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**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**THE DOORWAY FOR DEVILS**

by

Kellan D. Bethke

December 2012

Thesis Advisor:  
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**THE DOORWAY FOR DEVILS**

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B.S., United States Air Force Academy, 2011

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS  
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from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the years since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a substantial body of scholarship on the subject of terrorism has emerged without a unitary theory and course. What is today described as terrorism is scarcely a phenomenon unique to the 21st century. The roots of modern terrorism instead reside in the political history of the 19th and 20th centuries. This thesis asserts that modern terrorism began in late imperial Russia and was perpetrated by early revolutionary groups including the nihilists, populists, and Socialist Revolutionaries.

This thesis explores the motivations that led young men and women in 19th and early 20th century Russia to resort to organized political violence against the regime of the era. The analysis breaks the roughly fifty year period into three phases based upon the group that was the primary agent of terror and focuses on three categories of influence that shaped the movements: environmental conditions, ideological agitation, and individual motivations. The research revealed that in all three phases of terrorism, the three modes of influence help to illuminate why the groups resorted to violence. Moreover, the thesis suggests that the same paradigm can be a useful approach to analyzing other terrorist groups throughout history.



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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Many specialists in the field of terrorism trace the roots of modern terrorist movements to Russia in the late 19th century and early 20th century.<sup>1</sup> In what has become a largely forgotten chapter of history for those fixated on the present as well as on a single part of the globe, a significant number of individuals, usually young, educated, and relatively well-to-do, partook in a variety of terrorist campaigns that lasted over five decades, claimed the lives of many citizens and officials, including one Tsar, and significantly changed the social and political landscape of the nation in which they lived.<sup>2</sup> The groups and individuals involved in prerevolutionary terrorism sought to bring about societal change and they achieved their goal, although not always in the form they expected. In the present day, the world once again faces a significant terrorist threat, but the practitioners of the movement seem very different from their Russian forebears, at first glance. If the prerevolutionary outbreak of terrorism in Russia represents the foundation of the modern terrorist movement, then there should be a number of continuities in the characteristics and principles even if the environment, targets, and operators have changed. Understanding the underlying constants of ideas, personality, society, and state that helped to produce prerevolutionary Russian terrorism will deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of terrorism, as a whole. Thus, in addition to the historical account contained herein, this thesis suggests an analytical framework to assess the motivations that drive individuals into terror cells and apply it, as best as possible, to the Russian terrorist movements that took place between 1866 and 1908.

## B. IMPORTANCE

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 demonstrated that certain groups still believe that terrorism is a viable strategy and that certain individuals continue to be

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<sup>1</sup> Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," in *Terrorism in Context*, ed. Martha Crenshaw (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 63–65.

willing to carry out terrorist acts. Moreover, with the assistance of modern technology, terrorist actions have the potential to be more destructive than any time in previous history. In addition to the governmental responses that seek to address terrorism, the academic community has also become heavily involved in seeking to understand the phenomenon of terrorism and learning how to counter it at home and abroad. In order to fully understand a modern movement or event, historical context and background are critical. Thus, to reach a greater understanding of modern terrorism, it is vital to understand the ideas, state, and society from which it grew. In comparison to the broader literature on terrorism, which has grown to be quite substantial, the amount of literature describing terrorism's Russian roots is relatively meager. This thesis will endeavor to contribute to the existing scholarship about terrorism, writ large, by adding to the understanding of the prerevolutionary Russian terror that served as the modern variant's progenitor.

Additionally, Russian terrorism in the late 19th and early 20th century is an interesting historical case study of social movements within nations and the psychological factors that can allow seemingly normal people to do terrible things. For many analysts of either Russia or terrorism, Russia's inaugural experience with terror is overshadowed by the far more destructive revolution that began in 1917 and even more so by the unthinkable scale of state terror perpetrated by Joseph Stalin. The casualties from the entirety of the prerevolutionary terrorist movement pale in comparison to the body count of Stalin's purges that took place over the course of just a few years. As a result, Russia's prerevolutionary outbreak of terrorism has become an almost forgotten chapter of history. Even though the outbreak of revolutionary terrorism was not the most destructive event that occurred in the same area in the general time period, its effects are still significant. In addition to sowing the seeds of modern day terrorism, the groups and individuals that were involved in the prerevolutionary terrorist movement informed and empowered the Bolshevik faction that would eventually overtake the previous

revolutionary movements and the country, as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Thus, terrorism represents a major factor in the broader Russian revolution, which was a very significant historical event not just in Russia but worldwide.

### **C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES**

As implied by the major research question, the functional aspects of the thesis will involve the root causes of the prerevolutionary terrorist movements in Russia. Based upon the surveyed literature, three of the most significant factors that characterized the birth of Russian terrorism in the targeted period were the prevailing characteristics of the social and governmental environment, the psychological underpinnings of membership in a terrorist cell, and the efforts of ideologues in masterminding terrorist operations and building revolutionary principles. The initial hypothesis of the thesis is that environmental factors facilitated the emergence of terrorism, psychological factors motivated accession to terror cells, and ideologues conducted the daily operations of terrorist groups. Moreover, the thesis will hypothesize that the three factors are mutually reinforcing and that without any one of the particular factors it is much less likely for terrorism to occur.

It bears noting that, in terms of identity and scope, terrorism of the present day is significantly different from Russian terrorism around the turn of the 20th century. While terrorism in Russia was atheist and domestic, terrorism of the present day is religious and international. Although modern terrorism seems very different in practice, the thesis hypothesizes that the underlying principles that lead to the rise of terrorism have remained largely the same over the years. Namely, that the social and political environment still facilitates the rise of extremist thought, individuals still have psychological motivations to join radical movements, and ideologues still recruit and manage terrorist assets and drive terrorist operations.

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<sup>3</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 66.



## D. LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of Russian terrorism is a complex and multifaceted subject and a significant number of sources are required to deliver even a rudimentary knowledge of the subject. Fortunately, although the Soviet regime is renowned for curtailing or censoring most efforts at conducting objective historical research, the Communist party permitted and even encouraged the study of the early revolutionary movements in the post-Stalinist period.<sup>4</sup> Those early revolutionary movements not only prepared the soil for the Communist revolution in 1917, but they were also closely tied to a pronounced outbreak of terrorism that was perpetrated by a variety of groups and individuals over the course of more than 50 years. As with most historical phenomena, a diverse set of opinions prevail on the world's first experience with modern terrorism and the sources diverge and intersect in informative ways. At the simplest level, the existing literature on the subject can be divided based upon the sources' selected timeframe. In Philip Pomper's chapter on Russian revolutionary terrorism in *Terrorism in Context*, he divides the prerevolutionary period into three sub-periods based upon the characteristics of the terrorists or terrorist groups of the times: nihilist, populist, and Socialist Revolutionary (SR).<sup>5</sup> A more informative yet nuanced division can be drawn among the surveyed authors in terms of the primary factor cited with bringing about terrorism. Although there is overlap in some places, the authors explain the occurrence of terrorism primarily in terms of environmental, ideological, or individual factors. It would be impractical to delineate every possible way in which the authors concur or differ on the topic of Russian revolutionary terrorism, but there are a number of other significant distinctions between sources, as well. The most meaningful of the other differentiating factors are the topics of objective explanation versus more subjective approaches and primary sources versus secondary ones. Overall, the diversity and expanse of available literature provide an

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<sup>4</sup> Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894–1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 68, 75, 89.

excellent foundation upon which to pursue an understanding of the development of Russian revolutionary terrorism and how it provides valuable insights into terrorism in the present day.

One of the major delineating factors in analyzing prerevolutionary Russian terrorism is the timeframe in which it took place. There is some disagreement on when exactly the terrorist movements in Russia began, but most accounts place the start in student movements that began around 1950. Some analysts like Franco Venturi place the beginnings a little earlier, in 1848, and some others like Philip Pomper are more general and state only that the beginnings were in the 1850s.<sup>6</sup> Although Pomper provides a more general perspective on the beginning of the Russian terrorist movement, he offers more precise start and end dates for the main phases of the movements which serve as useful demarcations for analysis. The nihilist cycle, the first phase of the pre-revolutionary terrorist movement, began during the ideologically charged period between 1861 and 1863 when several extremist tomes by Peter Zaichnevskii (*Young Russia*) and Nicholas Chernyshevskii (*What Is to Be Done?*) were published and gained a significant following, especially among students. The period lasted until roughly 1871 when the trial of a contingent of followers of Sergei Nechaev, a particularly bloodthirsty and influential terrorist, delegitimized the nihilist movement to much of society.<sup>7</sup> The next phase of terror was primarily characterized by populists like the members of the groups Land and Freedom and *Narodnaya Volia* (People's Will). The populist period began in 1876 with the founding of the populist faction known as Land and Freedom and ended in 1894 as the Social Democratic movement overtook *Narodnaya Volia* in popularity.<sup>8</sup> The most critical years in the populist phase, however, were from 1878 through 1882 during which populist terrorist activity was the most pronounced.<sup>9</sup> The final phase of prerevolutionary terror was the SR era, which began in 1901 when the SR party began to adopt terrorist

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<sup>6</sup> Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, trans. Francis Haskell (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), xxxii; Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 63.

<sup>7</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 68–69, 72–73.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 82, 88.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

methods. The SR party endured until it was eliminated by the Bolsheviks in the post-revolutionary civil war, but its practice of terrorism largely ended in 1908 with the Azef affair.<sup>10</sup> With few minor exceptions, all of the other surveyed works on Russian terrorism fall within those periods. Some of the surveyed authors like Anna Geifman in *Death Orders: The Vanguard of Modern Terrorism in Revolutionary Russia* and Adam Ulam in *In the Name of the People: Prophets and Conspirators in Prerevolutionary Russia* deal with all three periods, and others like Norman Naimark in *Terrorists and Social Democrats* and Anna Geifman in *Entangled in Terror: The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution* deal with a single period.<sup>11</sup> Still others address two successive periods of the three. There are gaps of a few years between the periods and some significant events such as the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 are not reflected in the date-based classification system of this thesis, but overall time period is a useful way to categorize terrorist activity in the prerevolutionary period.<sup>12</sup>

Time-based distinctions are useful in building a basic understanding of prerevolutionary Russian terrorism, but categorization based upon factors used to explain the birth of terrorist tactics in Russia is conducive to a much deeper, more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Of the surveyed authors, most analyses of the underlying causes of terrorism can be placed into one of three categories: environmental, ideological, and psychological. The preceding categories are not drawn from any particular work, but were synthesized from the broader works cited. Proponents of environmental explanations for the rise of terrorism in prerevolutionary Russia cite the pervasive oppression and broader social stagnation of the period as primary explanatory factors. Authors in the environmental mode assert that the prevailing conditions created fertile soil for extremism to grow and condemn the late tsarist regime for allowing such a

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<sup>10</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 89, 98.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Geifman, *Death Orders: The Vanguard of Modern Terrorism in Revolutionary Russia* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2010); Adam B. Ulam, *In the Name of the People: Prophets and Conspirators in Prerevolutionary Russia* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977); Norman M. Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats: The Russian Revolutionary Movement Under Alexander III* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Anna Geifman, *Entangled in Terror: The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 1.

desperate situation.<sup>13</sup> Significant proponents of this scheme are Naimark in *Terrorists and Social Democrats* and Vera Broido in *Apostles into Terrorists: Women and the Revolutionary Movement in the Russia of Alexander II*.<sup>14</sup> To a lesser extent, Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko also use environmental explanations in their analysis contained in *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*, but they also draw heavily from the psychological category.<sup>15</sup> The next major category is characterized by what this thesis refers to as the ideological explanation of the rise of terrorism. The ideological explanation of terrorism focuses on specific groups or individuals that developed extremist ideologies and sought to spread their ideas. In Russia's case, individuals like Nechaev, Herzen, and Chernyshevskii and groups like Land and Freedom and Narodnaya Volia served as ideologues which refined and spread ideals of extremism.<sup>16</sup> Some of the major authors that espouse the ideological explanatory scheme are Franco Venturi in *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia* and Ulam in *In the Name of the People*.<sup>17</sup> Anna Geifman also employs an ideologue-driven perspective to a degree in *Entangled in Terror*.<sup>18</sup> The final explanatory category is based upon the psychological principles that can lead a person to become radicalized. The psychological approach is the most recent of the three categories to emerge in literature and it is broadly evident in all three of Anna Geifman's books that were surveyed for the thesis (*Death Orders*, *Entangled in Terror*, and *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894–1917*) as well as in *Friction* by McCauley and Moskalenko.<sup>19</sup> The psychological category is particularly important to this thesis because it is the most readily applicable to the appearance of terrorism in the modern context. *Friction* is particularly path-breaking because it

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<sup>13</sup> Vera Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists: Women and the Revolutionary Movement in the Russia of Alexander II* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), 17.

