

ROYALTY AND
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1890-1914

RODERICK R. MCLEAN



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CHAPTER I

The Kaiser and the Tsar: German–Russian dynastic relations, 1888–1914

In the closing stages of the July crisis of 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II appealed to Tsar Nicholas II not to intervene on the side of Serbia. In doing so, he drew attention to the need for all monarchs to show solidarity against those who had been responsible for the murder of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife.¹ This plea to the Tsar ultimately failed to fulfil its object, of preventing Russia from entering the war,² and Wilhelm blamed Nicholas II's 'frivolity and weakness'³ for precipitating the escalation of a Balkan dispute between Austria and Serbia into a European conflict. The inability of the Kaiser to persuade the Tsar to join him in defending the monarchical principle against Serbia underlined the failure of the *Russlandpolitik* pursued by Germany since Nicholas II's accession in 1894, a policy which had been over-reliant on the maintenance of good dynastic relations as a means of solidifying the ties between the *Kaiserreich* and the Tsarist empire. The central aim of the strategy had been, at least until 1906, the re-establishment of the alliance between the two countries, which had come to an end in 1890 after Wilhelm II's refusal, on the advice of the chancellor, General Leo von Caprivi, and the German foreign office, to renew the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. A close study of the development of the relationship between the Kaiser and the Tsar helps to explain, first, the failure to resurrect an alliance between the two powers and, secondly, the growing antagonism between the two emperors in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War, which

¹ Wilhelm II's comments on Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg to Wilhelm II, 29 July 1914, GStA Merseburg, HA Rep. 53 J Lit. B Nr 7.

² Dominic C. B. Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (London, 1983), pp. 141–51; D. W. Spring, 'Russia and the Coming of War', in *The Coming of the First World War*, ed. R. J. W. Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (Oxford, 1988), pp. 57–86; Keith Neilson, 'Russia', in *Decisions for War, 1914*, ed. Keith M. Wilson (London, 1995), pp. 97–120.

³ Wilhelm II's comment on Pourtalès to Bethmann Hollweg, 29 July 1914. Imanuel Geiss (ed.), *July 1914. The Outbreak of the First World War. Selected Documents*, English translation (London, 1967), no. 135, p. 294.

meant that when the decisive moment came, in July 1914, good-will between them had been exhausted, and neither monarch was prepared to prevent a conflict which was to result in the collapse of both their thrones, the ignominious flight into exile of the Kaiser, and the murder of the Tsar and his family by the Bolsheviks.

The accession of Nicholas II, at the young age of twenty-six, in 1894 represented both a challenge and an opportunity for those in Berlin who wished to see a renewal of close ties between Germany and Russia. The young Tsar had had a sheltered upbringing, a rather narrow education, and had been given little chance to participate in affairs of state prior to his accession.⁴ Alexander III, Nicholas's father, was largely responsible for this situation. Sergei Witte, who served both Alexander and Nicholas as minister of finance, recalled that when he suggested appointing the Tsarevitch as chairman of a government committee, in 1891, the Tsar replied, 'He is nothing but a boy, whose judgements are childish.'⁵ Alexander showed his contempt for his son on one occasion by pelting him with bread-balls, and he was inclined to depict Nicholas as a 'girlie', with a puerile personality and ideas, entirely unfit for the duties that were awaiting him.⁶ Such behaviour was not designed to inspire confidence and it is hardly surprising that when his father died, Nicholas despaired of his own ability to assume the responsibilities of emperor.⁷ Yet the new Tsar also had many fine qualities. He was not unintelligent, speaking five languages with varying degrees of fluency, and even Witte, no admirer of Nicholas II, conceded that he had a quick mind and learned easily.⁸ He also had a courteous nature, being described by one relative as 'exasperatingly polite', a characteristic which was often mistaken for deviousness, not least by Wilhelm II.⁹

Despite the new Tsar's youth and inexperience in affairs of state, the German chargé d'affaires in St Petersburg, Count Rex, reported that the members of Nicholas's entourage were convinced that he had a

⁴ Dominic C. B. Lieven, *Nicholas II, Emperor of all the Russias* (London, 1993), pp. 22–43; Marc Ferro, *Nicholas II, the Last of the Tsars*, English translation (London, 1991), pp. 7–28; Andrew M. Verner, *The Crisis of the Russian Autocracy: Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution* (Princeton, 1990), pp. 7–44.

⁵ Sidney Harcave (ed.), *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, English translation (New York and London, 1990), p. 125; cf. Ian Vorres, *The Last Grand-Duchess: Her Imperial Highness Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, 1882–1960* (London, 1964), p. 67.

⁶ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution, 1899–1919* (London, 1990), p. 58.

⁷ Grand Duke Alexander of Russia, *Once a Grand Duke* (New York, 1932), p. 169.

⁸ Harcave, *Witte*, p. 126.

⁹ Grand Duke Alexander, *Once a Grand Duke*, pp. 178–80; note by Wilhelm II, 28 March 1927 GStA Berlin BPH 53/165.

strong will, and that his mild manner disguised a firmness of purpose. Rex suggested that any improvement in relations between Russia and Germany would have to be achieved gradually, and at the dynastic level.¹⁰ The Kaiser appeared to agree that a cautious policy would be the best one to adopt with the new Tsar, but was nevertheless hopeful of an improvement in Germany's relations with Russia.¹¹

The desire, shared by the Kaiser and his chancellor, Chlodwig Prince zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, to make Nicholas II's accession the occasion for a new beginning in Russo-German relations could not obscure the fact that formidable obstacles stood in the way of this aim. The reign of Alexander III had seen a rapid deterioration in relations between the two countries, and by 1894 those hostile to Germany predominated at the Russian court, in the Russian army and among the Romanov family.¹² During the 1880s, clashes of interest between the Tsarist empire and Germany's other ally, Austria, in the Balkans, and the rise of a new virulent strain of Russian nationalism, had made it increasingly difficult for Bismarck to preserve the diplomatic link with St Petersburg.¹³ Wilhelm II's accession as Kaiser in 1888 had played a role in speeding up the disintegration of the alliance.

Wilhelm had first been sent on a mission to Alexander III in May 1884. On that occasion, his manner had pleased the Tsar, and earned the approval of Bismarck.¹⁴ The visit made a profound effect on Wilhelm. He came to see Alexander III as a role model, and, after the latter's death, he declared to Witte that the Tsar had been 'truly an autocrat and an emperor'.¹⁵ On his return to Germany, Wilhelm initiated a secret correspondence with the Tsar, in which he tried to incite Alexander against England, the British royal family and even against his own parents, Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm and Crown Princess Victoria of Prussia. These letters, written without the knowledge of Bismarck, came close to provoking a war between Britain and

¹⁰ Note by Graf Rex, December 1894 *GP*, ix, no. 2308, pp. 337–9.

¹¹ Hohenlohe, journal entry, 14 December 1894, Karl Alexander von Müller (ed.), *Fürst Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Denkwürdigkeiten der Reichskanzlerzeit* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1931), p. 24.

¹² Note by Graf Rex, December 1894, *GP*, ix, no. 2308, pp. 337–41.

¹³ George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875–1890* (Princeton, 1979); A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918* (London, 1954), pp. 255–324.

¹⁴ Otto Fürst von Bismarck to Prince Wilhelm of Prussia, 23 May 1884, GStA Berlin BPH 53/133.

