russians to handle, and in December the Germans marched into Bucharest. With the capital's capture, the Germans also seized vital resources that Russia needed to replenish their forces on the Southwestern Front.<sup>48</sup> Russia could not make up for these losses, especially as its economic situation in late 1916 dramatically worsened.

Deep-seated mistrust doomed the Russian-Romanian relationship from the start. Romania's failures validated Russian fears about their new ally. Romania also inherently mistrusted Russia after their alliance in the Russo-Turkish War in 1877. Despite Romania's contributions to the Russian victory, Russia took Bessarabia from Romania in the postwar peace settlement. Romanian leadership feared that they would again lose more territory or fail to regain the territory promised to them. Once

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<sup>47</sup> Stanley Washburn, *On the Russian Front in World War I: Memoirs of an American War Correspondent* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, Publishers, Inc., 1982), 217-19.

<sup>48</sup> Morrow, *The Great War*, 139; Gilbert, *The First World War*, 285, 288-89.

Russia diverted thirty percent of its forces, some one million troops in forty-seven divisions, to prop up a half-million Romanian troops in twenty-three divisions, what little cooperation that still existed between them vanished. Even with all its problems, the Romanian disaster provided the Allies some benefit as it forced the Central Powers to divert forty divisions to the Romanian Front, forcing Germany to halt all future offensives at Verdun.<sup>49</sup>

Romania's late declaration of war squandered the Allies' chance for victory. If the Central Powers diverted that many troops just to contain a weak country's entry, both Romania's entry and a coordinated attack by Kuropatkin and Evert's better trained and better supplied men surely had the potential to break Germany. This holds especially true if done before Germany transferred troops east. Instead the Central Powers gained more from Romania's entry as an enemy than Romania's neutrality, collecting the spoils of war which, as Stone points out, amounted to "over a million tons of oil, over two million tons of grain, 200,000 tons of timber, 100,000 head of cattle," and other materiel. This, Stone concludes, "made possible the Germans' continuation of the war into 1918." These were resources the Russians could have used to stem their own hunger and supply shortages; instead they went to the enemy. While it is a stretch to call the effects of Romanian intervention decisive, it furthered the growing crisis in Russia.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Russian Economy**

As previously mentioned, the Russian economy staged a major turnaround in the latter half of 1915 and in early 1916. Russia's industrial capacity grew to the point where it could generally support and sustain the war effort. Despite this, growing labor

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<sup>49</sup> Glenn Torrey, "Indifference and Mistrust: Russian-Romanian Collaboration in the Campaign of 1916," in *The Journal of Military History* 57, no. 2 (April 1993): 280-81, 285, 293-94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2944059>; Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield*, 168, 331; Morrow, *The Great War*, 139.

<sup>50</sup> Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 264-65; Glenn Torrey, "The Rumanian Campaign of 1916: Its Impact on the Belligerents," *Slavic Review* 39 no. 1 (March 1980): 41, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2497300>.

shortages, strikes, insufficient raw materials, a substandard logistics network, and food shortages remained, as did their reliance on the French and British. As 1916 went on, the Russian economy quickly spiraled out of control as massive military losses strained the economy. Inflation climbed sharply as the Tsarist government continually mismanaged Russia's monetary policy, triggering massive food and commodity shortages. With a growing sense of hopelessness and frustration, the Russian people demanded change. Even those not subject to revolutionary agitation blamed the Tsar and his government for their woes. As the Russian economy collapsed, it adversely affected the troops, shattering morale and undermining discipline. Family concerns consumed them.