<sup>14</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*; Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*.

<sup>15</sup> McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*.

<sup>16</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, Table of Contents.

<sup>17</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*; Ulam, *In the Name of the People*.

<sup>18</sup> Geifman, *Entangled in Terror*.

<sup>19</sup> Geifman, *Entangled in Terror*; Geifman, *Death Orders*; Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*; McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*.

endeavors to describe terrorism as a phenomenon that belongs not only to the mentally aberrant, but is equally likely to occur among individuals of sound and rational mind given the proper motivations.<sup>20</sup> McCauley and Moskalenko's analysis is also valuable in the context of the prerevolutionary period because it allows a deeper understanding of the terrorists of the time who could not all have been sociopathic or mentally infirm. No single explanatory categorization is conclusive in and of itself, but the combination of the three significantly deepens the academic discourse on the topic of Russian revolutionary terrorism.

Classifications based upon time and content are the primary means by which the thesis will analyze the available research, but there are also a number of other distinctions among the sources that bear note. A major characteristic that distinguishes several of the authors is the level of emotional attachment to the subject. To some, terrorism is a highly emotional issue; the number of people who have lost an acquaintance or loved one to terrorism or knows someone in the process of fighting against terrorism is on the rise within the United States and abroad. A number of the surveyed authors are implicitly or explicitly more emotionally invested in the subject than others. In the introduction to *Death Orders*, Geifman openly admits that the topic of terrorism is an emotional one for her; she knows victims of terror and has felt its impacts in her own life.<sup>21</sup> Vera Broido's *Apostles into Terrorists* has an implicit emotional bias because she was personally associated with some of the revolutionary figures about whom she wrote.<sup>22</sup> Other analysts, including Franco Venturi in *Roots of Revolution*, are acclaimed for providing balanced, objective perspectives on the topic.<sup>23</sup> In the case of *Friction*, one of the key reasons that the authors chose Russian revolutionary terrorism as a case study was because, due to its distance in time and space, it was less likely to elicit an emotional reaction than more contemporary movements.<sup>24</sup> This thesis will endeavor to be as

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<sup>20</sup> McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Geifman, *Death Orders*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, v.

<sup>23</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, vii.

<sup>24</sup> McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 6.

objective as possible, but will proceed with the understanding that sources written by less objective authors still contain a great deal of valuable information and that it is extremely challenging to cleanse any analysis of the traces of the authors emotions.

Another significant distinction between sources is whether or not they are primary sources. Of the resources surveyed, one is primary. Vera Broido's *Apostles into Terrorists* is a description of women during the nihilist and populist phases of Russian terrorism, much of which is drawn from her personal correspondences with her subjects.<sup>25</sup> Primary sources demand that a certain level of respect and care be taken in incorporating them into a thesis. Due to her personal contacts with her subjects, Broido has a more accepting perspective on the Russian terrorists than many other authors, and there are places in the book where her personal biases appear with great clarity. Broido's account, however, is robust because she wrote it later in her life after the movement ran its course and after having read a great deal of supplementary literature.<sup>26</sup>

## **E. METHODS AND SOURCES**

This thesis will take the form of an extended case study of the terrorist movements that took place in Russia from roughly 1861 to 1908. From that case study, the thesis will attempt to isolate a number of factors that were instrumental in producing the terrorist movements of the period with particular attention paid to the psychological, environmental, and ideological dimensions. To the greatest extent possible, the analysis will focus on terrorism as a historical, social, and political phenomenon. Concrete examples of Russian terrorists, terrorist groups, and terrorist acts will be used to deepen the context and promote a greater understanding of Russia's prerevolutionary situation. The intended outcome of the case study is a set of broader conditions that contributed to producing terrorism in Russia in the prerevolutionary period and a nuanced explanation of why they are important. The thesis will also assess the validity and effectiveness of the selected analytical system which evaluates the Russian revolutionary terrorist phases in terms of environmental, ideological, and individual factors. The most important sources

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<sup>25</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, vi–vii.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

for this thesis will be written historical accounts and analyses of terrorist movements as well as historical analyses of the period from whence the terrorist movements arose. The terrorist movements in Russia are intimately tied to the historical conditions in which they occurred, so a history-based analysis is critical.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

The thesis will be organized into three main parts, each one based on a specific phase of revolutionary terrorism between the years of 1866 and 1908. The chapters will be arranged in chronological order beginning with the nihilist movement, continuing on to the populist movement, and then finishing with the SR movement. Dividing the broader period will not only focus analysis into more manageable lengths of time, but also will allow a greater degree of specificity in addressing the movements which differed from one another in meaningful ways. In each of the time periods, the thesis will offer a detailed description of the terrorist movement that characterized the period and then endeavor to distill the factors, persons, or societal conditions that best describe the movement's creation and purpose. The purpose of the historical analysis is to provide a broad description of the phenomenon of terrorism in prerevolutionary Russia and delineate some of the phenomenon's foundational and enduring features. The thesis will conclude with a synthesis and presentation of the findings.

## II. PHASE ONE: THE NIHILISTS

Russia's first experience with modern terrorism came in the form of the nihilist movement that began in 1866 and lasted until 1871. The core of the nihilist ideology was characterized by a total rejection of the estate-based order of society, especially as exemplified by the Tsar and his state structure.<sup>27</sup> The opening salvo to what would become a prolonged war between the Russian state and terrorism took place on April 4, 1866 when Dimitrii Karakozov, a radicalized college student, attempted to assassinate Tsar Alexander II. Even though Karakozov's bullet missed its target, it still did a great deal of damage. Karakozov's actions not only emboldened his radical comrades but also spawned a massive government crackdown often known as the "White Terror."<sup>28</sup> As often occurs with reactionary state policing programs, the "White Terror" did lead to the apprehension of many members of nihilist circles, but the heavy-handed manner in which it was enforced served only to further alienate and radicalize the broader movement.<sup>29</sup> The movement retained magnetism for several years, but the extreme means and perspectives espoused by the nihilists eventually exceeded those which the broader society was willing to accept and even outpaced some of their ideological forebears. In connection with the 1871 trial of a particularly extreme circle of nihilists led by Sergei Nechaev, the movement lost its influence and mystique.<sup>30</sup> The movement was short-lived and did not perpetrate violence on a great scale. It did, however, claim the life of one of its own members.<sup>31</sup> Of course, the nihilist movement did not simply spring into existence by chance nor was violence the inevitable outcome of the movement. The rise of nihilists as a terrorist group was motivated in large part by the state, society, and culture of the era from whence it arose; the ideological and tactical foundation laid by the

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<sup>27</sup> McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 97.

<sup>28</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 347; Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 69.

<sup>29</sup> Pomper, 71.

<sup>30</sup> Pomper, 72–73, 75; Venturi, 381.

<sup>31</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 192–193.



movement's motivators and members; and the macabre allure that the groups were able to generate. Details on the Russian political system will be addressed in the next section.

#### **A. THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

The resort to terrorism among groups that sought change comes as no great surprise granted the political situation of the mid-19th century. The promulgation of laws was driven primarily by the whims of the sovereign which often led to governmental policies that appeared arbitrary and inefficient. Although the ideological environment was oppressive, the barrier against more liberal Western ideas was not airtight. As a result, a persistent group of revolutionary thinkers developed beginning roughly in the mid-19th century drawing, in part, their inspiration from revolutionary and liberalizing efforts as had unfolded elsewhere in Europe since the late 18th century. Initially, the battle for liberalization was one of words, but impassioned pleas, satire, and even entreaties to logic failed to generate the desired actions from the capitol. Thus, once activists came to believe that peaceful means failed to advance their causes, it was only a matter of time until spilled ink gave way to spilled blood. Several issues, in particular, drew fire from individuals who sought reform including the institution of serfdom, stratification of privilege, widespread prosecution for ideological crimes, and educational restrictions.<sup>32</sup>

One of the most significant targets of liberal thinkers was the institution of serfdom. Serfdom was a long-standing Russian institution in which an agrarian caste comprised of people known as peasants or serfs were hereditarily tied to the land upon which they worked. Often little different from slaves, peasants lived and worked under the leadership of a land owner who could direct, discipline, or even sell them as he or she desired. Additionally, there were legal penalties and restrictions on runaways. It was possible, however, for peasants to purchase their own freedom and they were allowed to

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<sup>32</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 159 –161; Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 28; Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 227– 228.

have property, a house, and a family.<sup>33</sup> By and large, peasants were surprisingly compliant; from the imposition of serfdom to its abolition there were only a few instances of large-scale peasant rebellion. The historical record notwithstanding, the Tsarist regime worried profoundly about peasant uprisings, and the outcome of that concern was the development of Russia's internal security structure and mentality.<sup>34</sup> In order to keep serfs in place and relatively passive, the regime adopted a system of internal passports and personal movement controls and restricted education, long seen by the regime as a liberalizing influence.

Another major front on the battle against serfdom occurred among the members of educated society. Informed by ideals of the enlightenment and the fact that very few European nations retained the system or any corollary to it, writers of all disciplines launched an array of literary broadsides at the practice and the regime that allowed it to stand.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, by the end of the 1850s Russia had also received a resounding lesson on its broader cultural backwardness in the form of the Crimean War in which the British and French fought against the Russians over control of the Black Sea and the Straits. The once-vaunted Russian army performed so dismally that the War is characterized by some as "almost semicomical."<sup>36</sup> Such an embarrassing performance was a stinging indictment against the credibility of the regime. Thus, when Alexander II took the throne in 1855, the national atmosphere was strongly calling for change, and to some degree the new Tsar was willing to accommodate.<sup>37</sup> Due to a combination of the boisterous public outcry and the Tsar's desire to reform the obviously antiquated system, Alexander II abolished serfdom in 1861.<sup>38</sup> Even though the peasants were formally emancipated, however, their situation improved only nominally. In fact, the material wellbeing of many peasants actually decreased. In many cases, former serfs divided the

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 103–105.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>35</sup> Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell*, 159–161.