¹⁵ Abraham Yarmolinsky (ed.), *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, English translation (Garden City, NY, 1921), pp. 402–3; cf. John C. G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II.: Die Jugend des Kaisers, 1859–1888* (Munich, 1993), pp. 432–9.

Russia,¹⁶ but the Tsar initially welcomed them, seeing Wilhelm as a political ally in Berlin.¹⁷ However, the Tsar's favourable opinion of Wilhelm seems to have been undermined during a visit paid by the latter to Russia in 1886, and by the time of Alexander III's own visit to Germany, the following year, there was a noticeable frostiness to the meeting between them.¹⁸ Even before this encounter, Wilhelm had turned against the Tsar and become a supporter of the 'preventive war' strategy, advocated by General Alfred Count von Waldersee as a means of crushing Russia before she had a chance to attack the *Kaiserreich*.¹⁹

Thus, by the time of Wilhelm's accession, in 1888, his relationship with Alexander III, which had started so promisingly, had become one characterised by growing personal and political alienation. Alexander III did not have the feelings of respect for the new Kaiser which he had had for the latter's grandfather, Kaiser Wilhelm I. Therefore his attachment to the alliance with Germany became weaker, and he became more willing to contemplate a break with Berlin.²⁰ The Tsar seems to have been irritated by the arrogant behaviour which Wilhelm displayed during a visit to St Petersburg in 1888,²¹ and by the time of his own return visit to Berlin, in October 1889, Alexander's growing distaste for Wilhelm II and Germany was noted by several observers.²² The Tsar's suspicion of German foreign policy played a role in his behaviour. He believed that the Kaiser had formed an alliance with England, while visiting Queen Victoria the previous summer, and he also suspected that the Germans were planning to sign a treaty with Turkey directed against Russia.²³ The Kaiser's domestic policies were also arousing Alexander III's suspicion. Wilhelm's attempts to conciliate the working classes were disapproved of by the reactionary Tsar and had become, by February 1890, according to a German diplomat 'a new factor impeding

¹⁶ Röhl, *Jugend des Kaisers*, pp. 440–5; Lamar J. R. Cecil, 'William II and his Russian "Colleagues"', in *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890–1945*, ed. Carol Fink et al., (Norman, OK, and London, 1985), pp. 105–6.

¹⁷ Alexander III to Prince Wilhelm of Prussia, 7/19 May 1885, GStA Merseburg HA Rep. 53J Lit. R Nr 6.

¹⁸ Röhl, *Jugend des Kaisers*, pp. 580–4, 739–42; Mathilde Gräfin von Keller, *Vierzig Jahre im Dienst der Kaiserin: Ein Kulturbild aus den Jahren 1881–1921* (Leipzig, 1935), diary entry, 18 November 1887, p. 65.

¹⁹ Röhl, *Jugend des Kaisers*, ch. 22; Cecil, 'William II', p. 107.

²⁰ Kennan, *Bismarck's European Order*, pp. 367–72.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 370–71; Cecil, 'William II', p. 106.

²² Kennan, *Bismarck's European Order*, p. 398; Keller, *Vierzig Jahre*, diary entry, 15 October 1889, p. 105; memorandum by Ludwig Raschdau, Germany's relationship with Russia, 15 July 1890, GStA Merseburg HA Rep. 53 E 1: Russland 1, pp. 57–9.

²³ Cecil, 'William II', p. 109.

the re-establishment of really intimate relations between Russia and ourselves'.²⁴

The dismissal of Bismarck as chancellor in March 1890 had a damaging effect on relations between Russia and Germany, for it was followed by the decision of the German government not to renew the Reinsurance Treaty, which the chancellor had made with Russia in 1887. There was a general feeling in the *Wilhelmstrasse* that the treaty had failed to prevent a deterioration in relations between the two empires, and that it was in conflict with Germany's treaty obligations towards Austria.²⁵ The cancellation of the treaty met with conflicting reactions in St Petersburg. The Russian foreign minister, N. K. Giers, bemoaned its passing and pointed out the advantages which it had possessed, notably in allowing the Tsar to ignore the loud, anti-German, voices of the slavophiles and chauvinistic generals, and in ensuring that Russia would remain neutral in the event of a Franco-German war.²⁶ Alexander III, while accepting the Kaiser's assurances that Bismarck's dismissal and the end of the alliance would make no differences to German–Russian relations,²⁷ was far from saddened by the German government's decision as his own attitude towards the Reinsurance Treaty had been lukewarm from the first.²⁸

The Kaiser believed that the end of the alliance was free from political dangers. Attachment to the monarchical principle would prevent Alexander III from seeking an understanding with the French republic and, in any case, Russia was too weak internally to contemplate an attack on Germany.²⁹ The Tsar, however, did not trust Wilhelm and the removal of Bismarck had increased his animosity towards Germany, for he was also suspicious of the new chancellor, General Leo von Caprivi. Alexander avoided Berlin when travelling back from Denmark in the summer of 1890, and later in the same year he treated Wilhelm rudely during a visit which the latter paid to Russia. In the following year, the renewal of the Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria and Italy caused Alexander considerable alarm and he initiated moves towards a rapprochement with France. This resulted in a visit by a

²⁴ Friedrich von Pourtalès to Friedrich von Holstein, 22 February 1890, *HP*, III, p. 327.

²⁵ Memorandum by Raschdau, 15 July 1890. GStA Merseburg HA Rep. 53 E I: Russland I, p. 60. Cecil, 'William II', pp. 109–10; Kennan, *Bismarck's European Order*, pp. 398–410.

²⁶ Schweinitz to Caprivi, 3 April 1890, *GP*, VII, no. 1370, pp. 11–15.

²⁷ Schweinitz to Wilhelm II, 3 April 1890, *ibid.*, no. 1371, pp. 15–17.

²⁸ Kennan, *Bismarck's European Order*, p. 409.

²⁹ Wilhelm II's comments on Münster to Caprivi, 4 January 1891, *GP*, VII, no. 1492, pp. 195–6; Cecil, 'William II', p. 110.

French naval squadron to Kronstadt, near St Petersburg, in July 1891, which awakened fears in Berlin that Alexander would give in to pressure from his people for an alliance with the French republic.³⁰ The personal relationship between the two Emperors had by this stage deteriorated irreparably.³¹ In consequence of this, and the growing tension in German–Russian relations, the Tsar took the initiative in opening negotiations with Paris. These were to culminate in the signing of the Franco-Russian alliance in January 1894.³²

Thus, in foreign policy terms, Nicholas II was bequeathed a pro-French and anti-German legacy by his father. The new Tsar was at pains to reassure the French that he wished to preserve Russia's alliance with Paris.³³ Nicholas's commitment to France never wavered, and it was to be the major obstacle to all attempts made by the Kaiser to bring about a *rapprochement* with St Petersburg. It was reinforced by many of his relatives, the most influential being, at least in the first years of his reign, his mother, the Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna. She had been born as Princess Dagmar of Denmark and had married Alexander III in 1866. The marriage had clear political overtones. She was the daughter of King Christian IX and Queen Louise, both of whom had strong grievances against Prussia, which had seized the formerly Danish possessions of Schleswig and Holstein in 1864.³⁴ Marie Feodorovna had inherited her mother's vehement anti-Prussian feelings, and although her influence over Alexander III had been limited, she had encouraged her husband's suspicions of Germany.³⁵ The outbreak of war in 1914 allowed her to expose her contempt for the Germans more openly. 'I have hated Germany for 50 years,' she declared, 'but now I hate it more than ever'.³⁶

³⁰ Cecil, 'William II', pp. 111–13; Alfred von Bülow to Caprivi, 30 July 1891 and Schweinitz to Caprivi, 5 August 1891, *GP*, VII, nos. 1502 and 1504, pp. 207–10, 211–15; report by the military attaché in Vienna Lieutenant-Colonel von Deines, 4 November 1891, *GP*, VII, no. 1511, pp. 225–6.

