THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR: THE EMERGENCE OF JAPANESE IMPERIAL POWER

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INTRODUCTION

With its large naval battles, siege warfare and brutal hand-to-hand combat, the Russo-Japanese War ("the War") was a bloody conflict fought with a new generation of weapons that inflicted destruction on a scale unimaginable during previous wars. When the combatants signed the Treaty of Portsmouth, ending the War in 1905, Japan emerged a victorious imperial power on the ascent, while Russia was a defeated imperial power in precipitous decline.

Mahan and Corbett both wrote about the War, and despite their differences, they shared some similarities. Both believed that a maritime power could use its fleet for peripheral operations such as commerce raiding – although Mahan thought that it was an inadequate primary form of warfare and required the support of a larger fleet to be effective[2] – and both attempted to place naval strategy in the larger context of international affairs. Although Corbett's focus on the benefits of limited war for insular maritime powers offers a more realistic analysis of the War, Mahan was the preeminent naval strategist of the age, and his writings profoundly influenced Japan and Russia, which both possessed large fleets capable of fighting decisive battles and establishing command of the sea.

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[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not reflect the position of either the Department of Defense or the Department of the Navy.

[2] John Sumida, Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 45-46 (citing Alfred T. Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783 (Boston: Little Brown, 1890), 196.

AGREEING TO DISAGREE

Mahan and Corbett differed on the decisiveness of sea power. To the former, sea power was the *sine qua non* of national greatness, since maritime nations needed command of the sea to protect their international trade. Thus, Mahan believed that maritime nations needed fleets of capital ships capable of fighting and winning decisive battles that left the victor with command of the sea and the vanquished without the means to contest it. He did not advocate fighting decisive battles for their own sake, however, but asserted that nations must have a strategic objective beyond tactical victory,[3] because "[u]nless the position won is strategically decisive . . . the battle might as well, or better, never have been fought."[4]

Corbett thought sea power was important, but not decisive, and argued that it rarely won wars by itself, an assertion supported by Britain's campaign against Napoleon's army during the Peninsular War.[5] Whereas Mahan emphasized establishing command of the sea, Corbett focused more on denying such command to the opponent. Corbett also disagreed with Mahan's premise that the enemy fleet was always the center of gravity, and he did not advocate the "big battle" approach. Favoring economy of effort, Corbett preferred lower risk strategies that enabled maritime states to exploit advantages through the use of force multipliers like joint operations and commerce raiding.

The two also differed on the concentration of forces. Mahan generally advocated a structured concept, which called for the fleet to remain unified, since division diminished the ability to strike a decisive blow. However, Mahan did not insist that fleets must always mass their ships in permanent battle formation, but rather that they should

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[3] Ibid., 44.

[4] A.T. Mahan, "Retrospect Upon the War Between Japan and Russia", in *Naval Administration and Warfare* (Boston: Little Brown, 1918), 136.

[5] Julian Corbett, *Classics of Sea Power* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1972), 13 (During the Peninsular War, the Royal Navy established command of the sea around Spain and Portugal, which enabled the British to bring in troops and supplies, while denying Napoleon the opportunity to do the same. Although it was the British Army that ultimately defeated Napoleon, it could not have done so without the Royal Navy's support).

remain close enough to concentrate if necessary. To Corbett, concentration was a more flexible concept, and he thought that a fleet was stronger not as ". . . a homogeneous body, but a compound organism controlled from a common center and elastic enough to permit it to cover a wide field without sacrificing the mutual support of its parts."[6]

Under Corbett's definition, one squadron could hold a defensive blockading position while another conducted commerce raiding, yet both squadrons would be "concentrated" for tactical purposes if they could unify quickly. Since sea travel is faster than land travel,[7] Corbett posited that ships did not have to remain as close together as armies and did not object to dividing the fleet if it could unify more quickly than the enemy in the operational theater. Corbett even asserted that the division of the fleet was sometimes preferable, since it offered concealment and flexibility.[8]

Corbett and Mahan also differed on the strength of defensive positions at sea. The former strongly favored them, since he believed defensive positions to be inherently stronger than offensive ones. Mahan did not favor defensive positions because he thought they ceded offensive initiative to the enemy. The difference lies in Mahan's belief that offensive and defensive positions were separate and distinct, while Corbett saw the two as complementary, with the offensive counter-strike being the heart and soul of the defensive position.[9] Corbett offered the caveat, however, that a prolonged defensive deadens the offensive spirit,[10] a point proven by the Port Arthur squadron during the War.