<sup>36</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Pipes, 163–164.

property of the landowners among themselves only to find that the resulting plots of land were insufficient even for subsistence.<sup>39</sup> Although they had ample reason for discontent, former serfs were generally not participants in nihilist terrorist groups nor in most other forms of political or revolutionary activity, for that matter. A group known as the *Narodniki* even attempted to release the alleged revolutionary potential of the agricultural class through their “to the people” campaign. Ironically, the movement ended in failure because the newly freed peasants distrusted the revolutionaries and still viewed the Tsar as their great king and benefactor.<sup>40</sup> The mistreated agricultural class did become, however, the rallying call for the disaffected university students that comprised the majority of the nihilist movement. In evidence, Karakozov initially told investigating authorities that he was a peasant after he was taken into royal custody.<sup>41</sup> Surely, some nihilists did actually feel some sympathy for the plight of the common man, but abuse of the peasants served primarily as a contrived grievance to unify would-be nihilists who were usually individuals of relative status and means.

Even in the present day, a visitor to either Moscow or St. Petersburg cannot help but be stunned by the grandeur of imperial palaces and seats of government. The Amber Room of Catherine’s Palace, the fountains at Peterhof, and the Kremlin were extravagant by the standards of the European dynasties of the era. Access to such fabulous locales, however, was possible only to a select portion of the broader Russian population. Adam Ulam encapsulates the situation of the commoner when he states that “the most loyal and patriotic subject could not help noticing that once you crossed the border from Europe into Russia the atmosphere became heavier, common people more servile and bedraggled,...all the amenities of life shabbier.”<sup>42</sup> Privilege and wealth were highly stratified and located primarily in large cities. Unsurprisingly, much of the wealth was also concentrated in the hands of those connected to the monarchy. Even the intelligentsia, which was a substantial and growing social class at the time, was

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<sup>39</sup> Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 166–167.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>41</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 4n.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

politically marginalized and of comparatively modest physical wealth. Significantly, many of the individuals who would become terrorists were students. By virtue of the location of Russia's schools, students necessarily lived in larger cities like St. Petersburg and Moscow, which were also the locations in which the riches of the monarchy and its vestiges were presented most visibly. As a result, the students had a high degree of exposure to the excesses of the regime. Although base, the role of simple jealousy caused by the gap between the haves and have-nots cannot be ignored as a significant environmental influence on the expression of radical thought and action.

The unsteadily liberalizing environment of the 1850s and 1860s also played a major part in turning dissidents into radicals. On one hand, the regime actively opposed dissent in public forums and media, but on the other, the period also saw a substantial opening of universities to broader swaths of society and, at first, rather lax behavioral and ideological constraints on students. Until roughly the death of Nicholas I, education was largely a right of the highly privileged and heavily preferential towards individuals who were destined for service in government. Rules were strict and specialties like history and philosophy were significantly limited. Simply put, Russian universities were not places that encouraged independent thought or that turned out many intellectuals, in the traditional sense. In the early phases of Alexander II's reign, universities changed substantially; they abolished uniforms, ended military training, gave students a relatively free hand in self-administration, adopted a strikingly permissive stance on the content of student publications, and most importantly opened enrollment to the general population.<sup>43</sup> The predictable result of the changes to the educational system was a sweeping and profound exposure of the students to radical publications and ideologues. Students enjoyed relatively free access to writings by a number of influential revolutionaries including Herzen, Dobrolyubov, Chernyshevsky, and others.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, some students appreciated the deeper philosophical and political nuances of the revolutionary ideologues, but in most cases, students merely used revolutionary ideas as a

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<sup>43</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 220–222.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

means to justify unruliness.<sup>45</sup> During the late 1850s and into the 1860s, there was a rash of blatant student misconduct in several major Russian cities. In some cases, the transgression was merely drunkenness, but as time passed, the breaches became more significant and political. Students were even able to force a number of unpopular professors to resign.<sup>46</sup> In an attempt to regain control, school administrations, often with the complicity of the provincial police and government, began to reduce the *carte blanche* that had been granted to the students. Naturally, the crackdown spawned even greater protests. In 1861, students organized the first ever demonstration in St. Petersburg which resulted in a number of students being arrested and imprisoned.<sup>47</sup> The students were eventually released on relatively light sentences, but by that time the damage was already done.<sup>48</sup> For the regime, the whole situation was a complete loss. Not only had government policy facilitated the occurrence of the outbreak, but the manner in which it tried to restore order was poorly executed. The end result was that the government not only gave further evidence of its own ineffectiveness but also deepened the grievances between itself and the student population.

The whole episode also revealed another major inconsistency in the regime's ideological policy because, while universities were ostensibly liberalizing, dissent was still largely illegal among the population, at large. At the time, many revolutionary ideologues lived and worked outside of Russia or published in secret, sometimes even from prison. Although punishments for ideological offenses were generally less severe than they were in previous eras or would become in later ones, one could still expect prison or exile if convicted of an ideological offense. The circumstances are rare in which a government can enforce ideological controls in anything but a heavy-handed manner. Additionally, it was easy for early revolutionaries and dissidents to use rough and allegedly unfair treatment by the government to build credibility among their followers;

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<sup>45</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 224.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 227–228.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

they endured hardship for the cause. Ultimately, ideological repression is an ineffective policy for any government, but Russia's sloppy and inconsistent execution of it only made matters worse.

By the time of Nicholas I's death, the soil was well prepared for the roots of nihilist extremism to take hold. Even though Alexander II's first years were characterized by the generally aptly called "great reforms" it was too late to uproot the weed of extremism and terrorism.<sup>49</sup> The institution of serfdom, the extreme concentration of wealth in royal hands, the ideological restraints on the public, and the repressive policies did much to arm the enemies of the regime. The combination of governmental ineffectiveness and public grievance thus provided dangerous fertilizer for a terrorist movement.

## **B. MAJOR IDEOLOGUES**

While environmental conditions were a significant contributor to the outbreak of nihilist terrorism in the 1860s in Russia, the national condition was only one of several contributing influences. During the 1860s and the years preceding it a number of individuals served to both inform and impassion the would-be terrorists to rise against the regime. Most of these ideologues were writers or journalists, and included individuals such as Pyotr Zaichnevsky, Nicholas Chernyshevskii, and Mikhail Bakunin. Additionally, terror cell leaders like Sergei Nechaev served not only in managerial functions, but also developed ideological guidance for members. The actions and influence of nihilist ideologues contributed significantly to not only the occurrence of terrorism, but also the conduct of terrorists once the groups developed.

### **1. The Golden Age of Russian Literature**

According to W. Bruce Lincoln in *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia*, "[d]uring the second half of the nineteenth century, the ability to portray life as it really was, not as it might—or ought to—be made

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<sup>49</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 11–12.

Russia's painters, writers, and composers the equal of any in Europe."<sup>50</sup> In the time that stretched from roughly 1850 to 1880, the inward gaze of Russian writers produced some of Russia's finest literary works including Turgenev's *A Hunters Sketches*, *Fathers and Sons*; Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, *The Devils*, *Notes from the House of the Dead*, and *The Idiot*; and Tolstoi's *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Eugene Onegin*.<sup>51</sup> Anyone versed in Russian literature of this period is sure to note that happiness, levity, and contentment are exceedingly rare. Thus, it is no great surprise that the outbreak of nihilist terrorism occurred within the same period. In fact, Turgenev was a significant, although somewhat unintentional contributor to the nihilist ideology. In his book *Fathers and Sons*, the main protagonist, Eugene Bazarov, is a prototypical nihilist. Bazarov rejects the conventions and vestiges of the time *en masse* and puts the entirety of his hope and faith in natural science. It is no small irony that Bazarov's death is a direct result of his scientific pursuits.<sup>52</sup> Even the one thing in which Bazarov places his faith is ultimately empty. It bears noting that the term "nihilism" is based upon the Latin *nihil* or nothing which Turgenev's depiction clearly bears out.<sup>53</sup> *Fathers and Sons*, however, offered no concrete solution or potential courses of action, which was largely borne out by nihilist terrorists who had no broader purpose, save to destroy the system as it currently existed.<sup>54</sup> It must be stated, however, that Turgenev was hardly a nihilist; many even criticized Turgenev for failing to follow his narrative with actions or even feelings.<sup>55</sup>

## 2. Nicholas Chernyshevsky

By a modern appraisal, Nicholas Chernyshevsky was an unlikely figure to become a revolutionary leader. Chernyshevsky was verbose in writing and awkward in

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<sup>50</sup> Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell*, 153.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 159–182.

<sup>52</sup> Bazarov dies of an infection he contracts while dissecting a corpse; Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 131–132.

<sup>53</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, "Nihilism," <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/127097?redirectedFrom=Nihilism#eid> (accessed November, 10, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Lincoln, 162; McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 97.

<sup>55</sup> Lincoln, 162; Ulam, 132.

personality, yet his life and his work did much to clarify and popularize the idea of the “new man” to which many nihilists deeply ascribed.<sup>56</sup> Although much of Chernyshevsky’s adult life reflected his cause, his most significant contributions to the nihilist ideology were his written works, especially his book entitled *What is to Be Done?*, and his public humiliation at the hands of the regime. Of Chernyshevsky’s impact on the prerevolutionary movement, Adam Ulam states that Chernyshevsky “was not the *maker* of the new world, but he took what was perhaps a passing fad and made it a religion at whose altar generations of Russian revolutionaries would worship.”<sup>57</sup> A critical component of the Chernyshevsky’s new world was the concept of the new man. The new man was conceptually a young person who abandoned the structures and institutions of the broader society and conformed to a new perspective on humanity and human relations. It goes almost without saying that a new man was opposed to the *ancien regime* of the Tsars, but a more significant and notable feature of the new man is revealed by the associated principles of the new woman and new marriage.<sup>58</sup> Predictably, the precipitant of the new world was a profound sexual revolution among all varieties of political extremists to include both the nihilists and the populists. New women were to be held in all respects equal to men and new marriages were, in all cases, sexually open for both members.<sup>59</sup> Proponents of the new world launched their assault against the traditional family because they viewed it as foundational element of society and, relative to the regime, it was an easier and more immediate target.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, since new marriages were by definition not recognized by either the state or the church, they had the convenient effect of pushing would-be revolutionaries further out of the mainstream of society.<sup>61</sup> According to Vera Broido, Chernyshevsky’s portrayal of the relationship between members of a new marriage as revealed in *What is to Be Done?* borders on caricature. The titular man and wife do not cohabit and even knock before entering

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<sup>56</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 56.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 53–54.