The relationship between the military and the economy cannot be overlooked. Part of the reason why the Russian economy struggled and failed rests on the fact that unlike its Western counterparts, Russia remained largely agrarian. Modern wars required modern industry to support it. Russian gross domestic product (GDP) and Russian per capita GDP provide an indicator of economic problems going into the war. While Russia's 1913 GDP stood at \$149.6 billion, trumping all other nations except the United States, its per capita GDP stood at only \$900, far below all other belligerents except Japan. By contrast, German GDP and per capita GDP stood at \$131.1 billion and \$1,960, British at \$135.5 billion and \$2,970, and American at \$368.2 billion and \$3,790, respectively. Furthermore, Russia mobilized some 15.8 million troops, or forty percent of service-aged males, but this percentage remained below that of the major European powers. Germany, by comparison, mobilized eighty percent of service-aged males and Britain nearly fifty percent.<sup>51</sup>

These differences in per capita GDP and mobilization percentages were critically important in World War I. Russia possessed the manpower necessary to fight a world war but,

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Gatrell and Mark Harrison, "The Russian and Soviet Economies in Two World Wars: a Comparative View," *The Economic History Review* 46, no. 3 (August 1993): 426-30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2598362>. GDP is given in billions of international dollars at 1980 rates.

despite its economy's quantitative size, lacked the economic prowess to support massive military operations. Despite their smaller populations, the French and British economies had the wherewithal not only to support their operations but also Russia's. This highlights the important role per capita GDP played as compared to total GDP. Russia's Western allies and even Germany, both with smaller populations and smaller overall GDPs, withstood the war much better. Russia's comparative advantages in total GDP and population meant little with an economy that could not capitalize on them.

Such industrial failings manifested themselves in Russia's infrastructure. Hew Strachan points out that Russia was "an industrialising power rather than an industrialised one."<sup>52</sup> Despite rapid economic and industrial growth during the three decades preceding the war, Russia still lagged behind its counterparts as the GDP statistics demonstrate. Gatrell points out that even with growth and expansion into modern industrial practices like chemical and electrical engineering, Russia's industry still stood alongside primitive workshops. As such, Russia's contemporary industrial methods lacked modernity, mixing old and new techniques and processes. Additionally, the vast majority of Russia's 170 million people remained unskilled. To be an industrial power, Russia needed a large, skilled labor force. In fact, as factory production, conscription, and military casualties increased, Russian industry's reliance on women and child laborers grew. Its productivity was lower than that of Western nations and its factories stood in rural areas, requiring transportation that Russia did not have. Production methods constantly changed, creating a random and eclectic supply of goods with little uniformity. It was an economy that resisted standardization and market control.<sup>53</sup> Such an economy, even with the vast improvements it made transitioning into 1916, lacked the wherewithal to survive a modern war. Russia's inability to

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<sup>52</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 145-146.

<sup>53</sup> Strachan, *The First World War*, 145-146; Gatrell, *Russia's First World War*, 1-6; Waldron, *The End of Imperial Russia*, 156.

modernize guaranteed an eventual break down. Retooling the Russian economy would take decades in peace time and was impossible during war.

Transporting Russia's vast resources to factories and troops to the front lines became problematic as the war continued. In previous conflicts, Russia typically took a defensive posture, relying on a strategy of defense in depth. This strategy forced invading armies to extend their lines while strategic consumption undermined the invader's campaign plans. In pre-World War I planning, Russia took an offensive stance despite the fact that its logistics network lagged far behind that of its enemies and lacked the ability to support offensive action. Robert Service writes that Russia's "railway network had barely been adequate for the country's uses in peacetime; the wartime needs of the armed forces nearly crippled it."<sup>54</sup> Golovine wrote that Russia stood at a distinct disadvantage when compared to its enemies. In 1914, while Germany possessed 10.6 kilometers of track for every 100 square kilometers, Russia only had one kilometer. When accounting for differences in population density and using Germany's rail system for a comparative basis with a coefficient of 100, Russia stood at a dismal four. This created problems as the nation transported new recruits to the front. In central Europe, the average recruit only had to travel some 200-300 kilometers, but in Russia that distance nearly quadrupled. Inferior and aging locomotives exacerbated problems with the Russian railway system, especially as overuse during the war wore them out.<sup>55</sup>

The problems the Russians faced pointed to a backwards economy. A number of historians argue that this "backwardness" was at the heart of Russia's economic woes. Stone argues otherwise. He acknowledges that Russia's economic difficulties exceeded those of its Western allies but he believes the Russian

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 28.