Togo used his fleet offensively throughout the War to blockade and protect commerce, but he also utilized defensive positions without ceding offensive capability. In contrast, after the attack on Port Arthur, the Russian squadron spent most of its time

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[6] Ibid., 132.
[7] A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1918), 25.
[8] Corbett, *Classics of Sea Power*, 133-4.
[9] Ibid., 32 (see also Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 379) (The essence of defense lies in parrying the attack).
[10] Corbett, *Classics of Sea Power*, 33.

in port and did not attempt to engage Togo, which ceded the tactical and strategic initiative to Japan. The Russians could have used the Port Arthur squadron more aggressively – and did so under Admiral Makarov – but the period of activity was too brief to be of lasting strategic value.[11]

The two theorists differed substantially regarding amphibious warfare. Mahan disliked joint operations, which he thought wasted resources, violated principles of concentration, failed to produce significant tactical benefits and exposed troops to danger.[12] Corbett firmly believed in joint operations and regarded the fleet and the army as one weapon that could maximize each other's power. In fact, Corbett wrote that the paramount concern of maritime strategy ". . . is to determine the mutual relations of your army and navy in a plan of war."[13] His strong affinity for joint operations stemmed in part from Wellington's success against Napoleon during the Peninsular War, in which the Royal Army and Navy worked together to fight a successful limited war in Spain for the unlimited objective of toppling the French dictator.[14]

Corbett believed that Japan was even better situated for fighting a limited war than England, given its proximity to the Yellow Sea and the Korean Straits. He also correctly assessed that the War would not be about one side trying to overthrow the other, but instead would be a joint/amphibious war in which the combatants sought unrestricted tactical mobility for their armies in Korea and Manchuria.[15]

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[11] Ronald Spector, *At War At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Viking, 2001), 2 (Stepan Makarov was a bold and aggressive commander who accelerated the repair of battleships and directed harbor batteries to fire upon the Japanese from the hills around Port Arthur. He ensured that the Russians met every Japanese patrol with aggressive countermeasures. Unfortunately for the Russians, he died when his flagship, the *Petropavlovsk*, struck a mine and sank while on patrol in the Yellow Sea).

[12] Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy*, 45.

[13] Corbett, *Classics of Sea Power*, 14.

[14] By controlling the seas around the Iberian Peninsula, the Royal Navy inserted infantry into Spain, which forced Napoleon's troops to concentrate. Unable to focus on counter-insurgency operations, Napoleon's troops became increasingly vulnerable to guerilla attacks.

[15] Julian Corbett, *Maritime Operations During the Russo-Japanese War, 1804-180*5, 2 Vol. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997) Vol. 1: 13.

CORBETT AND LIMITED WAR

Corbett advocated limited war for insular maritime powers because it permitted the use of defensive positions without surrendering the strategic initiative,[16] which echoed Von Moltke's belief that in war, the strongest position is the strategic offensive combined with the tactical defensive.[17] Nevertheless, Corbett qualified his support of limited war by noting that it presupposes the ability to acquire the territorial objective before one's opponent is strong enough to prevent the acquisition.[18] Fortunately for Japan, its proximity to the theater of operations gave it time to secure its territorial objectives before Russia could concentrate its forces. If it could control the Yellow Sea, Tokyo believed it could secure not only the Korean Peninsula for military operations, but also protect Japan itself from attack, although the latter belief failed to consider the threat posed by Russia's Vladivostok squadron.

In contrast, Russia was poorly situated to fight a limited war. While Japan's forces were located in the operational theater, Russian forces had to travel thousands of miles by rail and sea to engage the enemy, which stretched its command and control, supply lines and logistics to the breaking point.[19] The presence of hostile Chinese tribes willing to conduct guerilla operations in Manchuria only exacerbated Russia's dilemma. Russia was also poorly positioned to take the offensive in the Yellow Sea, since Port Arthur had little to recommend itself as a base of operations other than being a warm water port. With its small and shallow harbor, ships could not enter at low tide, and there was no room for maneuvering. The outer anchorage was exposed to torpedo attacks, and tall hills ringed the harbor, which if seized would allow the Japanese to bomb both fortress and fleet into oblivion. Finally, the Baltic Fleet was over 15,000 miles away and in no position to prevent a rapid Japanese seizure of Port Arthur.

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[16] Corbett, *Classics of Sea Power*, 68.
[17] Ibid.,69 (Von Moltke's theory is a restatement of Clausewitz's theory that the defensive position is inherently stronger in war than the attack) (see von Clausewitz, *On War*, 84, 379).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ironically, Russia encountered many of the same "space, time and force" difficulties that Napoleon experienced during his invasion of Russia.