<sup>59</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 24–25.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Ulam, 54.



one another's rooms.<sup>62</sup> Although the relationship in the story is somewhat extreme, it was nonetheless emulated in several cases, to include in Chernyshevsky's own marriage.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to publishing *What is to Be Done?*, Chernyshevsky regularly contributed to other revolutionary publications to include *The Contemporary*. Moreover, Chernyshevsky was able to coalesce a substantial following, especially among university students.<sup>64</sup> Unsurprisingly, the combination of his inflammatory journalism and large personal following made Chernyshevsky a decidedly unpopular man among government circles. In 1862, following a series of fires in St. Petersburg that were dubiously linked to nihilists, government agents arrested Chernyshevsky and his associate Nicholas Serno-Solovievich.<sup>65</sup> Relying largely on fabricated or questionably obtained evidence, prosecuting authorities were able to convict Chernyshevsky of a variety of ideological offenses for which his final sentence was six years hard labor followed by a lifetime of exile in Siberia.<sup>66</sup> In 1864, before Chernyshevsky left St. Petersburg, he was subjected to a "civic execution" intended to publicly humiliate him.<sup>67</sup> While the event was intended to bring shame, the civic execution ultimately made Chernyshevsky a martyr with whom young nihilists could associate and elevate as a source of solidarity.<sup>68</sup> Thus, Nicholas Chernyshevsky served to coalesce the nihilist movement both through his literature and through the example set by his own life, especially his public martyrdom.

### **3. Pyotr Zaichnevsky**

Many early contributors to the nihilist movement concerned themselves primarily with spreading discontent and opposition to the regime but did not explicitly endorse violence. Pyotr Zaichnevsky, on the other hand, was quite a different breed. Called

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<sup>62</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 25.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>64</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 59.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 111–112.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

Russia's first real Jacobin, Zaichnevsky was a true revolutionary and extremist who added terrorism to the nihilist repertoire.<sup>69</sup> Born in 1842 to landowning parents, Zaichnevsky was an avid reader and writer and was already well-versed in socialist literature by the time he entered the University of Moscow. During his college years he reprinted and sold a variety of socialist literature including several that he authored. Eventually, his activities drew official attention leading to his arrest and imprisonment.<sup>70</sup> In 1862, although incarcerated and only nineteen years of age, Zaichnevsky released one of his most well-known pamphlets entitled *Young Russia*.<sup>71</sup> Some of the demands contained in *Young Russia* were relatively unsurprising and included calls for a pluralist representative body and socialist governance. Much of the tract, however, was radical and bloodthirsty. Zaichnevsky called for a destruction of all the standing political and social institutions and, more viciously, the liquidation of the entire royal family and any who sought to protect them.<sup>72</sup> *Young Russia* was a substantial influence for conspiratorial nihilist groups, and after his eventual release from prison Zaichnevsky continued to move about Russia and cultivate extremist cells for much of the remainder of his life.<sup>73</sup> Zaichnevsky later developed connections to populists and continued to advance his violent agenda.<sup>74</sup> Although many individuals were able to produce literature that informed the perspectives of the nihilists, few called them to action the way that Zaichnevsky did.

#### **4. Mikhail Bakunin**

Perhaps the best characterization of Mikhail Bakunin is that he was a professional revolutionary, an opportunist, and a fanatic. Although politically an anarchist, Bakunin did a substantial amount to further the cause of the nihilists including providing ideological support to members of nihilist groups and co-authoring "Catechism of a

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<sup>69</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 143, 346.

<sup>70</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 285, 290.

<sup>71</sup> Venturi, 285; Ulam, 109.

<sup>72</sup> Venturi, 285; Ulam, 110.

<sup>73</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 68.

<sup>74</sup> Ulam, 347–348.

Revolutionary” with Sergei Nechaev. Bakunin was born to a noble family in 1814 and, save for his highly active nature, did not seem a likely candidate for his own future. He passed his early years largely in a manner perfunctory for someone of his social status, but began to drift from the comfortable statist mentality as an officer cadet.<sup>75</sup> In the 1830s, he discovered a passion for German political thought which he pursued to Berlin from whence he became a traveling revolutionary around Europe. By 1851 he found himself incarcerated in St. Petersburg where he languished until 1857 when he was granted exile in Siberia from where he was able to escape in 1861. By means of Japan, then the United States, Bakunin was able to reach London where he became associated with notable Russian revolutionaries like Herzen and Ogarev.<sup>76</sup> Eventually, Bakunin worked his way to Switzerland, which became a well-known hotbed of Russian revolutionary activity in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>77</sup> Bakunin quickly became a popular figure among young revolutionaries due to his dynamism and unique history and travel.<sup>78</sup> One of Bakunin’s most consequential views was that the populace was but a small push away from revolution. In Bakunin’s mind, “natural rebels,” once brought together by influences like himself, would be the instrument by which the old order could be destroyed and the way cleared for a new one.<sup>79</sup> For nihilists, Bakunin was even more significant because he conspired with Sergei Nechaev to, through some degree of negligence and ignorance, help build Nechaev’s terrorist enterprise. Bakunin and Nechaev shared personal interaction for only a few months in Switzerland in the summer of 1869, but it was a productive time.<sup>80</sup> Bakunin took an immediate liking to Nechaev due to their shared penchant for action. Bakunin liked Nechaev so much, in fact, that he arranged to give Nechaev half of a revolutionary fund owned jointly by himself, Ogarev, and Herzen.<sup>81</sup> Nechaev arrived in Switzerland with an entirely fabricated story that he

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<sup>75</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 107; Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 36–37.

<sup>76</sup> Ulam, 108.

<sup>77</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 99–100.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 101

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 69–70.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>81</sup> Ulam, 182–183.

had escaped from the estimable Petropavlovsk prison, which Bakunin and Ogarev enthusiastically believed. The senior revolutionaries helped Nechaev print and distribute his fantastical story as well as a number of other publications which included the *Catechism of a Revolutionary* and *The People's Justice* which, in addition to laying out guidelines for conducting conspiratorial actions, comprised Nechaev's societal and governmental hit-list.<sup>82</sup> Bakunin's assistance in both fiscal and literary resources played a significant role in facilitating Nechaev's murderous agenda.

## 5. Sergei Nechaev

If there is one person who can be considered the villain of the nihilist movement, that person is Sergei Nechaev. Nechaev was a cunning, manipulative, and ruthless individual who served as an organizer, tactician, and ideologue for the nihilist movement. It is very likely that Nechaev was inspired to create his terrorist cell, called *Narodnaya Rasprava* (People's Revenge), by the group led by Nicholas Ishutin and Ivan Khudyakov with which Karakozov had been associated.<sup>83</sup> Compared to his ideological forebears, however, Nechaev was able to build a relatively large following.<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, Nechaev was rather different from the sons of the wealthy that constituted much of his extremist circle. Nechaev was born in Ivanovo-Voznesensk to a bartender. Despite his modest background, Nechaev was able to attend university in Moscow and become a teacher in St. Petersburg.<sup>85</sup> In St. Petersburg, Nechaev became acquainted with Peter Tkachev, a radical who had indirect connections with both Zaichnevsky and Karakozov and who believed that, in order for Russia to change, everyone over 25 years of age should be destroyed.<sup>86</sup> Nechaev, armed with ambition and a fabricated background tailored to his political leanings, sought to gain control of and politicize the Petersburg student movements in the late 1860s.<sup>87</sup> At roughly the same time, Nechaev was also able

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<sup>82</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 183–185.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 148, 185.

<sup>84</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 66.

<sup>85</sup> Ulam, 176.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 178–179.

to leverage the repressive political atmosphere to bring the attention of law enforcement on a number of political rivals.<sup>88</sup> When the tsar's hounds started to bark at Nechev's own door, he had the good sense to leave Russia. It was this leave of absence that Nechaev used to generate the myth of his imprisonment, erstwhile meeting with Bakunin and producing his most notable works including *Catechism of a Revolutionary* and *The People's Justice*.<sup>89</sup>

In September 1869, Nechaev returned to Moscow and begun cultivating his terrorist cell, in earnest. In the early phases, the group grew rapidly and the primary occupations of the members were to acquire new membership and procure funds, usually by intimidation, extortion, or fraud.<sup>90</sup> Ironically, one of the first and only times that Nechaev's group drew blood was from one of their own. In an attempt to generate commitment and loyalty, Nechaev demanded that Ivan Ivanov, a member of *Rasprava* and a man for whom Nechaev was known to have a deep enmity, was to be killed.<sup>91</sup> On November 21, 1869 Nechaev and four accomplices murdered Ivanov in his apartment and ditched the body in a frozen pond. Authorities discovered the body on November 25 and, by early December, had arrested all of the men who had participated in the murder, save for Nechaev, who had escaped abroad.<sup>92</sup> The discovery of the body also led the police to the meeting location for the group in which they were able to find a list of members, many of whom were also arrested and put on trial in 1871.<sup>93</sup> Nechaev evaded capture until the spring of 1872, and in 1873 he was convicted of murder and sentenced to twenty years hard labor. By secret order of the Tsar, Nechaev was actually sent to Petropavlovsk prison in St. Petersburg where he lived the last nine years of his life in solitary confinement.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 180.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 180, 183–185.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 186–190.

<sup>91</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 66; Ulam, 191.

<sup>92</sup> Ulam, 192–193.

<sup>93</sup> Ulam, 193; Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 72.

<sup>94</sup> Ulam, 196–199.

Happily, Nechaev and his followers were never able to carry out the darker side of their agenda. In fact, many Russians, including other brands of revolutionaries, were appalled by the behavior of members of *Rasprava*, particularly the murder of Ivanov.<sup>95</sup> The prosecution of the ring, however, was not a victory for the regime. On one hand, many radicalized students attended the trial of Nechaev's followers and delivered impassioned and convincing pleas in favor of the defendants.<sup>96</sup> On the other, when it came to light that Nechaev was secretly imprisoned in St. Petersburg instead of the prescribed exile, there was a pronounced objection among some sectors of the public in spite of the realization that even Siberia would not have held him for long.<sup>97</sup>

## C. WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A TERRORIST

### 1. Profile of a Nihilist

By and large, nihilism was a phenomenon that was most prevalent among college-aged males from the upper classes. According to Philip Pomper, the median age of the individuals in Nechaev's group was 22 years of age. Additionally, of the members whose backgrounds are known, a full 50 percent were from the gentry. Of the remainder of the members, all but roughly 13 percent were from backgrounds with relatively comfortable means.<sup>98</sup> In some cases, it was a man's noble background that Nechaev leveraged to induce him to join *Narodnaya Rasprava*. Nechaev was well known for playing on feelings of guilt among the upper classes for repressing the masses for so long.<sup>99</sup> In other cases, Nechaev used the force of his own character and direct physical threat to drive compliance with his goals. Several of Nechaev's followers claim to have been coerced to join the group at knifepoint.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 72–73.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>97</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 198.

<sup>98</sup> Pomper, 71–72.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>100</sup> Ulam, 189.