³¹ Herbetto to Ribot, 10 December 1891 *DDF*, 1st series, IX, no. 101, pp. 158–9.

³² Cf. George F. Kennan, *The Fateful Alliance. France, Russia and the Coming of the First World War* (Princeton, 1984).

³³ General de Boisdeffre to Hanotaux, 17 November 1894, *DDF*, 1st, series, IX, no. 284, p. 427; Nicholas II to M. Casimir-Périer, President of the French Republic, 11 November 1894, *ibid.*, no. 277, p. 417.

³⁴ Cf. Theo Aronson, *A Family of Kings: The Descendants of Christian IX of Denmark* (London, 1976); Roderick R. McLean, 'Monarchy and Diplomacy in Europe, 1900–1910', DPhil. dissertation, University of Sussex (1996), pp. 149–50.

³⁵ Kennan, *Bismarck's European Order*, pp. 62–3; Viktor A. Wroblewski, 'Lambsdorff über Deutschland und seine Zukunft', *Berliner Monatshefte* 14, 5 (1936), 362.

³⁶ Rantzau to the German foreign office, 19 August 1914. PA Bonn Russland Nr 82 Nr 1 Bd 63; Jagow to Wilhelm II, 2 August 1914 and Jagow to the German foreign office, 2 August 1914, *ibid.*

Her opinions would not have been a matter of political concern in Berlin had it not been for the influence which she exercised over her son, the new Tsar. Nicholas had been very close to his mother as a child, and this continued into adulthood.³⁷ Whenever they were apart, mother and son corresponded frequently. Marie's letters often mentioned her dislike of Germany, and she also encouraged her son to view Wilhelm II with a jaundiced eye. Her own hatred of the Kaiser reached pathological proportions and Nicholas's tone was usually apologetic when he informed her of the arrangements for meetings between himself and Wilhelm.³⁸ Nicholas consulted her frequently during the first years of his reign over matters of foreign policy and over government and diplomatic appointments. She used this influence to ensure that her son appointed a succession of foreign ministers who were determined to preserve the alliance with France, and who shared her opposition to closer ties with Berlin.³⁹ Marie Feodorovna's influence over her son waned gradually after 1900 as she spent more and more time in Denmark, and also due to disagreements between her and Nicholas over domestic policy, particularly during the years of revolution between 1904 and 1906.⁴⁰ However, even after 1905, her influence was occasionally brought to bear on her son. She was an enthusiastic supporter of the Anglo-Russian *rapprochement*, which culminated in the signing of an agreement between the two countries, in 1907, and, as late as 1913, German diplomats continued to fear that she was active in the sphere of international relations to the detriment of the interests of the *Reich*.⁴¹

³⁷ Richard Wortman, 'The Russian Empress as Mother', in *The Family in Imperial Russia*, ed. David L. Ransel (Urbana, Chicago and London, 1978), pp. 67–74; Lieven, *Nicholas II*, pp. 27–8, 32, 44; Verner, *Crisis*, pp. 7–44.

³⁸ Edward J. Bing (ed.), *The Letters of Tsar Nicholas and Empress Marie*, English translation (London, 1937). Examples of her dislike of Germany and the Kaiser can be found in her letters to her son of 8 August 1897, 21 November 1897, 31 March 1903, 26 October 1906, 25 March 1909, 5 November 1910. Nicholas's letters often paid deference to his mother's views, which he shared, at least in part. See letters of 2 October 1896, 23 July 1897, 1 August 1897, 16 January 1901, 26 March 1903, 18/19 March 1909, 21 October 1910, 31 October 1910. (The letters are dated according to the Julian calendar, twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar in the nineteenth century, and thirteen days behind in the twentieth century.)

³⁹ Harcave, *Witte*, pp. 212, 262; Vorres, *Grand-Duchess*, pp. 72, 79; A. A. Mosolov, *At the Court of the Last Tsar*, English translation (London, 1935), pp. 66–7; Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden, *The Life and Tragedy of Alexandra Feodorovna* (London, 1928), p. 49; Gustav Graf von Lamsdorff, *Die Militärbevollmächtigten Kaiser Wilhelms II. am Zarenhofe, 1904–1914* (Berlin, 1937), pp. 58–9.

⁴⁰ Harcave, *Witte*, p. 374; Verner, *Crisis*, pp. 104–52; Lieven, *Nicholas II*, pp. 134–5, 147–8; for specific examples see Alvensleben to Bülow, 17 March 1905, PA Bonn Russland Nr 82 Nr 1 Bd 53; Bülow to Wilhelm II, 10 April 1905, GStA Merseburg HA Rep. 53, J. Lit. B Nr 16a Bd III; Prince Heinrich of Prussia to Wilhelm II, 11 April 1905, GStA Merseburg HA Rep 52 V 1 Nr 13; Sir Charles Hardinge to Lord Knollys, 15 March 1905, RA W 45/143.

⁴¹ Lieven, *Russia and the Origins*, p. 70; Lieven, 'Pro-Germans and Russian Foreign Policy, 1890–1914', *International History Review* 2, 1 (1980), 42; Seeger (ed.), *The Memoirs of Alexander Iswolsky*, p. 22;

The Kaiser and German diplomats had to take into account other relatives of Nicholas II when trying to improve relations with St Petersburg, not least among them were the Tsar's uncles, the four grand dukes,⁴² upon whom he relied for advice in the first decade of his reign.⁴³ Grand Duke Sergei was the uncle whose views had the greatest influence with Nicholas II on political questions. He was a political reactionary who, paradoxically, was a strong supporter of the Franco-Russian alliance. Sergei and Wilhelm II hated each other for a mixture of personal and political reasons.⁴⁴ The Kaiser viewed him as Nicholas's 'evil demon' and as Germany's 'most determined enemy'.⁴⁵ Sergei's death, at the hands of revolutionaries, in 1905, came as a real relief to Wilhelm, as it removed one influential enemy of a German–Russian *rapprochement* from the political scene.⁴⁶

Sergei's eldest surviving brother, the Grand Duke Vladimir, was considered in Berlin to be the most pro-German of the Tsar's uncles. He was married to the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, who had been born a Mecklenburg princess. She was often consulted by Nicholas on German attitudes, as she was felt to be well acquainted with the views of the Berlin court.⁴⁷ Grand Duke Vladimir often acted as the intermediary between Wilhelm and Nicholas. However, his main interests were concentrated on the arts rather than on politics,⁴⁸ and by 1900 the Kaiser had lost faith in Vladimir's commitment to improved relations with Berlin, and his ability to persuade the Tsar to adopt such a course.⁴⁹

David M. McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia 1900–1914* (Cambridge, MA., 1992), p. 158; Marie Feodorovna to Nicholas II, 25 March and 30 March 1909, *Letters of Tsar Nicholas*, pp. 241–4; Sir Charles Hardinge to Queen Alexandra, 4 June 1904, Hardinge Papers, University Library, Cambridge, vol. 6; Bernhard Fürst von Bülow, *Memoirs*, 4 vols., English translation (London, 1931), II, p. 63; Captain Paul von Hintze to Wilhelm II, 28 January 1909, PA Bonn Russland Nr 82 Nr 1 geheim. Bd 3; Hintze to Wilhelm II, 21 February 1910, Lamsdorff, *Militärbevollmächtigten*, pp. 366–7; Rantzau to Bethmann Hollweg, 6 February 1913, PA Bonn Russland Nr 82 Nr 1 Bd 62.