THE GATHERING STORM

The animosity between Russia and Japan grew from the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, and its aftermath. Fought in Manchuria and Korea, Japan won the war and acquired Taiwan and the Liaotung Peninsula – which contained Port Arthur – through the Treaty of Shimonoseki. However, shortly after the war ended, Russia, Germany and France "advised" Japan to restore the Liaotung Peninsula to China in exchange for an indemnity.[20] Angry and humiliated – but in no military position to refuse – Japan complied but resolved to build a military strong enough to prevent such extortion from ever repeating itself.[21]

A major crisis arose in 1895, with the assassination of the pro-Japanese Korean queen. Tokyo was concerned that Russia would use the incident to intervene and destroy Japan's chance to influence Korea's future.[22] Tokyo's concern proved prescient, when in 1896, the Russians landed a force of Marines that marched to Seoul and precipitated a coup, which caused the King to flee to the Russian Legation for protection. With the King as an official "guest" of the Tsar, the Russians steadily expanded their influence in the country, and the King soon gave the Russians control of Korea's financial system. Much to Tokyo's dismay, Russia had displaced it as the preeminent power in Korea.[23]

Tensions worsened in 1898, when Russia received a lease for Port Arthur, which meant that the Tsar might one day have a fleet in Korea's backyard. Japan could not risk a military confrontation, however, due to internal political turmoil. Therefore, Tokyo initiated a diplomatic discussion with Russia that resulted in a protocol wherein the two countries confirmed Korea's independence and Russia agreed not to interfere in Japan's economic relations. The protocol improved Japan's strategic position in Korea, and it cost the Russians nothing, since there were no terms limiting St. Petersburg's

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[20] Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 96.
[21] Ian Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Longman, 1985), 28.
[22] Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword*, 113.
[23] Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War*, 33-34.

involvement in Manchuria. Over the next two years, Russia expanded its economic influence in Manchuria by extending the Trans-Siberian Railroad and building naval bases at Port Arthur and Vladivostok.[24]

In 1901, increasingly alarmed over Russian meddling in Korea, Tokyo decided to establish the country as a protectorate – which would permit a military response to any Russian intrusion or occupation – and would allow Japanese advisers to assist in the reformation of the Korean government.[25] By 1903, tensions reached new heights when Russia reneged on a promise to withdraw troops from Manchuria and began constructing an economic enclave on the South Bank of the Yalu River. Upon learning that Russian troops had also established a camp along the Yalu border with Korea, Tokyo girded for war. Russia's duplicity regarding Manchuria was bad enough, but a potential invasion of Korea struck a raw nerve in Tokyo, where the leaders saw Korea as a "strategic dagger" pointed at its heart.

Japan strengthened its military presence in Korea, and soon its strategic position was virtually unassailable except through force.[26] St. Petersburg and Tokyo were on an apparent collision course, and repeated diplomatic efforts to resolve the situation peacefully were ineffective. Japan's foreign minister even offered recognition of Manchuria as a Russian sphere of influence if the Tsar would renounce ambitions in Korea.[27] However, with visions of an Asian empire in his head, and a profound hatred of the Japanese in his heart, Nicholas refused the offer.[28] Its patience at an end, Japan decided to settle the "Korea question" through force of arms, anticipating that military victory would create its own diplomatic solution. Bismarck would no doubt have approved of Japan's fighting a war for such a limited political purpose.

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[24] In 1860, Russia acquired the Ussuri region of China – which contained what would become Vladivostok – pursuant to the Treaty of Peking.
[25] Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword*, 172.
[26] Richard Storry, *Japan and the Decline of the West in Asia, 1894-1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 59.
[27] Constantine Pleshakov, *The Tsar's Last Armada: The Epic Voyage to the Battle of Tsushima* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 22.
[28] Ibid., 11 (When Nicholas was a young man visiting Japan, he was attacked and severely wounded by a sword-wielding *samurai*. Nicholas recovered but never lost his hatred for the Japanese, to whom he referred as "Macaques").

LET SLIP THE DOGS OF WAR

Japan's political and territorial objectives were well suited to fighting a limited war. Seeking neither to conquer Russian territory nor to topple its government,[29] Japan intended to drive the Russians from Korea and Manchuria and establish its hegemony in northeast Asia. Numerous factors – beyond Japan's limited objectives – combined to ensure that the War would be a regional one. First, the physical remoteness of Korea and Manchuria virtually guaranteed the theater of operations would not expand beyond northeast Asia. Second, Japan isolated Russia diplomatically by signing an alliance with the British, who were only too happy to support Japan in its efforts against the Tsar. Britain's neutrality also guaranteed that France, a Russian ally with Asian bases, and Germany, another Asian imperial power, would remain neutral, since neither wanted to risk offending their powerful neighbor. Third, neither Japan nor Russia had worldwide command of the sea. Finally, neither combatant possessed significant maritime colonies, nor conducted sufficient oceanic trade to make commerce raiding strategically worthwhile.[30]

Notwithstanding its geographic advantage, Japan understood that sea power alone would not drive Russia from Manchuria and Korea, and that joint operations would be necessary. Consequently, Tokyo's strategy required establishing command of the Yellow Sea and using the navy to support joint operations on the Korean peninsula. Tokyo planned to insert two armies at Inchon, the first of which would capture Seoul, while the second marched north across the Yalu River into Manchuria. The key to this strategy was the destruction of the Russian squadron at Port Arthur, since this "fleet in being" posed a significant threat to Japan's joint operations. By attacking Port Arthur without warning, Japan took a page more from Corbett's book than Mahan's by

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[29] H.W. Brands, *T.R.: The Last Romantic* (New York: Viking, 1997), 531 (During a visit to the White House, the Emperor of Japan personally told Theodore Roosevelt that Japan had limited aims in Northeast Asia, and that once satisfied, it would go no further).