## 2. Mystique

One of the characteristics that made nihilism unique among revolutionary groups that existed up to that point, was the degree to which it developed its own mythology. From Turgenev's literary characters and Chernyshevsky's new men to Nechaev's fabricated tales of his own bravado, portrayals of the nihilist movement and its members had an almost lyrical quality. It is not difficult to imagine that the aura of adventure painted into the nihilist conspiracy made it attractive to many individuals, especially college-aged males looking for a purpose for their lives beyond books and lectures. It bears noting that some of the governmental abuses against which nihilists rallied were very real and socially pernicious, yet while the poor policies deserved opposition the approaches that the nihilists advocated were even more objectionable. Individuals like Nechaev were also singularly dedicated to their cause, for which many of his followers and later revolutionaries legitimately admired him.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the individuals who drove the nihilist movement were, intentionally or otherwise, able to take advantage of the ideological currents of the time and package them in such a way that made murder and widespread rebellion acceptable to a notable slice of society.

## D. CONCLUSION

Despite the bloodier motives of some of the movement's ideologues, the nihilist movement generated limited social change and an even smaller body count. No wholesale murder *a la* Zaichnevski or Nechaev actually took place. In a more esoteric sense, however, the nihilist movement did generate some significant casualties. One of the most significant victims of the movement was the legitimacy of the regime. Even watershed actions like the abolition of serfdom in 1861 did not significantly improve the social situation; the agricultural class received a new title but little in the way of material gains. Additionally, the repressive and inconsistent ideological control exercised both before and during the 1860s only increased bitterness among progressive sections of society and galvanized student unrest. The regime, through missteps like civically executing Chernyshevsky and clandestinely modifying Nechaev's sentence, also

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<sup>101</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 193, 199.

inadvertently created martyrs for the movement. In many ways, the tsarist government confirmed and reinforced the suspicions of progressives and revolutionaries. Although the nihilists' program stalled and the movement was somewhat delegitimized by the fratricide of Ivanov, later terrorist groups would rely on several of the same ideologues and even revive and polish the memory of individuals like Nechaev.<sup>102</sup> Thus, though the nihilist movement did not achieve many of its goals, it did set a solid foundation upon which other revolutionary and terrorist groups would build in the near future.

The example of the nihilists is largely in accordance with the hypothesis of the thesis because environmental influences generated grievances among the populace, ideologues capitalized on the social conditions to add force to their agendas, and individuals were sufficiently motivated to partake in the movement. During the time from 1866 to 1871 in which the nihilists were most active, the repressive national atmosphere combined with the demonstrated weaknesses of the regime to create a great deal of public dissatisfaction. Ideologues like Chernyshevsky, Zaichnevsky, Bakunin, and Nechaev were able to use the social frustration as a springboard for their radical ideas, and many individuals, often college-age males, joined the movement for a variety of reasons including, ideological agreement, admiration for other participants in the movement, and sometimes a degree of coercion. The nihilists also contributed a number of ideas and techniques to future groups, most notably, the operation of a conspiracy and the beginnings of violent radical ideologies. Additionally, the nihilist phase produced martyrs who later groups could use to promote solidarity and action.

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<sup>102</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 72–73, 75.



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### III. PHASE TWO: THE POPULISTS

The second major phase of Russian prerevolutionary terrorism was associated with the populist movement and occurred in the period stretching from 1878 to 1882.<sup>103</sup> Compared to the nihilist movement which was relatively narrow in terms of scope, membership, and ultimate effect, the populist movement was substantially broader and surpassed its predecessor in nearly all respects. The populist movement was based on a relatively mature ideological framework and comprised a larger segment of the population than did its nihilist predecessors. While women played a relatively small role in the nihilist movement, their contribution to populist terror was substantial and worthy of mention.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, the populists were able to conduct a feat that the nihilists could not; a member of *Narodnaya Volia*, a populist terrorist group, assassinated Tsar Alexander II in March 1881.<sup>105</sup> Populist terrorists also killed a number of other governmental officials and experimented with various tactics and means of self-organization.<sup>106</sup> The high-tide of populist terror lasted from 1878 to 1882 and dealt a significant blow to the regime.<sup>107</sup> As with the nihilists, the populist movement was influenced significantly by the environment from which it arose, was informed and comprised by a number of influential people and groups, and was able to generate an ideological magnetism that helped draw members and motivate them to do conduct the bloody business of terrorism.

#### A. THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In many ways, the national environment faced by the populists was relatively similar to that faced by the nihilists. The wealthy were still wealthy, the poor were still poor, and the regime was still oppressive. Terrorism began to return to the toolkits of revolutionary groups in 1876, but even in the five years that had passed since the

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<sup>103</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 79.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

dissolution of the Nechaev ring, a number of significant changes took place in the nation that affected radical groups.<sup>108</sup> Some of the changes were a result of internal developments, external pressures caused others, and some were directly related to the populace and government's experience with nihilism. Specifically, the main environmental factors that shaped the development of the populist terrorist movement was the regime's enforcement methods, the changing public perspectives on radicalism and terror, the plight of women in higher education, and the further delegitimization of the regime due to the Russo-Turkish war.

The nihilist period was somewhat short lived, but it did change certain features of the national environment and instruct future generations of radicals and terrorists. Ultimately, the only winners to emerge from Russia's experience with nihilist terror were the populists. The nihilists lost because many ended up in prison or exile, the regime lost because it dealt with the nihilists in a manner that offended progressive members of the populace and drove even more individuals into the camps of other revolutionaries. The populists, in addition to being able to absorb many of the new radicals and revolutionaries, also benefitted from the nihilists lesson on how not to conduct a conspiracy.<sup>109</sup> Unsurprisingly, the nihilist movement led to an increase in government efforts to police and control the populace which, although it made operations more difficult, continued to embitter the population, especially students. Beginning during the nihilist period and continuing thereafter, the Third Department, the Tsar's secret police, stiffened its operations. In the early 1870s, even receiving subversive literature in the mail was grounds for arrest.<sup>110</sup> Another reaction to the nihilist movement, which the government knew was comprised largely of students, was to enact further restrictions on universities and university students. One particularly acrimonious action by Alexander II's regime was to cancel scholarships for many poor students who could not otherwise afford to attend university. The predictable result was new and ever-expanding waves of student protest. The regime elected to use soldiers to break up the demonstrations. The

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<sup>108</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 75.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>110</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 203.

soldiers often executed their mission with enthusiasm and violence, and, in the process of dispersing unruly formations and arresting instigators, beat up a significant number of students.<sup>111</sup> The regime also dubiously blamed students for a series of arson attacks in St. Petersburg and responded with still more repression.<sup>112</sup> The combination of the violent and repressive demeanor with which the regime approached students and the large number of poor former-students that were loath to go back to the provinces drove individuals to dissent groups in significant numbers.<sup>113</sup> Initially, most of the student groups were peaceful, which probably saved the whole movement from being destroyed by government officials while still in embryonic form.<sup>114</sup> In the longer-term context, however, the profusion of populist groups, even peaceful ones, meant that when terrorism did arise it was based on a more developed ideological and organizational framework which made it much more resilient to government control and more tactically efficient.

In many ways, education and educational reforms proved to be the achilles heel of the tsarist government. Educational restrictions also had a significant impact on the entry of women into populist groups. The principle of radical equality in the ideals of the new man and the new family drew a limited number of women into the nihilist movement, but in most cases they did not participate in the Jacobinism that characterized nihilism's darker side. In the populist movement, on the other hand, women figured quite prominently, even when it came to terrorist activities. Some of the primary motivators for women's entry into the revolutionary sphere were the feminist movement and the prohibition of women from attending universities. By the 1870s, feminism was already a broad and well established movement that encompassed women from all stations of life. Although their trajectories did not entirely coincide, feminists found allies among revolutionary circles, and the two formed a sort of symbiotic relationship in which both movements were able to count on some degree of support from the other.<sup>115</sup> Mere

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<sup>111</sup> McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 111.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 210.

<sup>115</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 45–47.

association with radicals, however, was not sufficient to drive women to revolutionary groups in significant numbers; a grievance was necessary. Many women found just such a grievance in the workplace. Alexander II's abolition of serfdom had the regrettable and unexpected effect of economically demolishing small-scale agriculture which forced great numbers of small landowners and former serfs, both men and women, to seek additional income elsewhere. Men, who could attend school or other training programs, fared relatively well, but women, who were barred from most traditional educational systems, met tremendous hardship.<sup>116</sup> Some women found *artels*, or cooperatives, to be an expedient manner of receiving training and finding work or were even able to enter certain fields without education, but education remained the real prize.<sup>117</sup> Throughout the early 1860s the national government and local communities experimented with a variety of methods for providing education to women from school age to university level. Ultimately, most of the attempts failed; some due merely to the lack of government funding, others as a result of direct government prohibition. The Third Department seemed particularly averse to women's education. In 1862, by the urging of the secret police, Alexander II disbanded a system of volunteer schooling for the poor which educated and employed a substantial number of women.<sup>118</sup> One of the last officially sanctioned bastions of women's education were series of evening lectures open to the public that were offered from 1870 through 1875 in St. Petersburg. The offering ended as a result of a lack of funding, but was harassed by police throughout the time of its operation.<sup>119</sup> By blocking access to education, the regime removed legitimate occupational options for many women and fostered a repressive atmosphere. Worse still, by allowing some programs for women's education to exist only to later take them away or allow them to expire, the government deeply embittered the women who advocated or participated in such reforms. Limited employment options and grievances against the regime played directly into the hands of the populists, who greeted the frustrated and

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<sup>116</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 47–48.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, 51.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–53.

alienated women with open arms. Women terrorists would not only become some of the most significant members of the populist groups like *Narodnaya Volia*, but they would also figure prominently in revolutionary groups thereafter.

While many of the regime's woes are attributable to its own maladroit policies, it was also a victim of some bad luck. One example of the ill-fortune of Alexander II's regime was the outbreak and resolution of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878. In something of a historical rarity, Russia was not an enthusiastic participant in the conflict. Domestic concerns and international realities clearly indicated that entry was not desirable, yet, due to the collapse of diplomatic recourses and an outpouring of domestic enthusiasm for protecting Slavic brethren, Russia entered the war in April 1877.<sup>120</sup> Ultimately, Russia won the war, but the end-state left much to be desired. Not only did the conflict last longer than expected, but the casualties were also distressingly high. Russia also suffered what was perceived as a major diplomatic defeat in the treaty terms.<sup>121</sup> Due largely to the hectoring of Austria-Hungary and Britain, against whom Russia deeply hoped to avoid conflict, Russia had to change what would have been a highly favorable post-war arrangement. The final agreement was far less favorable for Russia and, most egregiously, allowed Britain and Austria-Hungary to acquire Balkan territory even though they had spent no blood or treasure on the conflict.<sup>122</sup> In reality, Alexander II was not to blame; failure to cooperate with Britain and Austria-Hungary could have had much more serious consequences. A great many of the Russian subjects, however, did not grasp the greater diplomatic context and the Tsar was a convenient scapegoat.<sup>123</sup> Thus, the outcome of the Russo-Turkish war gave the public another reason to see the government as weak and unable to defend the best interests of the nation.

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<sup>120</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 358–359.

<sup>121</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 262.

<sup>122</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 360.

<sup>123</sup> Ulam, 262.

