

Russia at War, 1914-1917

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Russian State and Society,
1861-1917

Lecture Outline

- War Overview
- War Logistics
- The Army
- Population movement
- Societal Response



Why did the war pose problems for the Russian Empire?
What challenges were distinct from other combatants?

Overview

- Russia mobilised with speed, but 1914 saw succession of military disasters:
 - Total of 1.8 million Russian soldiers lost in 1914 alone
 - Standing army all but destroyed, and Russia left relying on reserves
- Lack of coherent command
- Incompetence among senior military figures
 - Total incomprehension of modern war methods
- Massive defeats and retreats in 1915
 - Nicholas II takes personal command in August 1915
- Popular suspicion of treason on high

Source ONE

Circular From: Chief of Staff of the Army on the Southwestern Front (29 June 1915)

- Recently cases of venereal disease, especially syphilis, amongst the troops have been much more frequent. There is evidence to suggest that a German-Jewish organisation spends quite a considerable amount on hiring syphilitic women to lure officers and infect them with syphilis.
- We recognise that this matter is urgent and the strongest and harshest possible measures are required to stop this phenomenon. The Supreme Commander of the Army orders local authorities in large centres such as Warsaw, Vilnius and Kiev to increase the police surveillance of hotels, lodging houses and suspicious private apartments. They should mercilessly issue administrative fines and long prison sentences for landlords for allowing lewdness in their properties. Women found to have venereal disease will be forced into medical institutions for treatment and afterwards, sent to remote provinces to be incarcerated in prison. When women belong to a gang, they will be subject to martial law and corporal punishment.

SOURCE TWO

Letter From: Chief of Staff for the Second Army, Quartermaster General of the Intelligence Department to Warsaw Chief of Police (24 June 1915)

- **Secret**
- Information made available to the army headquarters has revealed that currently in Warsaw, there are still many German prostitutes who are likely to be involved in some form of military espionage.
- We draw your attention to the Warsaw hotels 'Poloniia' and 'Narodnaia' where at this time the orchestras and entire administration consist exclusively of Austrian-Germans and Jews, some of whom are former Austrian officers (such as Berhgauz and Lerch). They are undoubtedly involved in espionage.
- The Commander of the Army orders the immediately search and cleansing of Warsaw of all suspicious elements. Even in cases where there is a lack of incriminating material, these individuals must be sent to the remote provinces of Russia.