[30] David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie (Contributor), *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887-1914* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 86.

exploiting the advantage of already being in the theater of operations.[31] Tokyo believed a quick strike was necessary, given that its formidable fleet was still numerically inferior to Russia's combined Far Eastern Fleet. Therefore, if Japan could destroy the Port Arthur squadron, the Russians would have only the Vladivostok cruisers in theater.

On paper, it all seemed rather straightforward. However, even the simplest thing in war is difficult.[32] Once the fighting begins, plans often fail to survive the first encounter with the enemy, and Japan's was no exception. Despite giving Russia a "bloody nose," the Port Arthur attack did not deliver a knockout blow, and the Russian squadron continued to threaten Japan's joint operations in Korea. A second torpedo attack and an attempt to seal the harbor with sunken ships at the entrance were also unsuccessful. Frustrated – but unwilling to risk ships he could not replace – Togo chose to blockade Port Arthur instead of pressing the attack. Failing to achieve its decisive victory, Japan embarked upon a prolonged siege of Port Arthur, a type of warfare for which it was unprepared and one that pressured its centers of gravity – manpower and materiel. Tokyo knew it could not afford a long war, but made a costly strategic error in assuming that Port Arthur would fall as quickly as it did during the Sino-Japanese War. Several months and almost 58,000 casualties later, Japan learned that incorrect strategic assumptions in warfare can lead to severe tactical misfortune.

THE YELLOW SEA

The pivotal event of the War occurred in 1904 at the Battle of the Yellow Sea. After seizing the hills surrounding Port Arthur, the Japanese began shelling both fortress and fleet, and the Tsar personally ordered his ships to make for Vladivostok – a task easier said than done.[33] Admiral Vitgeft, commander of the squadron, disagreed with the Tsar's order, since the fortress was not in imminent danger of capture. Nevertheless, on August 10th, the fleet left Port Arthur and steamed southeast.

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[31] The success of the attack on Port Arthur factored into Tokyo's decision to bomb Pearl Harbor in 1941. Thinking that such an attack would work twice, Japan made a strategic blunder in assuming that America would react as Russia did in 1904.
[32] Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 119 (Explaining that "friction" is what separates war in theory from war in reality).
[33] Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise* (New York: Charterhouse, 1974), 325.

Onboard his flagship *Mikasa*, Togo received the message that the Russians were on their way, and he knew that his chance had come. If the Japanese could destroy the Russian squadron, it would help break the siege of Port Arthur and demonstrate to Tokyo the indispensability of Togo's fleet. The Admiral also understood that if the Russians escaped, it might mean the destruction of Vice Admiral Kamimura's Second Division, which Togo dispatched to the Sea of Japan to hunt down the Vladivostok cruisers."[34] The loss of Kamimura's ships would be a disaster, and Togo could not allow it to happen. Although Togo had lost two battleships and could not unreasonably risk his remaining four, he knew that he had to fight.

The battle began in the early afternoon with the fleets exchanging fire at a range of several miles.[35] Vitgeft shifted course several times, however, and the fleets ended up on a parallel course but heading in opposite directions with the Russians moving east and the Japanese moving west. By choosing to fight a long-range action, Togo made a rare tactical error[36] and moved his fleet too far west to overtake the Russians without placing his own ships in grave danger. Togo had to decide whether to pursue the Russians for a "fight to the death," or to chase them back to Port Arthur. He chose the latter, changed course and steamed directly towards the Russian ships. For the next several hours, the fighting continued sporadically as the stokers on both sides worked furiously to give their ships all the speed they could muster.

As sunset approached, the Russians were close to breaking through when "the most critical minute of the war"[37] occurred in the form of two direct hits on the Russian flagship *Tsarevitch*. One of the shells tore through the pilothouse, killing Admiral Vitgeft, disabling the ship's steering and throwing the entire Russian formation into disarray. After a chaotic interval, Admiral Uktomsky reestablished control and ordered the fleet back to Port Arthur. As darkness fell, Japanese torpedo boats continued the attack but

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[34] Corbett, *Maritime Operations in the Russo Japanese War*, Vol 1: 138.
[35] Newton McCully, *The McCully Report: the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905*, Ed. Richard A. von Doenhoff, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1977), 142.
[36] Edwin Falk, *Togo and the Rise of Japanese Sea Power* (New York: Longmans, 1936), 333-34.
[37] Vice Admiral G.A. Ballard, *The Influence of the Sea on the Political History of Japan* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1921), p. 241.

failed to sink any of the fleeing ships, and the squadron returned safely to Port Arthur the following morning.[38] Despite failing to destroy the squadron, the battle was a decisive victory for Japan.[39] First, none of the Russian ships reached Vladivostok and would never make another attempt. Second, every Russian battleship had suffered some damage, and third, Japan had complete control of the Yellow Sea, which meant it could conduct joint operations without harassment and conserve its limited resources.