<sup>55</sup> Bertram D. Wolfe, "Titans Locked in Combat, Part 1," in *Russian Review* 23, no. 4 (October 1964): 329, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/126210>; Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, 28; Golovine, *The Russian Army in the World War*, 34-36.

economy was not backwards. Russia's improved ability to produce war materiel going into 1916 supports his viewpoint. Regardless of whether the Russian economy was backwards or not, the question remains: what role did the economy play in the Russian Revolution, if any? Stone argues that economic growth, ironically enough, contributed to Russia's economic collapse. The Russian economy did not grow gradually; rather, growth lagged leading up to World War I and spiked during it. This growth vastly modernized the economy, but modernization also brought unintended consequences, like inflation. As Russia failed to cope with sudden and substantial modernization, it helped spark the Russian Revolution.<sup>56</sup> It is this perspective that best explains why Russia collapsed economically in late 1916.

The economic and industrial growth of a modern war required vast amounts of capital and workers. As the Russian government spent, it printed rubles, and continually debased its currency from gold. Massive inflation followed. Using the first half of 1914 as the baseline, inflation began growing rapidly in the latter half of 1916 – after Brusilov launched his offensive – as the amount of currency in circulation expanded 336% and the price index stood at 398. These numbers show a startling increase from the first half of 1916 when those numbers stood at 199% and 141, respectively. The numbers only climbed from there.<sup>57</sup> Despite the problems it later created, monetary expansion helped facilitate Russia's wartime turnaround. Stone acknowledges that keeping the currency tied to gold would only have impeded the industrial expansion that Russia needed to support the war effort; the necessary capital would not have otherwise been available.<sup>58</sup> Even without its economic and military problems, Kettle argues that by late 1916 Russia was quickly heading for bankruptcy. Bankruptcy alone had the potential to spurn its own revolution.<sup>59</sup> It was a no-win situation for the Russian economy. Russia's only hope was to

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<sup>56</sup> Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 284-286; Gatrell, *Russia's First World War*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 287.

<sup>58</sup> Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 284-288.

<sup>59</sup> Kettle, *The Allies and the Russian Collapse*, 35.

end the war before its monetary mismanagement consumed the empire.

Inflation directly contributed to Russia's food shortages as peasants hoarded food rather than sell it for rubles that rapidly became worthless. By late 1916 the food shortages had grown to a critical state. Already hurt by conscription, Russian agriculture suffered more as inflation caused many farmers to stop planting altogether. They had no incentive to work for nothing, especially when the government implemented price controls and requisition programs. The Russian Army's dire need for draft animals handed Russia's agricultural sector another setback. This proved ruinous for peasants as animal losses were not easily replaced. In the cities, food scarcity brought about food riots and, by the end of 1916, the people's animosity towards the Tsarist government reached a tipping point. If the Tsar could not provide them with food, they would support someone who could. It is not surprising that a popular Bolshevik slogan became "Peace, Land, and Bread." Perhaps the most tragic fact about the food shortages was that Russia's wartime harvests exceeded prewar ones, even with the difficulties farmers faced. Inflation, hoarding, agricultural policies, and an inferior logistics network meant the food failed to reach those who needed it. These problems extended to all commodities, not just food.<sup>60</sup>

Inflation also played a role in labor and factory riots. While wages in many sectors increased as the war continued, the ruble's fall cut purchasing power. Factory and industrial leaders also reaped massive wartime profits while workers' wages grew at a much slower rate. These leaders became targets for worker frustration. As the Russian economy began spiraling downward, revolutionaries found ready recruits on the factory floor. This held