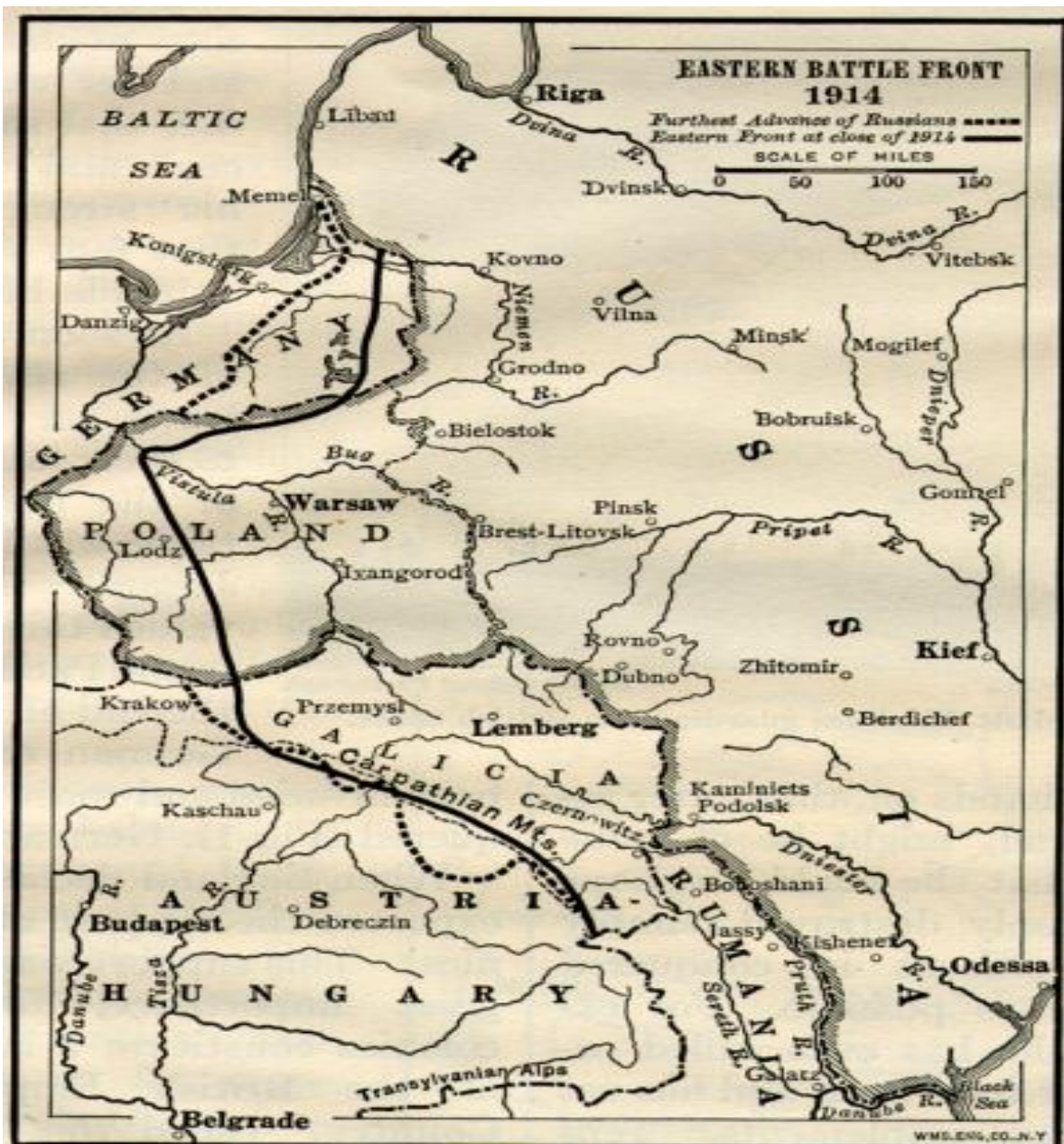
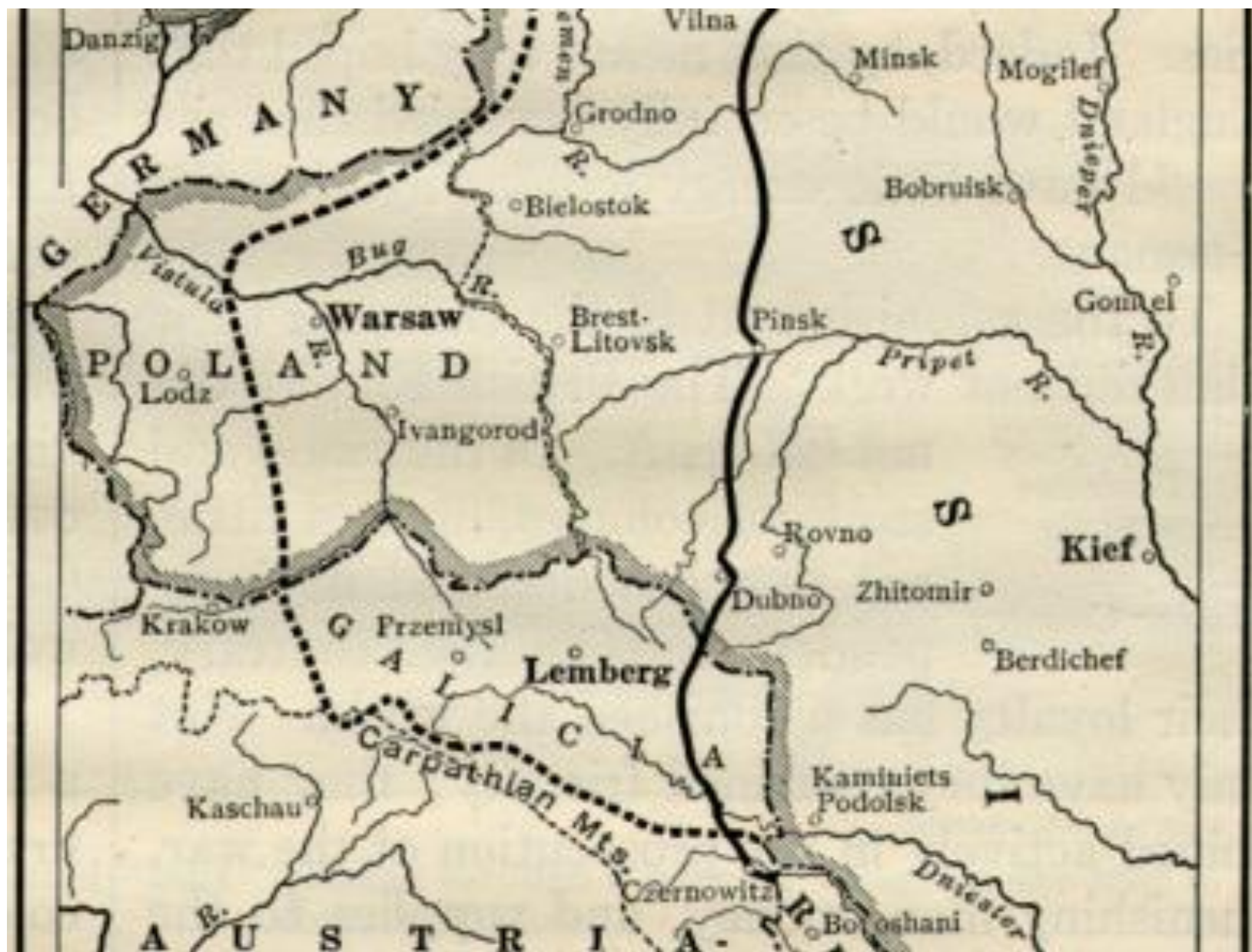