Anyone who has kept a garden knows that, when clearing weeds, the whole weed must be removed; if the roots are left below the ground, the weed will regrow. Russia experienced a similar phenomenon in its battle against terror and radicalism. The regime was able to capture a relatively large number of terrorists and subversives, but some continued to evade government enforcement. Pyotr Zaichnevsky, even though imprisoned for a time, was able to move about Russia for much of his life and contribute to other revolutionary causes, to include that of the populists.<sup>124</sup> To the Tsar's unending chagrin, some revolutionaries were nearly untouchable because they lived outside of the country. Revolutionaries often gathered in Switzerland and were able to collaborate on techniques and ideology, write pamphlets, and make connections with other radicals.<sup>125</sup> As it were, Bakunin and other revolutionaries abroad functioned like weeds in a neighbor's garden which invade others by means of the pollen of subversive literature carried by students acting as worker bees. Additionally, a tenacious remnant of extremists remained within Russia. As a result, Russia soon experienced a new outbreak of terrorism.

Another troublesome development to appear in the 1870s was a growing public desensitization to or even acceptance of terrorism. While the lurid revelations from the trials of the Nechaev ring inspired disgust among much of society, the people became increasingly tolerant of it as the decade wore on. It is likely that, as time progressed, growing portions of the population grew to see that the regime did not necessarily have their best interests at heart and that a change was necessary. Public indifference to terrorism should not be viewed as a vote in favor of the populists; if anything, it was a vote of no-confidence in the Tsar and his system.

As with the nihilist movement, the populist movement did not necessarily have mass public appeal, but it did benefit substantially from the national environment from whence it grew. As a result of clumsy policies by the government, especially in controlling dissent and regulating education, the populace had more than sufficient reason to doubt the Tsar's efficacy. Alexander II also suffered from a degree of bad luck in the

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<sup>124</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 301–302.

<sup>125</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 183.

form of the Russo-Turkish war. The Tsar had little choice but to get involved in the war and his armies were victorious, but his prudent acceptance of international realities in the resulting treaty infuriated many in the homeland. Populist groups also gained a great deal of benefit from the revolutionary continuity provided by radicals that remained at-large and the freedom of action granted by a relatively permissive populace.

## **B. MAJOR IDEOLOGUES**

In a fundamental sense, the national environment in which the populists operated was not starkly different from that faced by the nihilists. As a result, environmental explanations may not be the most complete explanation of why and how the populist movement differed from its predecessor. One explanation of the differences in operation and outcomes between the movements is provided by the individuals and groups that comprised them. In large part, the nihilist movement was much more individual in nature than the populist movement. Populists tended to organize themselves into more cohesive groups which were better able to self-regulate than the conspiratorial cells that characterized nihilist organization. The populist movement also waited longer before resorting to violence, and when violence did arise the perpetrators conducted it with much greater organization, planning, and support which substantially increased its effectiveness.<sup>126</sup>

### **1. Alexander Herzen**

According to Franco Venturi, “Herzen was the true founder of Populism.”<sup>127</sup> Herzen, a member of the intelligentsia, was a writer and an ideologue who viewed and portrayed populism with a human face. Both in-person and through correspondence, Herzen had contact with many members of prerevolutionary radical groups and provided a substantial amount of socialist ideological continuity. As a young man, Herzen witnessed the Decembrist revolt at the end of 1825 as well as the harsh manner in which the government stifled it. The failed revolt had a deep impact on Herzen, who grew to

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<sup>126</sup> Pomper, “Russian Revolutionary Terrorism,” 80.

<sup>127</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 1.



own the Decembrist cause as his own.<sup>128</sup> From a relatively young age, Herzen cultivated connections with other revolutionary individuals. Some of Herzen's revolutionary relationships were deep and prolonged. Nicholas Ogarev and Herzen were childhood friends who collaborated on revolutionary matters intermittently beginning in their teenage years. While in their late twenties, Herzen, Ogarev, and Ogarev's wife lived in the same home. The trio adhered to the notion of the new marriage, which facilitated extramarital liaisons between Herzen and Ogarev's wife, a number of which produced children. Ogarev fully knew of the relationship between Herzen and his wife, but did not outwardly manifest hostility toward his colleague.<sup>129</sup> Herzen also had a great many briefer, more superficial connections with other revolutionaries, especially from 1857–1862 when his home became a “meeting place and object of pilgrimage,” for budding revolutionaries of the time.<sup>130</sup> Although Herzen died in 1870, before the high-tide of Russian populism, contact with Herzen served as a common denominator between a large number of the individuals that participated in revolutionary movements.<sup>131</sup> Herzen also made an impact on other generations of Russian radicals to include the nihilists and Bolsheviks, who did however approach him with some reservation.<sup>132</sup>

Herzen's personal correspondences were significant, if not symbolic, for many revolutionaries, but his greatest contributions to the revolutionary cause, especially that of the populists, were in his writings. In *Roots of Revolution*, Franco Venturi characterizes Herzen's autobiography, entitled *My Past and Thoughts*, as contributing most significantly to the development of the populist ideology.<sup>133</sup> Herzen's framing of populism as a movement based on “personality rather than dogma” is clearly reflected in both his work and his life.<sup>134</sup> Herzen's autobiography, however, represents only a small segment of his broader literary contributions to the early revolutionary movement.

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<sup>128</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 1–2.

<sup>129</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 34.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>133</sup> Venturi, 1.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

Herzen was also a prolific political journalist and critic and aired many of his views in his self-published periodicals, initially the *Polar Star* then *The Bell*.<sup>135</sup> By 1860, *The Bell* had become one of the most significant publications for revolutionaries of all varieties. Although it was technically illegal to be in possession of the periodical, *The Bell* had a substantial body of readers within Russia that even included the Tsar and many other governmental officials. Obviously, the Tsar and his retinue did not read *The Bell* because they were revolutionaries but because the magazine served not only as a helpful gauge of popular opinion but also as a surprisingly accurate, albeit slanted, body of investigative reporting on the Russian government. Russian subjects could also contribute to the periodical, which they did in great numbers.<sup>136</sup>

Significantly, while Herzen's perspectives were clearly represented in the subject matter, *The Bell* was a remarkably moderate periodical. Ultimately, Herzen advocated for a populist system that emphasized agrarian socialism but eschewed Western styles of political authority.<sup>137</sup> Absent from Herzen's outlook on populism were violent conspiratorial organizations and universal populist doctrine. However, as the 1860s dawned and populism began to acquire more conspiratorial and action-oriented forms, Herzen's influence began to wane. The revolutionary movements that occurred during that time and afterwards drew on Herzen for their ideological foundation, but abandoned his notions on the manner in which populism should be pursued and the form the resulting government should take.<sup>138</sup> Even though the revolutionary movements departed from the core of Herzen's image of populism, they repeatedly honored him as the founder of the movement.<sup>139</sup> It is unlikely that Herzen would have approved of the ultimate trajectory of the populist movement, but it is impossible to know due to the time of his

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<sup>135</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 31, 37, 39.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 39–40.

<sup>138</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 1.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

death. Ultimately, Herzen's legacy is that of an inventor whose creation, while initially benign, grew in unpredictable ways to become a new creature with a nature far more malevolent than initially intended.

## 2. Narodniki

One of the first major populist initiatives to take place after the conclusion of the nihilist movement was the “to the people” campaign of 1873–1874.<sup>140</sup> At its core, the movement was intended to serve the joint purpose of bringing revolutionaries into contact with the Russian agricultural class and beginning to stir the passions of revolution among the laboring masses.<sup>141</sup> Many of the individuals who partook in the campaign, called the *narodniki* based on the Russian name for the initiative “*k narodu*” (“to the people”), were in their teens or early twenties and were relatively new initiates to revolutionary circles.<sup>142</sup> The *narodniki* left the cities to live and labor with the peasants, assuming that the peasants would be the greatest recipients of the benefits of revolution and, therefore, an easy target for radicalization. Regardless of their intentions, the reality of living among Russia's common folk surprised many of the young revolutionaries, even ones who had prepared for the experience.<sup>143</sup> Many of the aristocratically-born *narodniki* were entirely unsuited for the ardors of an agrarian life; many could not physically bear a day of labor or even imbibing of the homemade spirits that were ubiquitous in rural Russia.<sup>144</sup> Ultimately, the movement stalled; many of the young radicals lost patience with their target audience, and the whole effort was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the peasants. The peasants, in the infrequent times in which the revolutionaries were able to share their populist doctrine, did not see themselves as the oppressed and downtrodden individuals that the revolutionaries had assumed that they were. In fact, most peasants continued to see the Tsar as their great benefactor and kind

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<sup>140</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 219.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 218–219

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 219–220.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

ruler and did not view most wealthy peasants as predatory *kulaks*.<sup>145</sup> As a result, the perspective of the *narodniki* toward the peasants was often a condescending one.<sup>146</sup> The movement ended in 1874 with a massive wave of arrests of the populist missionaries.<sup>147</sup> While the movement was unsuccessful in its larger aims of inciting peasant rebellion, it did have some other unexpected effects. Most significantly, the *narodnik* campaign served as a training ground and ideological cultivator for a significant portion of the individuals who would later become members of the groups Land and Freedom and *Narodnaya Volia*.<sup>148</sup>

### 3. Land and Freedom

To speak of the group Land and Freedom is actually to speak of two separate groups. The first Land and Freedom was formed in 1861 as a collaborative effort between radicals in London and St. Petersburg. The group was influenced heavily by a variety of contemporary revolutionary publications including *The Bell* and *The Contemporary*, and, according to Adam Ulam, it was “the closest thing to an underground revolutionary party Russia had [theretofore] ever known.”<sup>149</sup> The first Land and Freedom endeavored to create fertile soil for a large-scale peasant revolt, but was relatively muted in its calls for violence or an immediate revolution.<sup>150</sup> Initially, the Tsar’s Third Department had practically no knowledge of the Land and Freedom organization, but some of the party’s leaders and ideologues were on the police’s radar. Herzen, Ogarev, Bakunin, Chernyshevsky, Serno-Solovievich, and other radicals were well known and not well-liked by the police.<sup>151</sup> Due to the arrest of Chernyshevsky and Serno-Solovievich and

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<sup>145</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 229–230.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>148</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 470.

<sup>149</sup> Ulam, 101.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

the fading influence of Herzen, the first Land and Freedom expired in the spring of 1863 before it could provoke any serious or widespread unrest.<sup>152</sup>

While the first Land and Freedom was primarily an exercise in building ideology and organization, the second Land and Freedom was far more active. Revived following the collapse of the *narodnik* campaign in 1874, the second Land and Freedom marked the return of terror and conspiracy to the arsenal of revolutionary groups.<sup>153</sup> In large part, Land and Freedom was born out of a crisis of the populist movement; the “to the people” campaign had been a disappointing failure and the peaceful methods upon which the movement had thence far been predicated met public indifference and official repression. The fortunes of the movement changed, however, as the trials of the arrested *narodniki* began. The trials, in fact, were a colossal victory for the movement. The public and the judiciary fell on the side of the populists and the Tsar fell on the side of the hated secret police. The Tsar’s actions once again embittered the people and ignited a vengeance among many of the populists.<sup>154</sup> Land and Freedom was born in the fall of 1876, and by that time many of its members no longer had the patience for bringing about change in a peaceful fashion.<sup>155</sup> In the relatively brief lifespan of the organization, Land and Freedom’s constituent cells launched the first real wave of political violence in prerevolutionary Russia. Land and Freedom’s murderous campaign was highly ambitious; the organization placed a target on the head of the Tsar, ordered assassinations of a variety of state and local officials, and even discussed plans as great as using dynamite to blow up the Winter Palace.<sup>156</sup> Land and Freedom was unable to meet its more extreme goals, but members of the organization did kill a substantial number of government and police officials.<sup>157</sup> One of the highest profile attacks of the period was Vera Zasulich’s attempted assassination of General Trepov, the governor of St. Petersburg, in January of 1878. The event was not remarkable for the attempt, for

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>153</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 233.