⁴² Vladimir Alexandrovitch, 1847–1909, Alexei Alexandrovitch, 1850–1908, Sergei Alexandrovitch, 1857–1905, Pavel (Paul) Alexandrovitch, 1860–1919.

⁴³ Grand Duke Alexander, *Grand Duke*, pp. 136, 173.

⁴⁴ Röhl, *Jugend des Kaisers*, pp. 339–50; Eckhart G. Franz (ed.), *Ernst Ludwig, Grossherzog von Hessen und bei Rhein, Erinnerungsbilder* (Darmstadt, 1983), p. 97; General Karl von Villaume to Wilhelm II, 22 February 1891, PA Bonn Russland Nr 82 Nr 1 geheim. Bd 1; Holstein to Eulenburg, 1 April 1892, *EK*, II, no. 638, p. 839; note by Graf Rex, December 1894, *GP*, XI, no. 2308, p. 339.

⁴⁵ Wilhelm II to Hohenlohe, 20 October 1896. *GP*, XI, no. 2868, p. 370.

⁴⁶ Wilhelm II's comments on Radolin to Bülow, 18 February 1905; Wilhelm II's comments on Alvensleben to Bülow, 22 February 1905; Schoen to Bülow, 24 February 1905, PA Bonn Russland Nr 82 Nr 1 Bd 53.

⁴⁷ Mossolov, *Last Tsar*, p. 68.

⁴⁸ Grand Duke Alexander, *Grand Duke*, pp. 137–8.

⁴⁹ See below.

The Tsar's wife, Alexandra Feodorovna, and her brother, Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hesse, also needed to be taken into consideration in Wilhelm's dealings with Nicholas. The Kaiser's failure to establish a satisfactory relationship with either of them represented the squandering of a favourable opportunity to exploit dynastic ties for Germany's political benefit, for both were his first cousins. The Tsarina, although a German by birth, was English in culture and upbringing, as was her brother, the Grand Duke. She disliked Wilhelm, and this situation was made worse by the ill-feeling which existed between the Tsarina and the Kaiserin, who could not forgive Alexandra for having converted to Russian Orthodoxy. There was no rapport between Wilhelm and the Grand Duke of Hesse, whom he distrusted as a political liberal, who was more English than German. The Kaiser's dislike of Ernst Ludwig meant that he turned down all the latter's offers to act as a mediator with St Petersburg, and thus closed off one particular avenue to a *rapprochement* with Nicholas II.⁵⁰

Two other obstacles blocked the path to a *rapprochement* between Germany and Russia. They were the attitudes of a succession of Russian foreign ministers and diplomats, and the stance taken by Russian public opinion. All of the five foreign ministers who served Nicholas II between 1895 and 1914, Lobanov, Muraviev, Lamsdorf, Isvolsky and Sazonov, wished to maintain St Petersburg's links with Paris. Wilhelm II failed to establish a satisfactory relationship with any of them, and proved unable to persuade Nicholas to appoint a pro-German to this key post. In addition, the majority of Russia's ambassadors favoured the maintenance of Russia's existing foreign policy. Public opinion was less important in Russia than in any other country in Europe. Nicholas II was contemptuous of it and, living for the most part in isolation at Tsarskoe Selo, outside St Petersburg, he did not allow it to influence his decisions.⁵¹ Russian public opinion was, in the main, anti-German and

⁵⁰ Sigurd von Ilseman, *Der Kaiser in Holland: Aufzeichnungen des letzten Flügeladjutanten Kaiser Wilhelms II.*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1967–8), II, pp. 50–1; Prietz to the Prussian foreign ministry, 29 May 1919, PA Bonn Hessen Nr 56 Nr 1 geheim. Bd 2; Mossolov, *Last Tsar*, pp. 31, 34–5; note by Eulenburg, 12/13 October 1895, *EK*, III, no. 1145, p. 1568; Bülow, *Memoirs*, I, pp. 300–1; Maurice Paléologue, *Guillaume II et Nicolas II* (Paris, 1935), pp. 77–9; W. H-H. Waters, *Potsdam and Doom* (London, 1935), p. 194; Wilhelm II's comments on Hohenlohe to Bülow, 3 January 1901, PA Bonn Hessen Nr 56 Nr 1 geheim Bd 1; Wilhelm II to Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hesse, 11 November 1901, *ibid.*; Bülow to Wilhelm II, 15 July 1904, *GP*, XIX, no. 6043, p. 200; Sir Rennell Rodd to Hardinge, 12 May 1908, Hardinge Papers, vol. 12. Roderick R. McLean, 'Kaiser Wilhelm II and his Hessian Cousins: Intra-State Relations in the German Empire and International Dynastic Politics, 1890–1918', *German History* 19 (forthcoming).

⁵¹ Lieven, *Russia*, pp. 54–5.

favourable towards France, and despite the Tsar's lack of willingness to allow it to influence his political actions, it did serve as a constraining factor on the adoption of a pro-German foreign policy, particularly in the years after 1905, when the régime had been weakened by revolution.⁵²

Many factors, therefore, militated against the resurrection of intimate relations between Germany and Russia. In foreign policy terms, Nicholas had been bequeathed an alliance with France by his father, and in the dynastic and political spheres the obstacles to an understanding between the two empires were formidable. The indifferent political relations between the two countries paradoxically accentuated the importance of the relationship between the two emperors, for an appeal to the traditional friendship between the Romanovs and Hohenzollerns was seen in Berlin as a mechanism which could reduce the warmth of Russia's ties with the French republic.⁵³ The importance accorded to Wilhelm II's relationship with Nicholas II by the German government was put most clearly by Bernhard Prince von Bülow in 1905. He stated: 'Many years' experiences tells us that much less can be achieved with Russian diplomats, than through direct contact between His Majesty and the Tsar.'⁵⁴ This tendency to see the dynastic relationship as the decisive political link between Berlin and Petersburg was reinforced by the attitudes of Russian diplomats, notably the Ambassador to Germany between 1895 and 1912, Count von Osten-Sacken, who told a French diplomat on one occasion that in the *Kaiserreich*, 'everything depends on the always changing and personal whim of the Emperor'.⁵⁵

The Tsar's own utterances and behaviour in the first months after his accession did not provide much support for the Kaiser's view that Alexander III's death would open a new, more favourable era for Germany's *Russlandpolitik*. Nicholas rejected the Kaiser's suggestion that they revive the traditional practice of appointing military plenipotentiaries to each other's suites, on the grounds that 'it would provoke all kinds of gossip'.⁵⁶ This initial set-back did not deter Wilhelm from initiating a

⁵² Lieven, 'Pro-Germans', 41.

⁵³ Barbara Vogel, *Deutsche Russlandpolitik, 1900–1906: Das Scheitern der deutschen Weltpolitik unter Bülow 1900–1906* (Düsseldorf, 1973), p. 44.