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<sup>60</sup> Peter I. Lyashchenko, "Economic and Social Consequences of the War," in *The Russian Revolution and Bolshevik Victory: Why and How?*, ed. Arthur E. Adams, Problems in European Civilization, ed. Ralph W. Greenlaw and Dwight E. Lee (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1960), 18-20; Barbara Alpern Engel, "Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia During World War I," in *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 4 (December 1997): 717-721, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/245591>; Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 295; Gatrell, *Russia's First World War*, 108-113.



especially true in Petrograd as the city housed both the government and the heart of anti-Tsarist radicals. Workers' strikes and protests grew larger and more frequent. The end of 1916 saw nearly 1,300 strikes involving almost one million workers, double the number that went on strike in 1915. By early 1917, the previous year's problems yielded such discontent that 700,000 workers went on strike in January and February alone. Approximately 170,000 soldiers joined the demonstrations against the government.<sup>61</sup> With this, the February Revolution had begun.

Russia could only blame itself for its economic undoing. Russian leaders failed to prepare the nation for both a modern war and a rapidly evolving worldwide economy. They failed to learn the basic lessons of modern conflict, all despite having firsthand experience in the Russo-Japanese War. They also failed to see just how important an effective logistics network was to waging a successful war, a clear lesson from the American Civil War. And yet, despite failing to learn anything about what a modern European conflict might look like, Russia changed its war plans, eschewing the defensive for the offensive without any way to facilitate such operations. By early 1916, Russia's economy had evolved significantly but it was too little, too late. Russia's economy collapsed under the weight of both 1916's military operations and the rapid economic growth that enabled that year's offensive operations. It was all too much for the people, the army, and the Russian economy to handle.

### Conclusions

With the near constant protests in the cities, widespread food shortages, a worthless ruble, and military mutiny, the Tsar and his government lost control. On 15 March 1917, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated, marking the end of the Romanov Dynasty and the death of Imperial Russia.<sup>62</sup> After a transitory time with the Provisional

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<sup>61</sup> Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1996), 298-303; Lyashechenko, "Economic and Social Consequences of the War," 18-22.

<sup>62</sup> Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon*, 343. The Julian calendar date, which Tsarist Russia used during the war, was 2 March 1917.

Government, the Bolsheviks staged the October Revolution. Shortly thereafter, Russia descended into the bloody chaos of the Russian Civil War.

With so many changes, 1916 started out promisingly enough as industrial output improved to the point that it could support Russian military operations. With Germany turning its attention towards France, Russia should have been able to mount a war-changing Eastern Front offensive. Sadly, incompetent leadership and poor planning botched any hope for victory at Lake Narotch, where losses cemented a defeatist spirit in most military elites. Even when a daring leader like Brusilov achieved amazing results, cowardice and defeatism undermined any chance for success. Romania's ill-fated entry into the war leached Russian materiel and manpower just as Germany regained momentum in the East, a veritable death blow to the Russian Army. Rapid economic growth and poor fiscal policies, necessary as they were in the short term, ran headlong into an impotent logistics system, crumbling domestic infrastructure, and, the greatest enemy of all, time. This confluence of events overwhelmed Russia and created fertile grounds for what would be an unavoidable revolution by the close of 1916.

Revolutionary sentiment was always prevalent in Russia, simmering just below the surface. From time to time it would bubble up, forcing the Russian government to implement some reforms, but never fundamental change. Accustomed to hardship and privation, the fatalistic Russian people would simply continue on with their lives. Even after two years of war, terrific setbacks, and massive casualties, the Russian people somehow still carried on. Revolutionary sentiment grew but never enough to gain a substantial foothold in Russia. Everything changed in 1916. It was that year's successes, losses, and the consequences of each that provided the catalyst necessary to bring the festering discord to a head. While the military situation was but one factor contributing to the Russian Revolution, it was undoubtedly a decisive factor. Had it not been for the war, it remains entirely reasonable to believe that Russia would not have started down a path to revolution, much less have reached the revolutionary tipping

point. Just as the Russo-Japanese War triggered the 1905 Revolution, World War I, 1916 in particular, brought about the Russian Revolution, starting Tsarist Russia down the path to annihilation.

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