On August 14th, the ripples of battle spread to the Battle of Ulsan, where Kamimura's ships intercepted the Vladivostok cruisers in the Sea of Japan as they deployed to Port Arthur. The Russians attempted to flee, but the Japanese sank one cruiser and severely damaged the other two, which was a significant loss for Russia. With its three heavy cruisers, armed merchantman and torpedo boats, the squadron had destroyed dozens of transports, including British and German ships carrying food, siege guns and locomotives meant for Port Arthur. In the span of just a few days, Togo's ships had effectively eliminated the combat capability of the Tsar's Far Eastern fleet, and Russia's hope now resided in the Baltic Fleet.

WHY ARE WE HERE?

Clausewitz wrote that no one with common sense should start a war without a defined objective and a plan for attaining it.[40] Nevertheless, no one ever accused Tsar Nicholas II of being a sensible man. Thinking that a war abroad might ease his troubles at home, Nicholas did not have a concrete objective in northeast Asia beyond avoiding expulsion from Port Arthur and Manchuria. Nevertheless, the Tsar believed that victory over the inferior Japanese would be swift and glorious,[41] not withstanding that he and his advisors completely underestimated Japan's resolve and the strategic importance of

[38] Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 333 (The *Tsarevitch* – struck by at least 15 shells – limped to Kiao-chou, where the Japanese interned it for the remainder of the war, along with three Russian cruisers).
[39] Ballard, *The Influence of the Sea on the Political History of Japan*, 244-45.
[40] Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 579.
[41] Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 166 (St. Petersburg was largely indifferent towards the Japanese and saw them as an annoyance, which was unwise, since Japan was completely immersed in Russia's Korean and Manchurian activity).

Korea to Tokyo.[42] Moreover, St. Petersburg erroneously believed that it controlled whether peace or war would occur and never considered that Japan might strike first.[43]

Not surprisingly, Russia based its strategy upon flawed assumptions. In Manchuria, the Russians believed that its relatively small force could hold off the Japanese until reinforcements arrived.[44] At Port Arthur, the Russians assumed that an impenetrable fortress and an invincible fleet rendered an amphibious landing by Japan in the Gulf of Korea impossible.[45] Space and time, however, conspired against these assumptions. Given the distances involved, deploying troops to Manchuria was a daunting task, especially since the principal means of transportation was the Trans-Siberian Railroad, which was very slow to use. Nevertheless, Russia thought it would have plenty of time to mobilize its forces. Assuming command of the sea was equally unrealistic, given the division of the Pacific squadrons and the Baltic Fleet's 15,000-mile separation from the Yellow Sea. Add to Russia's poor strategic assessment St. Petersburg's disdain for the Japanese as warriors, and it is not surprising that the War effort went poorly.

Russia's political structure prevented effective strategy formation. Whereas oligarchs governed Japan and employed a reasoned method of policy formation,[46] Russia was an autocracy under the absolute power of the Tsar, who had few talents but fancied himself an expert in Asian affairs.[47] There was no Prime Minister either to coordinate policy recommendations or to referee disputes between ministers, which meant Nicholas often received conflicting advice from his ministers on the same issue.

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[42] Alexei Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army and the Japanese War: Being Historical and Critical Comments on the Military Policy and Power of Russia and on the Campaign in the Far East*, 2 Vols., Trans. Capt. A.B. Lindsay, Ed. E.D. Swinton (Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1909), Vol. I, 194, 215.
[43] Ibid. 194.
[44] Ibid., 133 (Given the difficulty of sustaining troops in Manchuria, Russia kept only enough troops to contain an enemy, not defeat one, and would not be able to concentrate enough forces quickly enough before the Japanese arrived).
[45] Ibid., 224.
[46] Shumpei Okamoto, *The Japanese Oligarchy and the Russo-Japanese War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 13 (Theoretically, Japanese foreign policy was under the "personal rule of the Emperor, but he rarely exercised his power. In practice, the Emperor delegated his authority to the Genro ("elder statesmen"), the ministers of state, the military leadership and the Privy Council. The most influential of the groups was the Genro, which was extra-constitutional body that advised the Emperor on crucial problems facing the nation, including decisions regarding war and peace).
[47] Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1997), 168.

Instead of crafting a national policy behind which the people could rally, Russia had a parochial one created by an indecisive Tsar with the assistance of corrupt and ineffective advisors.[48] Russia's poor strategy/policy match had major political consequences, since the Russian people were on the brink of revolution even before the War started.