⁵⁴ Bülow to the German foreign office, 12 August 1905, PA Bonn Deutschland Nr 131 Nr 4 Bd 5.

⁵⁵ Barrère to Hanotaux, 30 September 1896, *DDF*, 1st series, XII, no. 464, p. 763.

⁵⁶ Nicholas II to Wilhelm II, November 1894, *DdR*, p. 9; Lambsdorff, *Militärbevollmächtigten*, pp. 94–5.

regular, secret, correspondence with Nicholas which continued, with various ebbs and flows, until the outbreak of the First World War.⁵⁷ Four main themes recurred in these letters, whose contents were often of an incendiary political character. The Kaiser cast himself in the role of Nicholas's experienced colleague and protector, he stressed the need for all monarchs to defend the 'monarchical principle' and political conservatism, attacked the 'regicidal' French republic (and also Britain) and encouraged the Tsar to believe that Russia's mission lay in the Far East as the European bulwark against the 'yellow peril'.⁵⁸ Like the letters which Wilhelm had written to Alexander III in the mid-1880s, of which Bismarck had been unaware, his correspondence with Nicholas II was conducted without the knowledge of the chancellor, Prince zu Hohenlohe.⁵⁹ Although Hohenlohe's successor, Bülow, was privy to the contents of the letters in later years, they were never read by German diplomats at St Petersburg.⁶⁰

The central aims of the correspondence in the 1890s were, first, to weaken, and if possible, destroy the Franco-Russian alliance and, secondly, to encourage the Tsar to proceed with Russian expansion in Siberia and the Far East as a way of redirecting the orientation of Russian policy away from the Balkans, where her interests were liable to collide with those of Austria. Wilhelm remained convinced that the alliance between the Tsarist empire and the France could not survive, for it was going against nature for a monarchy to co-operate politically with a republic. He made his views plain to the Russian foreign minister, Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky, when the latter visited Berlin in the autumn of 1895. Wilhelm told Lobanov that the Franco-Russian alliance risked legitimising republicanism at the expense of the monarchical principle, and thus could pose a danger to all the kingdoms and empires in Europe. The Kaiser informed the Russian foreign minister that his own preferred option for the reorganisation of the international system involved the resurrection of the *Dreikaiserbund* (Three Emperors' League) between Germany, Russia and Austria, together with the isolation and eventual subjugation of France. His words were unfortunate, for Lobanov, a strong supporter of the diplomatic status quo,

⁵⁷ Goetz (ed.), *Briefe Kaiser Wilhelms II.*; N. F. Grant (ed.), *The Kaiser's Letters to the Tsar* (London, 1920).

⁵⁸ Cf. Wilhelm II to Nicholas II, 8 November 1894, 7 February 1895, 26 April 1895, 10 July 1895 and 26 September 1895, *BKW*, pp. 287–96.

⁵⁹ Note by Eulenburg, 5 July 1895, *EK*, III, no. 1116, pp. 1512–14.

⁶⁰ Peter Winzen, *Bülow's Weltmachtkonzept. Untersuchungen zur Frühphase seiner Aussenpolitik, 1897–1901* (Boppard am Rhein, 1977), pp. 141–2, 409–10; Vogel, *Deutsche Russlandpolitik*, p. 55; Freiherr von Schoen, *The Memoirs of an Ambassador*, English translation (London, 1922), p. 44.

communicated details of the Kaiser's remarks to M. Hanotaux, his French counterpart.⁶¹

Wilhelm's attempts to encourage Russian expansion in the Far East,⁶² which were to continue until the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, and beyond, made a mockery of his agreement with Hohenlohe that Nicholas should be handled in a reserved and discreet manner.⁶³ On 5 July 1895, Philipp Count zu Eulenburg, the German ambassador to Vienna, and the Kaiser's closest confidant,⁶⁴ noted that the Kaiser had told the Tsar's uncle, Grand Duke Alexei, during a visit to Kiel, that he was prepared to guarantee Russia's western frontier while the Tsar confronted the 'yellow peril' in the Far East. Wilhelm had already raised this suggestion with Nicholas in a letter on 26 April, and he repeated his pledge in a further letter to Nicholas on 10 July 1895. This was kept secret from Hohenlohe.⁶⁵ Thus, a matter with serious security implications was being decided behind the back of the chancellor, in a blatant assertion of the monarch's right to decide on matters of foreign and military policy. Eulenburg trusted neither Nicholas, nor the Grand Duke Alexei, and feared that the Kaiser's guarantee could lead to a serious political crisis.⁶⁶

Despite the controversial character of their contents, Nicholas was initially appreciative of Wilhelm's letters. When Hohenlohe visited St Petersburg in September 1895, he formed a favourable impression of the young Tsar. Nicholas told the chancellor that he would have no objections if Germany were to acquire a naval coaling station in the Far East, and he also spoke out vociferously about the perfidious nature of England's imperial policies. For his part, Hohenlohe found the Tsar to be thoroughly versed in all aspects of government. Nicholas told the chancellor to inform Wilhelm that he should continue the practice of writing to him on matters of importance.⁶⁷ The Kaiser responded by writing an appreciative letter to Nicholas after Hohenlohe's return and by presenting him with an engraving depicting their joint mission of

⁶¹ Prince Lobanov to Hanotaux, 12/24 October 1895, *DDF*, 1st series, xii, no. 182, pp. 261–3.

⁶² Note by the under-secretary in the German foreign office, Freiherr von Rotenhan, 30 July 1895, *GP*, ix, no. 2318, pp. 358–60.

⁶³ See above.

⁶⁴ John C. G. Röhl, *Kaiser, Hof und Staat: Wilhelm II. und die deutsche Politik* (Munich, 1987), pp. 35–77; Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888–1918* (Cambridge, 1982).

⁶⁵ Note by Eulenburg, 5 July 1895, *EK*, iii, no. 1116, pp. 1513–14; Wilhelm II to Nicholas II, 26 April 1895 and 10 July 1895, *BKW*, pp. 290–4.

⁶⁶ Note by Eulenburg, 13 July 1895, *EK*, iii, no. 1117, pp. 1514–15.

⁶⁷ Hohenlohe to Wilhelm II, 12 September 1895, *GP*, ix, no. 2319, pp. 360–1.

‘resisting the inroads of Buddhism, heathenism and barbarism for the Defence of the Cross’.⁶⁸

Technically, until 1905, Nicholas II’s power as Tsar was unlimited. Thus a foreign policy based on the promotion of friendly relations between the two Emperors appeared to be the best way to ensure that Russia would not pursue an anti-German political course. However, in reality, Nicholas’s power was circumscribed by a number of factors. The first was his lack of experience of government which meant that in the early years of his reign he often needed to turn to his relatives and ministers for advice. Secondly, unlike Wilhelm II, he had no court party to rely upon, nor a preconceived view of how he would direct the conduct of government.⁶⁹ This flaw was accentuated, at least initially, by the Tsar’s lack of confidence in his own judgement and ability.⁷⁰ The third factor which reduced the practical ability of Nicholas II to exercise his autocratic powers was the absence of the civil, military and naval cabinets which underpinned the authority of Wilhelm II in Germany.⁷¹ In contrast, Nicholas did not even have a private secretary,⁷² and, as a consequence, much of his time was spent in dealing with trivialities, which in other circumstances he could have delegated to a secretariat.⁷³

The imbalance between the Tsar’s theoretical omnipotence and the practical limitations upon his power was recognised by several observers at the time. In February 1895, Friedrich von Holstein warned the Kaiser’s adviser, Philipp Eulenburg, not to champion the cause of monarchical absolutism. In doing so, he noted that Wilhelm II was becoming much more of an autocrat than Nicholas II.⁷⁴ Bülow also eventually came to the same conclusion. In 1902, prior to the meeting between the Kaiser and the Tsar at Reval, he warned Wilhelm not to alienate Lamsdorf, the then Russian foreign minister, by drawing attention to the limitations upon the Tsar’s practical authority. The Tsar was

⁶⁸ Wilhelm II to Nicholas II, 26 September 1895, *BKW*, pp. 294–6.