<sup>154</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 177–178.

<sup>155</sup> Ulam, 247.

<sup>156</sup> Broido, 178; Ulam 247–248.

<sup>157</sup> Broido, 178.

Zasulich failed to kill him even though she fired from point blank range, but for the outcome.<sup>158</sup> Naturally, other liberals and revolutionaries supported Zasulich, but a stunning percentage of the general population came out in her favor, as well. In a show trial characterized by extreme public interest and impassioned addresses from both Zasulich and other revolutionaries, the defendant turned the tables on the victim and put Trepov and, by extension, the whole tsarist system on trial.<sup>159</sup> Ultimately, the jury found Zasulich not guilty of the assassination attempt, which stunned authorities and revolutionaries, alike.<sup>160</sup> Revolutionaries were substantially emboldened by the affair, and once again, the regime was painted as the villain.<sup>161</sup>

It is important to note that Land and Freedom was at no time a monolithic organization; it was factionalized from the beginning. Some sections of Land and Freedom's membership repudiated violence throughout the life of the organization, and others, adhering to concepts laid out by Nechaev and Bakunin, believed that violence was the only way to achieve their goal.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, the groups were divided geographically which also limited uniformity in both ideology and practice. In 1879, Land and Freedom split into two groups. One group, called the Black Repartition (*Chorniy Peredel*) did not accept terrorism as a legitimate tactic and instead sought to continue the program of the *narodniki* by seeking to radicalize the peasants. The other faction called itself *Narodnaya Volia* (People's Will) and became one of the most active and violent terrorist groups of the period.<sup>163</sup> In spite of Land and Freedom's factionalism, it did however pioneer a number of organizational tendencies that other groups would borrow and elaborate upon. Most significantly, Land and Freedom adopted practices of secrecy and enforced internal order through brutal punishments for spies and informants.<sup>164</sup> The extent of Land and Freedom's control over its members was limited, however. In 1879, Alexander Solovev,

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<sup>158</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 596.

<sup>159</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 270–271.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>161</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 78.

<sup>162</sup> Ulam, 287.

<sup>163</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 180.

<sup>164</sup> Venturi, 559; Broido, 178.

a member of Land and Freedom, attempted to assassinate the Tsar, but did so without seeking approval or support from the organization.

#### 4. *Narodnaya Volia* (People's Will)

*Narodnaya Volia* is perhaps the most significant case study of a terrorist group during the populist period. *Narodnaya Volia* was the primary group and perpetrator of terrorism in the period that stretched from 1878 through 1882 which is known as “the crisis of the autocracy.”<sup>165</sup> During that time, terrorists killed a large number of state officials, including the Tsar, and generated a great deal of panic in all sectors of government. Compared with earlier terrorist groups, *Narodnaya Volia* was the most mature and sophisticated terrorist organization. The organization adopted corporate practices like the division of labor and had a more definitive program than most of their ideological forebears. Like previous groups, *Narodnaya Volia* ultimately desired a socialist state, but, unlike their predecessors, acknowledged that a constitutional period was first necessary.<sup>166</sup> It is important to note, moreover, that while many historians question the sanity of some earlier terrorists, most members of *Narodnaya Volia*, especially its leading figures, were perceived as individuals of sound and rational mind.<sup>167</sup> Of particular interest is the fact that many significant members of *Narodnaya Volia*, to include Sofia Perovskaya and Andrei Zhelyabov, ultimately disapproved of terrorism but accepted it at the time for the sake of the group and the cause. Even the role or terrorist actions changed in *Narodnaya Volia*. Rather than using terrorism as a podium to propagate their social ideology, terrorism was an end in and of itself.<sup>168</sup>

*Narodnaya Volia*, especially in its earlier years was a very busy organization. In addition to the substantial number terrorist actions its members perpetrated, the group also engaged in a rather ingenious program of deception and espionage. With its revamped structure and motivation, *Narodnaya Volia* conducted its acts of terrorism with

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<sup>165</sup> Pomper, “Russian Revolutionary Terrorism,” 79.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 83–84.

<sup>167</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 142.

<sup>168</sup> Pomper, 84

an order and precision that surpassed any of its predecessors. The organization's sectionalized structure allowed some individuals to specialize in explosives, others could specialize in propaganda, and still others could tend to the organizations administration or labor on the groups publication, *The People's Will*.<sup>169</sup> For its acts of terror, the target set did not change much from previous populist groups. Nearly any government official was eligible to have a death warrant levied upon him by *Narodnaya Volia's* Executive Committee. However, due to the group's favored method of strike, dynamite, many lower level government functionaries were killed, as well.<sup>170</sup> Unsurprisingly, Tsar Alexander II was the organization's primary target; the group had condemned him to death as one of its earliest actions in 1879.<sup>171</sup> *Narodnaya Volia* haunted the Tsar, conducting seven assassination attempts between 1879 and 1881 when the eighth attempt finally achieved its goal.<sup>172</sup> Although terrorism was the primary output of the organization, it also displayed an impressive penchant for deception and espionage. Especially early in its existence, the members of *Narodnaya Volia* went through substantial efforts to give the appearance of a much larger conspiracy. In reality, the Executive Committee was simply the part of *Narodnaya Volia* that determined the docket for assassinations, but through skillful misinformation and deception the revolutionaries cast the two as unique entities. Moreover, *Narodnaya Volia* cast a shade of mystery around the Executive Committee by never claiming membership or connection to it. Thus, for the first couple years of *Narodnaya Volia's* existence, authorities perceived the Executive Committee as a mysterious organization about which they had very little information and from which a member was never captured.<sup>173</sup> *Narodnaya Volia* also had significant successes in espionage. The group collected a tremendous amount of information on the Tsar's political police and was even able to place assets in the department, itself. Alexander

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<sup>169</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 80; Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 334.

<sup>170</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 711.

<sup>171</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 191.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.



Mikhailov, *Narodnaya Volia*'s master spy, was ultimately caught, but not before providing his group with a great deal of intelligence on Third Department operations and tactics.<sup>174</sup>

The assassination of a head of state is a notable historical occasion in its own right, but the historical legacy of *Narodnaya Volia* is much broader than a single high-profile murder. In the long-term, *Narodnaya Volia* made the regime an enemy of itself and set several important precedents for future movements. In many ways, the regime met its *bête noir* in *Narodnaya Volia*. Terrorism left the Tsar no positive policy options. Allowing the attacks to continue unabated was never an option for the regime, and all police crackdowns ever seemed to achieve was a greater radicalization of revolutionaries. As Adam Ulam states, *Narodnaya Volia* “destroyed its [the regime’s] power to reform itself.”<sup>175</sup> Perhaps the most significant legacy of *Narodnaya Volia* was its self-identification as a party. The notion of being a party substantially increased the group’s cohesion and deepened individual obedience and commitment. One of the hugely consequential ideas to arise from *Narodnaya Volia* was the concept of *partiinnost*.<sup>176</sup> There is no specific English word that captures the denotative and connotative meaning of *partiinnost*, but it is most closely described as the feeling of pride, dedication, and obligation derived from membership in a party. The concept of *partiinnost* was later used by the Communist Party to substantial effect.

## 5. Women Revolutionaries

One feature of the populist movement that made it so unique was the substantial degree of participation by women. Women figured prominently not only as members in the groups but also in their leadership and even the direct participation in acts of terrorism. Three of the most significant women in the movement were Vera Zasulich, Vera Figner, and Sofia Perovskaya. All three women enjoyed long and productive careers in the revolutionary business. Vera Zasulich entered the revolutionary world through her

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<sup>174</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 186, 196–197.

<sup>175</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 394.

<sup>176</sup> Pomper, “Russian Revolutionary Terrorism,” 86.

acquaintance with Sergei Nechaev and was a member of both Land and Freedom and the Socialist Revolutionary party.<sup>177</sup> Zasulich is best known for her assassination attempt on General Trepov, but later grew to disdain terrorism as a tactic of social change.<sup>178</sup> Vera Figner had perhaps the longest and broadest career of any female revolutionary in the populist period. Figner was an active participant in the *narodnik* movement and was also a member of *Narodnaya Volia*. Notably, Figner was a leading personality in the Executive Committee of *Narodnaya Volia* and was influential in planning terrorist actions. In 1883, an informant denounced Figner, leading to her arrest and subsequent imprisonment.<sup>179</sup> Sofia Perovskaya, a would-be poster-child for the St. Petersburg gentry, was another significant contributor to the populist cause. At a young age, she became interested in nihilism and grew more and more involved as her years advanced.<sup>180</sup> Perovskaya successfully evaded incarceration for revolutionary activities several times, but joined *Narodnaya Volia* somewhat reluctantly due to its violent proclivities.<sup>181</sup> Fate finally caught up with Perovskaya in 1881 when she was arrested and subsequently hanged in connection with the assassination of Alexander II.<sup>182</sup> Many other women were also involved in revolutionary activities during the populist period, at one point making up nearly a third of the Executive Committee of *Narodnaya Volia*, and their contributions to the movement were no less significant than those of males.<sup>183</sup>

## C. WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A TERRORIST

### 1. Profile of a Populist

As with the nihilist movement, the ranks of populist revolutionaries fell into a relatively uniform demographic profile. In large part, populist revolutionaries were children of the wealthy urban class and many were university students or former

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<sup>177</sup>Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 77; Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 273.

<sup>178</sup> Pomper, 78.

<sup>179</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 186–187, 202.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–76.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 183–184,

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

university students. Whereas nihilist revolutionaries were primarily male, the populists counted many women among their number. Additionally, the majority of populists were unmarried and had no children. The social composition of populist revolutionaries is very important because it reveals a number of things about the nature of the populist movement and about terrorist movements, in general. In a very practical sense, the children of privilege engaged in radicalism because they could. Populist terrorists were, by and large, free from obligations that would otherwise have slowed their path towards radicalism. Most populist terrorists did not have a family to feed, a career to cultivate, or an estate to manage. More significantly, populist revolutionaries were individuals of means. Maintaining an extremist organization is a very expensive undertaking. Printing publications, moving people around a country, and acquiring the materials necessary to conduct acts of terrorism are all expensive and would have been outside of the financial abilities of the majority of the Russian population. Thus, populist revolutionaries combined their unique set of resources and liberties to craft a highly destructive movement.

## 2. Motivations

In some cases, however, populist revolutionaries did face higher barriers to entry into the revolutionary world than did their predecessors. The course of the populist movement was characterized by increasing levels of violence in all sectors. Police brutality grew steadily over the populist period; suspected radicals were beaten harshly when apprehended and the use of torture on prisoners increased greatly in frequency.<sup>184</sup> In addition, the severity of legal sentencing also increased substantially over the populist period. While nihilists usually received relatively modest prison sentences or exile, long prison sentences or execution became the norm by around 1880.<sup>185</sup> Populist revolutionaries also faced much higher levels of violence among their own revolutionary comrades. If a member of a populist revolutionary group was suspected of being a spy or traitor for the regime, he or she faced savage beatings, probably to the point of death. One

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<sup>184</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 263.