FIG. 13.





Logistics- Trade



Total Trade Blockade

No ice free sea port: no rail link
to Murmansk till 1915

All foreign trade had to go
through Vladivostok

Autumn 1914: exports fell by
99%, and imports by 97.5%

All domestic industry converted
to military production

Logistics- Communications

- Railway network
 - Despite expansion since 1880's, was overstrained by troop and supply transportation
 - Reliance on imported rolling stock
- Fuel Shortage
 - Pre-war, coal imported from England
 - Donets basin coal used, but placed further strain on rail network
- No telephone lines, few telegraphs
 - Communications seriously impeded

Logistics- Food Supply

Breakdown between Town and country

- Peasants unable to buy consumer goods, so withdraw from cash economy
- Amount of land under plough reduced
- Peasants don't sell grain, but eat more, feed animals better, and brew *samogon*

Army consumed 17 million tons of grain, 2/3 of total pre-war consumption

Rising sense of crisis in towns and some areas of countryside

Logistics- Materials

- Supply system in rear unable to cope
 - No contingency plans had been made for prolonged war
- Transport network in disarray
 - Movement of men, food, clothing, munitions, medical supplies
- Munitions shortages acute
- Winter clothing and boots shortage





The Russian Army

- More than FIFTEEN MILLION men mobilised
 - Of these, SEVEN MILLION were killed, wounded or captured
 - Casualties exceptionally high among officers
- Mobilisation of reserves pulled in men over 40 and boys of 18.
 - Skeletal training- no 'militarisation'?

For every man, a woman grieves

- Cost to the state of paying allowances to soldiers' wives was enormous:
 - 25 million receive state allowance in 1916
 - Cost 1914-January 1917: 2 billion roubles (7% of Russia's total military expenditure)
- Conscription of males under age of 55 leaves agriculture, Russia's mainstay, in hands of women and elderly
 - Sown area in Nizhegorodskaja down by 50%
 - 20% of households without sown land
- Unenviable plight of numerous invalids