⁶⁹ Lieven, *Nicholas II*, pp. 68–101; Mossolov, *Last Tsar*, p. 126.

⁷⁰ Nicholas II to Grand Duke Vladimir, 26 November 1896. Theodore von Laue, *Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia* (New York, 1969), p. 123.

⁷¹ Dominic C. B. Lieven, *Russia’s Rulers under the Old Régime* (London and New Haven, 1989), pp. 279–89; John C. G. Röhl, *Germany without Bismarck: The Crisis of Government in the Second Reich* (London, 1967); Röhl, *Kaiser, Hof und Staat*, pp. 77–140; Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II*; Isabel V. Hull, ‘Persönliches Regiment’, in *Der Ort Kaiser Wilhelms II. in der deutschen Geschichte*, ed. John C. G. Röhl (Munich, 1991), pp. 3–23.

⁷² Mossolov, *Last Tsar*, p. 12 ⁷³ Verner, *Crisis*, pp. 51–2.

⁷⁴ Holstein to Eulenburg, 17 February 1895, *EK*, III, no. 1089, pp. 1470–2.

not a monarch like his German counterpart and was likely to adopt an anti-German policy if his foreign minister were to suggest such a course.⁷⁵ Even the Duke of York, the future King George V, and the cousin of both Wilhelm and Nicholas, told a German diplomat on one occasion that, although an autocrat, Nicholas II had less practical power than the Kaiser. The Tsar appeared to be unable to control his ministers, and whereas the German Emperor could always rely on the loyalty of the army, this was no longer the case in Russia. The Duke concluded that of the three monarchical systems, in Britain, Russia and Germany (respectively parliamentary monarchy, autocracy and constitutional monarchy), the German one was that which accorded most power to the sovereign.⁷⁶ None of this, however, altered the basic political fact in both Germany and Russia, namely that the monarch controlled all important governmental appointments, and that a minister could only stay in office if he retained the ruler's confidence. Thus no minister could seek to implement policies with which the Emperor disagreed and expect to remain in office.⁷⁷ In such a context, the Kaiser's personal appeals to the Tsar remained the most promising way to bring about a *rapprochement* between the two empires, although they should have been allied to other diplomatic strategies.

Before Nicholas's accession, Wilhelm had already identified the influence of Marie Feodorovna over her son as a major reason for the Tsarevitch's somewhat diffident character. Thus, when Nicholas visited Vienna in the autumn of 1892, and the German ambassador described him as shy and awkward, the Kaiser's blamed this on Marie Feodorovna's debilitating influence.⁷⁸ After Nicholas became Tsar, the Kaiser believed that if the power of the Dowager Empress over her son could be broken, this would open the way for a *rapprochement* between St Petersburg and Berlin. In the early years of the new Tsar's reign, Wilhelm and German diplomats constantly monitored the behaviour of

⁷⁵ Bülow to Wilhelm II, 22 July 1902, *GP*, xviii(i), pp. 60–1.

⁷⁶ Metternich to Bülow, 23 February 1900, PA Bonn Russland Nr 82 Nr 1 Bd 42.

⁷⁷ Cf. Röhl, *Kaiser, Hof und Staat*, pp. 116–40; Lieven, *Russia's Rulers*, pp. 280–2; S. S. Oldenbourg, *The Last Tsar: Nicholas II, His Reign and His Russia*, 4 vols., English translation (Gulf Breeze, FL, 1975–7), II, p. 163; Verner, *Crisis*, pp. 53–8; McDonald, *United Government*, p. 212; Hintze to Wilhelm II, 28 January 1909, PA Bonn Russland Nr 82 Nr 1 Bd 3; Seeger, *Iswoolsky*, p. 141; Katharine A. Lerman, *The Chancellor as Courtier: Bernhard von Bülow and the Governance of Germany, 1900–1909* (Cambridge, 1990); Gerd Fesser, *Reichskanzler Bernhard von Bülow* (Berlin, 1991).

⁷⁸ Wilhelm II's comment on Prince Heinrich VII, Reuss to Caprivi, 15 November 1892, *GP*, VII, no. 1638, note 4, p. 412.

both Nicholas and the Dowager Empress for signs of a break between them. Their mood turned to one of increasing frustration as it became clear that no such event was likely to occur, and as each new ministerial and ambassadorial appointment exhibited the continuing influence of Marie Feodorovna.

On 24 November 1894, the German ambassador in St Petersburg, Werder, wrote to Hohenlohe in pessimistic terms about the possibility that Nicholas would assert his own authority at the expense of his relationship with his mother. He believed that Nicholas was more likely to turn to his mother for advice on political questions.⁷⁹ It did not take long for her influence to make its mark, for in February 1895 Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky, the candidate favoured by the Dowager Empress and the French ambassador, was chosen as the new foreign minister, in place of the deceased N. K. Giers. The Kaiser, however, refused to be discouraged, and declared that a decisive break between the Tsar and the Dowager Empress would soon occur.⁸⁰

In the months that followed, German diplomats believed that the Dowager Empress was strengthening her influence over the Tsar, and expressed scepticism as to the likelihood that Nicholas would soon alter his views towards Germany.⁸¹ The Kaiser tried to counteract the growing influence of Lobanov and the Dowager Empress by appealing directly to Nicholas. To this end, he sent his aide de camp, Colonel Helmuth von Moltke, on a mission to St Petersburg in October 1895. Wilhelm was particularly alarmed by the international situation at this time because of the French decision to increase the strength of their forces on Germany's western frontier to coincide with a visit by Lobanov to Paris.⁸² When Nicholas received Moltke he went out of his way to assure him that he had instructed his foreign minister to influence the French in a peaceable direction, and that if he had been aware that the French would seek to make political capital out of the visit, he would never have permitted Lobanov to go to Paris. Nicholas's comments on Russia's relations with Germany were similarly reassuring. He felt that

⁷⁹ Werder to Hohenlohe, 24 November 1894, PA Bonn Russland Nr 82 Nr 1 geheim. Bd 1; cf. note by Graf Rex, December 1894, *GP*, ix, no. 2308, pp. 338–9.

⁸⁰ Werder to Hohenlohe, 15 February 1895, *ibid.*, no. 2310, pp. 324–6. Wilhelm's comment, p. 326, note 5.

⁸¹ Cf. Eulenburg to Holstein, 11 January 1895, *HP*, iii, no. 434, p. 489; note by Eulenburg, 28 July 1895, *EK*, iii, no. 1119, pp. 1516–17; Radolin to Eulenburg, 23 September and 2 October 1895, *ibid.*, nos. 1128, 1143, pp. 1536–9, 1561–4; Radolin to Hohenlohe, 14 July 1895, *GP*, ix, no. 2317, pp. 357–8.