Russia faced significant strategic challenges throughout the War. The remoteness of Korea and Manchuria from St. Petersburg created myriad operational and logistical difficulties. Since supplying by sea was not an option, the only means available was the Trans-Siberian railway. With only a single track stretching over 5,000 miles, the railway was slow, required an enormous amount of maintenance and was vulnerable to guerilla attack. The Japanese made numerous efforts to sabotage the railroad – including the use of local insurgents – but they were mostly unsuccessful, given the extraordinary security measures employed by the Russians.[49] Japan's use of insurgents was rather Corbettian, since it served as a force multiplier and allowed Japan to do more while risking less. Wellington used Spanish insurgents, albeit more effectively, in a similar manner against Napoleon's army during the Peninsular War.[50]

Although Russia entered the War with many disadvantages, it did have some advantages that it failed to exploit. The Far Eastern fleet not only possessed the newest and best ships in the Russian navy, but it was also larger than the entire combined Japanese fleet.[51] Furthermore, Russia could replace lost ships, while Japan could not. Nevertheless, the commanders at Port Arthur, but for Makarov, exhibited "a lack of enterprise and faulty judgment from first to last"[52] by choosing defensive tactics

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[48] Sergei Witte, the Russian Finance Minister, was the most talented of the Tsar's advisors and often disagreed with Nicholas about the War.

[49] McCully, *The McCully Report*, 21-22. The Russians employed roughly 35,000 soldiers east of Lake Baikal to guard the railroad, and had agents posted along the trade routes that reported the slightest suspicious activity. Bridges were specially guarded and there were constant foot and horse patrols. Any person found traveling outside of their tightly controlled district was considered a suspect and subject to severe discipline.

[50] Andrew Roberts, *Napoleon and Wellington* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 54 (The presence of Spanish partisans disrupted Napoleon's lines of communication and made it virtually impossible for him to conduct combined operations against the British).

[51] Evans and Peattie, *Kaigun*, 92.

[52] Ballard, *The Influence of the Sea on the Political History of Japan*, 202.

that ceded the initiative, created no strategic benefit and allowed the Togo's fleet to establish strong positions. St. Petersburg evidently intended to lengthen the War and make Japan use its limited resources by fortifying Port Arthur for a lengthy siege and awaiting the arrival of the Baltic fleet.[53] If the commanders at Port Arthur knew of the Baltic Fleet's condition, however, they would not have placed much hope in its arrival.

A LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

The Baltic Fleet that deployed for northeast Asia in October of 1904 was an odd collection of new ships too complicated for their crews to operate and old ships in desperate need of repair. Despite its impressive appearance, the fleet was unprepared for either deployment or battle, given the unreliability of its ships and the fact that its crews consisted largely of inexperienced recruits, as well as "chronic troublemakers, suspected revolutionaries, anarchists and other undesirables" whom St. Petersburg sought to rid itself of by sending half way around the world.[54]

Admiral Rozhestvensky, the fleet's commander, was a talented and intimidating officer who had little desire to lead what he described as a "miserable fleet" on an apparent suicide mission.[55] Although the Tsar ordered the Baltic Fleet to deploy in April, its ships and crews were in such poor condition that it took almost six months to depart, and Rozhestvensky had no objection to the delay. He believed that Port Arthur was beyond saving and wanted to arrive at Vladivostok in March when the port would be ice-free.[56]

Sending only a few ships through the Suez Canal, the fleet endured a 15,000-mile journey around the Cape of Good Hope, with heat and sickness taking a terrible toll on the crews. Lacking forward bases for refueling, Russia had contracted with a German shipping company to deliver coal at selected ports, which placed the fleet at the

[53] W.D. Bird, Lectures on the Strategy of the Russo-Japanese War (London: Hugh Rees, 1911), 24.
[54] Spector, *At War At Sea*, 11.
[55] Pleshakov, *The Tsar's Last Armada*, 113.
[56] Ibid., 63.

mercy of transports that often broke down.[57] Despite contracting for coal, however, Russian ships still had to store massive amounts, which made them slower, less maneuverable and prone to capsizing.[58] The ships also suffered shortages of soft water for their boilers and oil for their engines.

The two great fleets met at Tsushima on May 27, 1905. Determined to "cross the T" and not repeat his mistake in the Yellow Sea, Togo executed a daring u-turn of his fleet that brought it onto a parallel and slightly converging course with the Russians.[59] Had Rozhestvensky turned to port, he might have slipped behind Togo's fleet as it raced to cross in front of him. However, the Russians continued on their course and attempted to form a single column, which would prove disastrous. Some of the Russian fleet actually had to stop their engines to avoid colliding, and the entire formation became "a mob" according to Admiral Nebogatov.[60]

For the first 10 minutes of battle, the Russians actually shot better than the Japanese and hit the *Mikasa* a dozen times – albeit without inflicting serious injury. As the range between the fleets closed, however, the Japanese inflicted heavy damage and the flagship *Suvaroff* and battleship *Oslyaba* were soon in flames. With Rozhestvensky incapacitated by a head wound, Admiral Nebogatov regrouped the column and turned it north towards Vladivostok, while using the thickening fog and smoke from the burning ships as cover. Togo's fleet reestablished contact around six in the evening and within an hour sank the battleships *Alexander* and *Suvaroff* and blew up the *Borodino*. As darkness fell, Togo turned the battle over to his cruisers and torpedo boats, which sank two battleships during the night. Japanese cruisers located Admiral Nebogatov's remaining ships the following morning, but the Admiral surrendered rather than see his crews slaughtered.