Population Dislocation

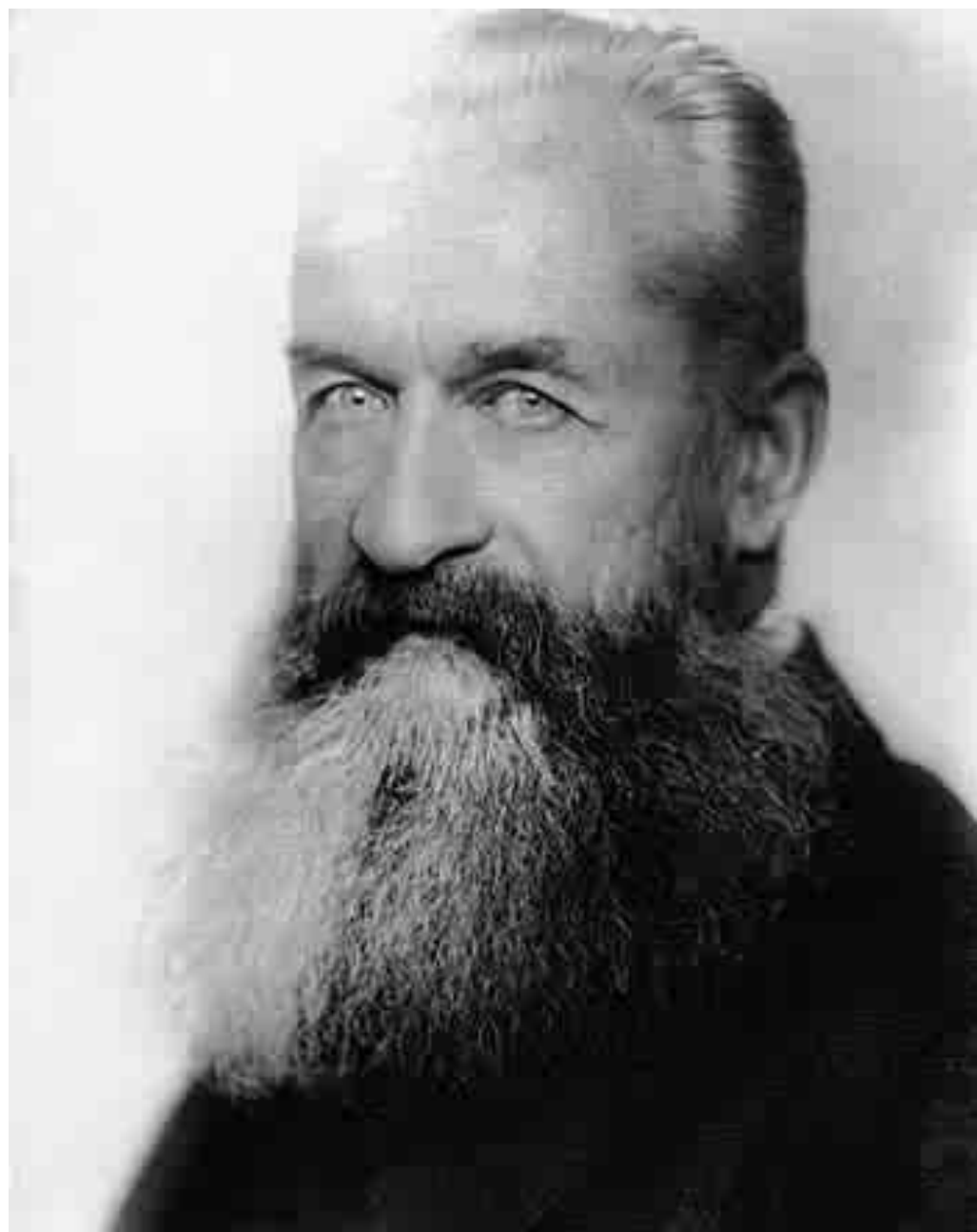
- 12 military districts, city based garrisons
 - Penza- town pop. 260,000, garrison 70,000
 - Tambov- town pop. 296,000, garrison 100,000
- Massive evacuee influx, into central Volga region especially
 - 53,000 in Nizhegorodskaja alone
- Evacuated factories, again in Volga regions
- Some Implications:
 - Accusations of hooliganism and Black marketeering
 - Extra pressure on local resources
 - Exposure to outside cultures, beliefs, grievances



SOURCE THREE

Excerpt from soldier's letter.

- 'Women have really become spoiled. It is terrible what is currently happening in the nation. At the end of the war, the half of soldiers who will return will not find their honest wives. It is terrible. Mothers abandon their young children and while their husbands shed blood, they walk with their lovers. A terrible time has come. People have forgotten God and lost their consciences.' (10 December 1916)



Educated Society Responds

- Zemstvo Union, headed by Prince Lvov
- Virtually ran military supply campaign
 - Initiated field hospitals, refugee assistance, medical units, purchase of military supplies, support to soldiers' families
 - Labour brigades of 80,000 men, formed to dig trenches and bury dead
 - Financed by State to tune of 2 billion roubles by 1916
- State takes suspicious and reluctant view of Union
 - Even moderates like Lvov forced into opposition

War Industries Committees (WIC)

- Set up by Moscow industrialists to win war contracts, and break monopoly of big Petrograd factories
- Close connections with zemstvo union and Duma; formed powerful alliance
- All members of central committee liberal critics of autocracy
 - Sought greater public and Duma involvement in war effort
 - Leading members, including Guchkov, imprisoned



Tsarina Alexandra working as scrub nurse, Tsarskoye Selo hospital, 1914



The State Duma #1

- Duma's initial *union sacree*, gesture of solidarity with government
 - Duma members soon forced into opposition by military incompetence
 - Sukhomlinov, disgraced War Minister, and other unpopular ministers forced out of office in 1915
- Duma recalled on 19 July 1915
 - Progressive bloc called for responsible ministry
 - Their cause joined by ministers themselves
 - Tsar resisted, dissolved the Duma on 2 September

The State Duma #2

- Duma Liberals unwilling to provoke public disorder
 - But their critique of government had massive impact:

‘When the Duma keeps everlastingly insisting that the rear must be organised for a successful struggle, the Government persists in claiming that organising the country means organising a revolution, and deliberately prefers chaos and disorganisation. What is it, stupidity or treason?’

(Miliukov’s speech to the State Duma, November 14 1916)

Popular attitudes to the war

- Difficult to judge popular responses to war
 - Response to mobilisation?
 - Letters and petitions?
 - Participation in demonstrations?
- War an important test and regulator of citizenship
 - Did Russians feel themselves to be Russian?
 - Were they willing to sacrifice for the state?
 - Did they show 'patriotism'?