⁸² Wilhelm II to Nicholas II, 26 September 1895, *BKW*, pp. 295–6.

war between the two countries would only bring misery to both.⁸³

The Kaiser was satisfied with the outcome of Moltke's mission and heartened by the latter's conclusion that agreement could always be reached with the Tsar by appealing to the monarchical principle. However, he continued to believe that Nicholas was ill-informed about the political situation, a conviction strengthened by what he saw as the Tsar's naive view that Russia would be able to restrain the chauvinists in Paris.⁸⁴ Hugo Prince von Radolin, the German ambassador at St Petersburg, took a similarly circumspect view. He felt that, despite his good intentions, Nicholas might not be able to resist the anti-German tendencies of his ministers, sentiments which were echoed by the influential director of the political section of the German foreign office Friedrich von Holstein.⁸⁵

By November 1895 Wilhelm too was becoming frustrated at the lack of political concessions from Nicholas, and he made his feelings clear during a visit to Berlin by the Tsar's uncle, the Grand Duke Vladimir. Holstein informed Radolin:

H.M. is beginning to be quite angry with the Tsar because of the repeated cool rebuffs. I don't know the details, but can pretty well construct the matter from the general picture. H.M. would like to restore the Holy Alliance, but Lobanov, who runs the Tsar, won't desert France.⁸⁶

The Kaiser failed to hold his tongue on another occasion, when, out of anger against the Russians, he appeared to offer the British military attaché German support to force open the Dardanelles. A few weeks earlier Wilhelm had promised Nicholas II aid to achieve the same objective.⁸⁷ He had thus placed himself in the invidious position of having offered the Straits to two powers simultaneously. Holstein feared the damage which the remarks would cause if the British communicated them to St Petersburg, and even Eulenburg believed that the Kaiser's behaviour was exposing the dangers of personal decision-making in the sphere of foreign policy.⁸⁸

⁸³ Helmuth von Moltke, report on a farewell audience with the Emperor of Russia, 3 October 1895, GStA Berlin BPH 53/116; Moltke, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 198–203; cf. Marschall to Hohenlohe, 1 October 1895, *DdR*, pp. 110–11.

⁸⁴ Note by Eulenburg, 12/13 October 1895, *EK*, III, no. 1145, pp. 1567–71; Eulenburg to Hohenlohe, 1 October 1895, *DdR*, pp. 111–12.

⁸⁵ Radolin to Eulenburg, 2/3 October 1895, *EK*, no. 1143, pp. 1561–5; Holstein to Eulenburg, 2 November 1895, *ibid.*, no. 1152, pp. 1583–4.

⁸⁶ Holstein to Radolin, 16 November 1895, *HP*, III, no. 501, p. 562.

⁸⁷ Note by Hohenlohe, 13 November 1895, *DdR*, pp. 120–2.

⁸⁸ Holstein to Eulenburg, 21 December 1895 and Eulenburg to Holstein, 31 December 1895, *ibid.*, nos. 515 and 517, pp. 576–85.

The Kruger telegram affair of January 1896 put a stop to any ideas which the Kaiser might have had of coming to an arrangement with Britain.⁸⁹ Thus, during 1896, Wilhelm continued to place his faith in his ability to persuade the Tsar of the merits of co-operation with Germany. The experiences of the previous year had failed to remove the wishful thinking which had motivated his *Russlandpolitik* since Nicholas's accession. The only people who stood in the way of a Russo-German understanding were the Dowager Empress and the foreign minister. The Tsar, by contrast, despite the evidence of his own pro-French sympathies, could be relied upon.⁹⁰ However, the reports being sent by German diplomats back to Berlin did not make encouraging reading from the Kaiser's viewpoint. Both Lobanov and the Dowager Empress continued to dominate the Tsar, and their opinions remained unconvincing to an understanding with Germany.⁹¹ None of this seemed to undermine the Kaiser's naive faith that the political constellation at St Petersburg would soon alter in Germany's favour. He shared his views with the newly appointed British ambassador, Sir Frank Lascelles, who subsequently communicated them to Count Hatzfeldt, the German ambassador in London. Lascelles 'told me . . .', Hatzfeldt informed Holstein, 'that H.M. claims to know from a good source, that Lobanov will not remain in office any more. The young Emperor will now come into the foreground to a greater extent and enunciate his own foreign policy.'⁹²

Wilhelm turned out to be correct. However the grim reaper rather than the Tsar was responsible for the Russian foreign minister's political demise. Lobanov's death in August 1896, shortly before a visit by the Tsar to Breslau, seemed to provide the Kaiser with an excellent opportunity to convince Nicholas of his good faith and to encourage him to appoint a pro-German foreign minister. The meeting between the two emperors appeared to go well,⁹³ and Hohenlohe's report on his audience with Nicholas II was also more than satisfactory from a German perspective. The Tsar had spoken of his desire to open up Siberia to Russian colonisation, to carry through the completion of the

⁸⁹ See ch. 2.

⁹⁰ Marschall, diary entry, 11 June 1896, Walther P. Fuchs (ed.), *Grossherzog Friedrich I. von Baden und die Reichspolitik 1871–1907*, 4 vols. (Stuttgart, 1968–80), III, p. 526.

⁹¹ Radolin to Hohenlohe, 18 April 1896, *GP*, XI, no. 2847, pp. 340–42; cf. Marschall to Münster, 19 May 1896, *ibid.*, no. 2851, p. 346.

⁹² Hatzfeldt to Holstein, 4 June 1896, *HNP*, II, no. 683, pp. 1086–7.

⁹³ Wilhelm II to the German foreign office, 9 September 1896, *GP*, XI, no. 2861, p. 360.

Trans-Siberian railway, and to confront the Japanese in the Far East once the line to the Pacific was finished.⁹⁴ All of which conformed with the Kaiser's wish to see Russian expansionism directed away from Europe.

Despite the visit's superficial success, events over the subsequent month were to prove that it had been counter-productive, for it encouraged Nicholas's doubts about Wilhelm's character and sincerity. The Tsar had been growing tired of the Kaiser's patronising manner towards him.⁹⁵ However, Nicholas's mother played the decisive part in transforming the Tsar's doubts about the Kaiser into a profound distaste. For after the visit to Breslau, the Tsar and Tsarina travelled to Copenhagen. In the anti-German atmosphere of the Danish royal palace at Bernstorff, Marie Feodorovna managed to regain influence over her son. According to a well-informed Danish source, who passed on information to Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter, the German minister in Copenhagen, Nicholas had initially spoken favourably about his meeting with the Kaiser at Breslau. However, the Dowager Empress had responded by pouring scorn and derision upon her son, and, in so doing, had destroyed the excellent impression made on the Tsar by his visit to Germany.⁹⁶ Statements which the Tsar made to the British prime minister, Lord Salisbury, during a subsequent visit to Balmoral, and to the French foreign minister, M. Hanotaux, whilst in Paris confirmed that his visit to Denmark had resulted in a marked increase in his hostility towards the Kaiser. Nicholas was at pains to assure the French foreign minister that under no circumstances would he give in to Wilhelm's overtures to abandon the alliance with Paris in favour of a return to co-operation with Berlin.⁹⁷

The suspicion that the summit between Nicholas and Wilhelm at Breslau had been counter-productive was reinforced by a disastrous subsequent exchange of visits between the two monarchs at Darmstadt and Wiesbaden. The Tsar, who was staying with his brother-in-law, the Grand Duke of Hesse, had initially declined to meet Wilhelm for a second time, and made no secret of his distaste for the Kaiser, during their discussions, by behaving in an off-hand manner. Wilhelm was

⁹⁴ Note by Hohenlohe, 10 September 1896, *ibid.*, no. 2862, pp. 361–2.