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[57] Ibid., 122.
[58] N.K. Klado, *The Russian Navy in the Russo-Japanese War*, Trans. L.J.H. Dickinson. (London: Hurst and Blackett, Ltd., 1905) 41 (It took roughly 17,000 tons of coal for the fleet to travel 1,000 miles. Consequently, to make its voyage to Vladivostok, the fleet would require the staggering amount of at least 25,000,000 tons).
[59] Spector, *At War At Sea*, 15.
[60] Richard Hough, *The Fleet That Had to Die* (New York: Viking, 1958), 163.

Of the 38 ships in the Russian fleet, Togo captured or destroyed 31 of them and lost none of his own. The casualty differential was even more staggering – Japan lost 117, while the Russians lost 5,000, had 6.000 captured and an unknown number wounded.[61] Corbett described Tsushima as "the most decisive and complete naval victory in history."[62] Indeed, the annihilation was complete and extinguished all hope of a Russian victory.[63] With the land campaign in Manchuria deadlocked, only a decisive victory at sea by Russia could have altered the strategic situation.[64] With victory unattainable, the Tsar accepted President Roosevelt's offer to mediate the surrender and sent Witte to the United States to negotiate the best terms he could.

Tsushima not only ended the War, but also sent shock waves around the world. President Theodore Roosevelt expressed what many thought when he said that, "no one anticipated that [the battle] would be a rout and a slaughter rather than a fight."[65] Britain, whose very existence depended upon the Royal Navy, was profoundly discomfited to see that a nation could lose its fleet and a war in the course of an afternoon.[66] The German Kaiser, who also possessed a large fleet, was equally perturbed. The battle also impacted naval strategy by making the great powers reluctant to risk their fleets in single engagements. This reticence extended into World War I, where the German and British fleets met only once at Jutland.[67]

FIRE IN THE BELLY

According to Corbett, the key question in waging war is the intensity and "passion" with which the nation's spirit is absorbed in the objective,[68] which is a restatement of Clausewitz's theory that the force a nation uses in war is a combination

[61] Spector, *At War At Sea*, 21.
[62] Corbett, *Maritime Operations in the Russo-Japanese War*, Vol.. 2: 333.
[63] Ballard, *The Influence of the Sea on the Political History of Japan*, 283.
[64] Ibid., 284.
[65] Brands, *T.R: The Last Romantic*, 533.
[66] Robert Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: Dell, 1976), 95.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Corbett, *Classics of Sea Power*, 42.

of its will multiplied by its means.[69] The people's passion also represents one third of the Clausewitzian "Trinity," with the other two elements being "chance," as represented by the military, and "reason," which is the government. Theoretically, the three sides exist discreetly, but in practice they are interrelated and in perpetual tension, which has major implications for all aspects of strategy formation.[70]

By any measure, Japan's trinity was extremely strong. First, its oligarchical system brought a judicious process to policy and strategy formation; second, the Japanese were a very nationalistic people who saw the War as a struggle for their country's existence and were unwavering in their support of the military and the government, and last, Japan's military – the best in Asia – was disciplined, modern, well trained and fanatically loyal to both Emperor
and cause.

In contrast, Russia's trinity was a shambles. There were no checks and balances to prevent or undo the government's poor strategic decisions, and the Russian military was poorly trained, ill equipped and unprepared for war. Moreover, a corrupt and Byzantine bureaucracy undermined the fleet's readiness and a lack of money for training often kept ships in port. The need for St. Petersburg's approval regarding the smallest matters repressed strategic and tactical initiative, and relations between officers and their crews ran the gamut from resentful and suspicious to near mutinous.[71] Worst of all, the mood of the people ran more to pre-revolutionary discontent and bitterness than patriotism.

As the war went from bad to worse, it became apparent that the government could not protect the national interest and many considered it more patriotic to support the opposition than the actual government.[72] Underground political movements like the Bolsheviks gained influence and infiltrated the military, and by July 1904, the

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[69] Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 77.
[70] Ibid., 89 (see also, Michael Handel, *Masters of War*, 3d ed., rev. and enl. (London: Brasseys, 2001), 102-111).
[71] Spector, *At War At Sea*, 11.
[72] Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 170.

government was so unpopular that the assassination of the Minister of the Interior elicited little public regret in St. Petersburg and outright celebration in Poland. Add to this combustible mix Tolstoy's description of Russia as a nation that was "drinking itself to death," and it is apparent that the country was crumbling under extraordinary social and political pressures.