⁹⁵ Radolin to Hatzfeldt, 15 September 1896, *HNP*, II, no. 689, p. 1093; Soulange-Boudin to Hanotaux, 16 September 1896, *DDF*, 1st series, XII, no. 454, pp. 748–51; Schelking, *Recollections*, p. 129.

⁹⁶ Kiderlen-Wächter to Hohenlohe, 16 September 1896, PA Bonn Dänemark 32 Nr 1; Schelking, *Recollections*, p. 129.

⁹⁷ Margaret M. Jefferson, 'Lord Salisbury's Conversations with the Tsar at Balmoral, 27 and 29 September 1896', *Slavonic and East European Review* 39, 22 (1960), 220; note by Hanotaux, 12 October 1896, *DDF*, 1st series, XII, no. 472, p. 781.

greatly shaken by the change in the Tsar's attitude towards him, which he blamed on the Grand Duke Sergei, who was also present at Darmstadt, and on the influence of the Dowager Empress upon her son.⁹⁸ When Eulenburg raised the matter of the visit, two weeks after it had occurred, the Kaiser turned pale. Eulenburg recorded: 'H.M. said very little to me about it. I sensed how much it tormented him. "An Emperor under the rule of his mother," he said, with a certain bitter contempt.'⁹⁹

Two events following closely on the disastrous summit between the two emperors indicated that Nicholas now wished to distance himself from the Kaiser, thus demonstrating that the personal contact upon which Wilhelm placed so much importance in his dealings with the Tsar had proved itself to be an ineffectual mechanism for bringing about an improvement in Russo-German relations. Soon after his return from Germany, Nicholas decided that he wished to discontinue his correspondence with Wilhelm. He had grown uneasy with the letters' contents and his doubts had been strengthened when he learned that the Kaiser had written them without Hohenlohe's knowledge. The Tsar's hapless Uncle Micha, the Grand Duke Vladimir, again acted as the intermediary between Nicholas and Wilhelm. The Kaiser ignored the Tsar's desire to break off the correspondence and proceeded to continue writing to Nicholas for a further eighteen years.¹⁰⁰

The Tsar's choice of Muraviev as his new foreign minister was a more serious set-back still for the Kaiser. Wilhelm had vetoed Muraviev's appointment two years previously as Russian ambassador to Berlin, so the new foreign minister had no reason to be favourably disposed towards him.¹⁰¹ In addition, as a former minister in Copenhagen, Muraviev's rise to high office had been aided by the patronage of Marie Feodorovna.¹⁰² Holstein believed that Wilhelm II's own disastrous interventions in the sphere of foreign policy had resulted in Muraviev's appointment. The Kaiser's policy of courting Russia and England in turn, at one point seeming to offer the Dardanelles to both powers, had simply resulted in the alienation of both Nicholas II and Queen Victoria, to the detriment of Germany's international interests.¹⁰³ Additionally, the issue of the Germanophobe influence of the Dowager Empress

⁹⁸ Wilhelm II to Hohenlohe, 20 October 1896, *GP*, xi, no. 2868, pp. 369–70.

⁹⁹ Note by Eulenburg, 8 November 1896, *EK*, iii, no. 1272, p. 1751.

¹⁰⁰ Holstein to Hatzfeldt, 27/28 November 1896, *HNP*, ii, no. 692, p. 1098; Rudolf Vierhaus (ed.), *Das Tagebuch der Baronin von Spitzzenberg* (Göttingen, 1960), diary entry, 18 November 1896, p. 348; Wilhelm II to Nicholas II, 12 November 1896, *BKW*, pp. 303–4.

¹⁰¹ Holstein to Radolin, 10 January 1897, *HP*, iv, no. 592, p. 1.

¹⁰² Eulenburg to Holstein, 13 January 1897, *ibid.*, no. 593, pp. 2–3; cf. Holstein to Hatzfeldt, 15 January 1897, *HNP*, ii, no. 697, p. 1112, note 5.

¹⁰³ Holstein to Hatzfeldt, 15 January 1897, *HNP*, ii, no. 697, pp. 1122–5.

had still not been addressed. The disconcerting nature of her views continued to matter because of the hold she exercised over her son. Radolin lamented to Hohenlohe that Marie Feodorovna's power had reached levels never seen during the reign of Alexander III.¹⁰⁴

Despite these political set-backs during the winter of 1896/97, Wilhelm II remained determined to continue to pursue the aim of an understanding with Russia. However the visit which the Kaiser paid to St Petersburg in August 1897 exposed the limits of the Tsar's desire for good relations with Germany, and it also served to confirm Nicholas's distaste for his German counterpart.¹⁰⁵ The chargé d'affaires of the French embassy in Berlin, Soulange-Boudin, noted the gulf between the myth of intimacy with the Tsar and the Russians, which the Kaiser and the German government wished to promote, and the reality of continuing distrust between the two emperors and governments.¹⁰⁶ The Tsar's growing animosity towards Wilhelm had been confirmed before the Kaiser's arrival in St Petersburg. Nicholas informed his mother that he would have to make the Kaiser an honorary admiral in the Russian navy as an act of courtesy prior to the visit. 'C'est à vomir!', he wrote.¹⁰⁷ Despite this, the political discussions during the Kaiser's visit seemed to go well. Wilhelm appeared to get Nicholas's permission to establish a German naval base at Kiaochow on the Chinese coast, though the conversation between them on this issue was hypothetical in nature,¹⁰⁸ and Nicholas told the German foreign minister, Bernhard von Bülow, that he believed that Russia's relations with Germany were too important to be damaged by economic differences caused by the attempts of German landowners to get the government to raise the tariffs on Russian agricultural imports. Bülow, in turn, was heartened by the anti-English views of Nicholas and his ministers, and believed that enthusiasm in St Petersburg for the alliance with France was declining.¹⁰⁹

As in the previous year, these hopes were misplaced. The French ambassador to Berlin noted that in spite of the claims of the *Wilhelmstrasse* that the visit had been a success beyond expectations, there was

¹⁰⁴ Radolin to Hohenlohe, 17 January 1897, *DDR*, pp. 292–4.

¹⁰⁵ Paléologue, *Guillaume II et Nicolas II*, pp. 15–16.

¹⁰⁶ Soulange-Boudin to Hanotaux, 8 August 1897, *DDF*, 1st series, XIII, pp. 487–9.

¹⁰⁷ Nicholas II to Marie Feodorovna, 23 July 1897, *Letters of Tsar Nicholas*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁸ Bülow to the German Foreign Office, 11 August 1897; note by Bülow, 17 August 1897, *GP*, xiv(i), nos. 3679–80, pp. 58–60.

¹⁰⁹ Bülow to the German foreign office, 10 August 1897, *GP*, XIII, no. 3438, pp. 75–6; cf. Radolin to the German foreign office, 12 August 1897, *ibid.*, nos. 3439, p. 77; Bülow to Eulenburg, 20 August 1897, *ibid.*, no. 3444, pp. 81–2; Radolin to the German foreign office, 18 August 1897, *ibid.*, no. 3443, pp. 79–81.