ONE HAND WASHES THE OTHER

Although Mahan wrote that a fleet should never divide itself into fractions "individually smaller than an individual enemy,"[73] he also wrote that navies should apply the principle of concentration in both letter and spirit with the "essential underlying idea [being] that of mutual support."[74] Ergo, no matter how a fleet distributed itself, if the parts were supporting each other and could mass quickly, then concentration existed, and "[a] very considerable separation in space may be consistent with . . . mutual support."[75] Applying Mahan's "mutual support" theory, the divided Russian squadrons in the Far East were not as poorly concentrated as they seemed, since the presence of the Vladivostok cruisers prompted Togo to send Kamimura's ships to the Sea of Japan and prevented full concentration of the fleet against Port Arthur.

Regarding commerce raiding, Mahan wrote that it should not be the primary form of warfare because "[i]t is not the taking of individual ships or convoys, be they few or many, that strikes down the money power of a nation; it is the possession of that overbearing power on the sea which drives the enemy's flag from it. . . [T]his overbearing power can only be exercised by great navies . . ."[76] In Mahan's opinion, commerce raiding could no more substitute for the fleet than the militia could substitute for the regular army.[77] He did not totally disregard raiding, however, and thought it could be effective if supported by a large fleet that caused ". . . a dispersion of the

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[73] A.T. Mahan, *Retrospect,* 167.
[74] Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy*, 76 (citing A.T. Mahan, *Naval Strategy* (Boston: Little Brown, 1911), 74-75).
[75] Ibid.
[76] A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1918), 138.
[77] Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy*, 47 (citing A.T. Mahan, *Sea Power in Its Relations to the War of 1812*, 2 Vols, (Boston: Little Brown, 1905) Vol.. 1: 5).

superior force, [such] that [the enemy] may be led to expose detachments to attack by greater numbers. . ."[78] Moreover, Mahan noted that while significant distances between ports were disadvantageous for regular naval operations – where the essence was concentration – those same distances were advantageous for commerce raiding – where diffusion of effort was the rule.[79] In this sense, the physical separation between Vladivostok and Port Arthur worked to the Russian's advantage, since the raiders were far more effective attacking Japan's supply lines than they would have been bottled up in Port Arthur.

The presence of the Vladivostok squadron also lengthened the siege of Port Arthur, cost Japan the lives of many soldiers and forced the diversion of heavy artillery intended for the siege of Port Arthur. Although the prolonged land campaign gave Russia additional time to develop its naval strength, the fleet did not translate the opportunity into tactical success.[80] The squadron had the ships to strike at Togo, yet it took repeated artillery shelling – and a direct order from the Tsar – to drive the fleet from Port Arthur and then only for the purpose of fleeing to Vladivostok.

The squadron commanders at Port Arthur, including Makarov, did not grasp the strategic threat posed to Togo's fleet by the presence of the Vladivostok cruisers, and if they had, they might have tried more aggressively to conduct operations with both squadrons. Only Togo appeared to understand the threat and divided his fleet to address it. In hindsight, Russia's maritime campaign demonstrated that simply having a large navy does not make a nation a maritime power. Not to diminish Japan's victory, but it is easier to succeed when your opponent suffers strategic and tactical myopia.

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[78] Ibid., 46 (citing Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little Brown, 1982), Vol. 1: 180).
[79] A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, 31.
[80] A.T. Mahan, *Retrospect*, 145.

CONCLUSION

Corbett's writings are useful in analyzing the War because they apply Clausewitz to the maritime theater and introduce to naval strategy the concepts of limited war, the strategic defensive and the effectiveness of joint operations. Using Corbett's analytical framework, it is apparent that Japan maximized its advantages and leveraged its sea power extremely well, which enabled Tokyo to pursue its political objective with limited means at its disposal.

Although Mahan offers useful insights regarding the War, his weakness lies in not appreciating joint operations and their potential impact upon maritime strategy, which is a significant theoretical "blind spot", since Japan's entire strategy hinged upon the use of joint operations after establishing command of the sea. It is possible that Mahan's antipathy towards joint operations resulted from his American perspective on naval strategy, which did not emphasize joint operations. To his credit, however, Mahan did change his thinking regarding the existence of navies given the outcome of the War. Whereas he had previously written that "navies depend upon maritime commerce as the cause and justification of their existence," he later wrote that "a navy may be necessary where there is no shipping . . . [M]ore and more it becomes clear, that the function of navies is distinctly military and international, whatever their historical origin in particular cases."[81]

Regardless of theories about concentration and limited war, however, at the end of the day Japan won the War because its admirals and crews – who were more experienced, better trained and "never left their ships"[82] – simply outfought their Russian

[81] Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy*, 81 (citing A.T. Mahan, *Naval Strategy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1911), 445-6.
[82] Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army and the Japanese War*, Vol 1: 241.

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counterparts. Nevertheless, Japan's tactical victories would not have been strategically significant without a well-matched strategy and policy. Tokyo understood that victory hinged not upon defeating Russia in a worldwide conflict, but rather only in Northeast Asia. To the world's astonishment, Japan played David to Russia's Goliath and established itself as a legitimate power destined to influence affairs in Asia and beyond for decades to come.

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