<sup>185</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 196–197.

such case was that of Nicholas Gorinovich. Fellow members of his revolutionary cell had reason to believe that Gorinovich was an informer, so they beat him with blackjacks, splashed acid in his face, and left him for dead. Gorinovich miraculously survived, albeit horribly disfigured, and told tsarist authorities everything he knew about the group.<sup>186</sup> Populist terrorists were even a danger to themselves. Especially once *Narodnaya Volia* came into full-scale operations, dynamite was the favored method of conducting assassinations. At the time, explosives technology was very primitive, so the bombs posed great danger to the individuals who made them and the individuals that used them, called throwers.<sup>187</sup> In Alexander II's assassination and in many others, the thrower was among the casualties.<sup>188</sup> Even though the environment was much harsher for the populists, the movement was still able to attract a great number of individuals.

### 3. Mystique

It is unsurprising that most groups that are involved in socially objectionable activities also partake in a relatively high degree of self-idealization and the populists were no exception. Internally, the movement sought to glorify members who accomplished great feats or gave their lives for the cause. According to Philip Pomper, populists “created the image of the virtuous assassin.”<sup>189</sup> Interestingly, the notion spread outside of the group, as well. The outrageous public celebration of Zasulich's acquittal serves as a clear example. Vera Broido, in her book, *Apostles into Terrorists*, repeatedly mentions the warm and human characteristics of the women who partook in the movement.<sup>190</sup> Thus, the populists were able to craft an internal and external mythology that added to both its ranks and public approval.

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<sup>186</sup> Ulam, *In the Name of the People*, 260.

<sup>187</sup> Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 711.

<sup>188</sup> Broido, *Apostles into Terrorists*, 199.

<sup>189</sup> Pomper, “Russian Revolutionary Terrorism,” 80.

<sup>190</sup> Broido, vi, 75, 185, 187.

## D. CONCLUSION

Despite a tenuous foundation, the populist movement was the first true harbinger of the demise of the Romanov Dynasty and state. The physical damage that the movement did to the regime, was substantial, but the political damage it did was far greater. The activities of populist revolutionaries left Alexander II with no good options; reforms had been illusory, inaction was never an option, and repression merely entrenched the opposition. Even repression could not stop the tide of populist terror which continued in spite of police brutality and severe legal consequences. Populism also served to bring terrorism into mainstream society and even met a degree of public approval. Perhaps the most significant invention of populism was the notion of *partiinnost* which became an enduring feature of the revolutionary toolkit in promoting internal cohesion and loyalty. In short, the populist movement carried radicalism out of the estranged obscurity of nihilism and brought it to the public eye in a stark and visceral manner.

As was the case with the nihilists, analyzing the populists through the lenses of environmental influences, the actions of ideologues, and individual motivations provides an effective understanding of the movement. The national situation, specifically the regime's responses to nihilism, educational restrictions on women, growing public acceptance of violence against the regime, and the embarrassment of the Russo-Turkish War, gave the populist theorists and groups the raw materials with which to create a robust revolutionary enterprise. Additionally, even though the potential dangers were much higher for the populists than for nihilists, many young and wealthy individuals joined the movement. Two of the most significant principles to arise during the populist phase were the concepts of the virtuous assassin and *partiinnost*. The notion of the virtuous assassin drew many individuals into extremist groups and promoted both group cohesion and the self-actualization of members. *Partiinost* played a large role in promoting compliance among group members to leadership directives and even induced some members that disapproved of violence to engage in acts of terrorism. Significantly, both concepts propagated to future terrorist groups within Russia and beyond.

#### IV. PHASE THREE: THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES

The third and final phase of prerevolutionary terrorism in Russia is associated with the Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party and took place primarily between 1901 and 1908. Around the turn of the 20th century, after a reprieve of nearly twenty years, the SRs rekindled the fires of terrorism and launched the longest and most destructive terror campaign to occur in Russia before the 1917 revolution. The Socialist Revolutionary Party became the bearer of the revolutionary torch following the slow death of *Narodnaya Volia*, but while the SRs inherited an old role, they brought it into a new social and national situation. While *Narodnaya Volia* was able to kill Alexander II, they could not kill his far less accommodating son, Tsar Alexander III. Alexander III died of natural causes in 1894 after having essentially overturned his predecessors liberalizing reforms.<sup>191</sup> *Narodnaya Volia*'s demise was also characterized by increasing factionalization among revolutionaries. However, while earlier splits yielded groups that disagreed on tactics but usually remained relatively conciliatory, break-away groups from *Narodnaya Volia* were more polarized and even came into conflict with one another.<sup>192</sup> The same period also saw the birth of new revolutionary parties, including the Social Democrats who imported German-style Marxism into Russia, and later the liberal Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party, which included in its ranks many educated and wealthy members of society.<sup>193</sup> The primary outbreak of terror during the period was from roughly 1901 through 1908, with the fiercest, multi-party violence occurring from 1905 to 1907.<sup>194</sup> The Combat Organization of the Socialist Revolutionary Party was founded in 1901 and was the first formalized entity to employ the tactic of terrorism in the new century. The first high-profile assassination that the Combat Organization conducted took place in 1902 and targeted the Interior Minister, Dimitrii Sipiagin.<sup>195</sup> Like its terrorist forefathers, however, the Socialist Revolutionary Party ultimately

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<sup>191</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 13, 16.

<sup>192</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 85.

<sup>193</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 6; Geifman, *Death Orders*, 107.

<sup>194</sup> Pomper, 89; Geifman *Thou Shalt Kill*, 3.

<sup>195</sup> Geifman, *Death Orders*, 28.

debilitated itself by sullyng its public image and provoking another crackdown by the regime. Moreover, the revelations in 1909 that Evno Azef, theretofore believed by revolutionaries to be an influential leader in the SR Party and Combat Organization, was a spy for the *Okhrana* destroyed the perception of honor among revolutionary terrorists.<sup>196</sup>

## A. NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

While the historical conditions were relatively uniform between the nihilist and populist periods, the Socialist Revolutionaries existed in a time of accelerating national change. By 1901, the year of the Socialist Revolutionary Party's founding, the tsarist system was already rapidly on its way to collapse.<sup>197</sup> Strictly speaking, the twenty years between *Narodnaya Volia's* assassination of Alexander II and the beginning of the SR wave of violence, were free from large-scale political bloodshed, but that does not mean that they were inconsequential. In fact, the two decades of apparent peace had a substantial influence on the structure and practice of the SRs. Due largely to the assassination of Alexander II, the reign of Alexander III was a harsh and reactionary one. Alexander III presided over a much expanded security system that included a newly reconstituted security police called the *Okhrana*. Additionally, the death throes of *Narodnaya Volia* promoted the growth of new revolutionary parties which added levels of complexity to the revolutionary environment. In 1894, Nicholas II was the last Tsar to come to the throne and brought with him a new style of rule.<sup>198</sup> Whether by omission, commission, or misfortune on the part of the Tsar, the early years of the twentieth century were rife with events that fanned the flames of revolution and violence. Continuing urbanization, racial tensions, famines, and epidemics all led to growing agricultural and industrial unrest which merged with mass dissatisfaction over the Russo-Japanese War to produce the attempted revolution of 1905, the end of absolute monarchy, and a colossal outbreak of violence from 1905 to 1907, extinguished only by massive repression on the

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<sup>196</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 97.

<sup>197</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 45.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

part of the government. In short, the Socialist Revolutionary program both benefitted from and contributed to the inflammatory nature of the times.

One reality that is neglected by planners of all types is that the opposition almost always has a rebuttal. Russian terrorist and revolutionary groups were repeatedly a victim of that phenomenon. In fact, terrorist groups and police entities existed in a type of self-intensifying cycle. Increased levels of dissent or terrorism led to increased harshness and repressiveness from the law-enforcement mechanism which fueled further attacks from oppositionists, resetting the cycle. Ironically, the actions of earlier terrorist groups like Land and Freedom and *Narodnaya Volia* precipitated a substantial strengthening of the police forces which would later dismantle the revolutionary organizations piece-by-piece.<sup>199</sup> In 1880, Alexander II disbanded the Third Department and replaced it with the far larger and more capable *Okhrana*. Tactically, the *Okhrana* was able to build upon previous experience fighting terrorists and incorporate new techniques like using agents provocateurs and organizing counter-revolutionary activities among workers.<sup>200</sup> The department became a major tool for Alexander III's crackdown on opposition and deserves a large portion of the credit for the period of relative stability that closed the nineteenth century. The *Okhrana* also foiled several assassination attempts on Alexander III.<sup>201</sup> However, as for the terror-police cycle, it was only a matter of time until the forces of revolution attained a critical mass of manpower and knowledge that would allow open violence to burst forth once again. In addition to pent-up aggression, the SRs' ability to perpetrate violence was also assisted by the advancement of technology. As the twentieth century dawned, the size of bombs decreased and making them became easier and safer. As a result, would-be terrorists and terrorist groups were able to acquire bombs in greater number and with less chance of being caught by police in the process.<sup>202</sup> Despite their efficacy, the police were also vulnerable to a few of their own tactics. The SRs were eventually able to turn some of the *Okhrana*'s agents and infiltrate it with a few

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<sup>199</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 85.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–88.

<sup>202</sup> Geifman. *Thou Shalt Kill*, 16.



of their own. Famous double agents like Evno Azef and Georgii Gapon served both the revolutionaries and the police at various intervals and typified the confusion and complexity of the times.<sup>203</sup>

Considering the intensity of *Narodnaya Volia* in the period between 1878 and 1881, the period of halcyon afterwards is quite notable. Despite appearances, however, the regime's monopoly on social order in that time was merely a façade. *Narodnaya Volia* was falling apart due to internal divides and police depredation, but revolutionary feeling still burned strongly, albeit subliminally, in many corners of society. In the period between 1881 and 1901 the Russian revolutionary environment was characterized by the profusion of a number of different groups and parties. One of the most significant groups to appear in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was the Social Democrats. In contrast to *Narodnaya Volia*, the Social Democrats were not populists, but derived their ideology specifically from Karl Marx. The Social Democrats also represented a new brand of dissident that turned their eyes from the agrarian *narod* to the urban proletariat, a precedent that would have a deep impact on the course of Russian history.<sup>204</sup> The ideological roots of the Social Democrats were much more European than previous radical movements, and initially refuted both violence and regime change.<sup>205</sup> As with previous revolutionary groups, Social Democrats were prone to factionalism, both geographically and ideologically. Social Democracy first gained traction in St. Petersburg then spread to Moscow and then to the provinces as the 1880s gave way to the 1890s.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, Social Democrats could espouse any of a relatively wide range of tactical and ideological options. Two of the most consequential axes of ideological differentiation among the groups were their perspectives on the role Marxism should play vis-à-vis the state apparatus, and their perspectives on terrorism. Some groups believed that it was unnecessary to overthrow the regime, and sought instead an agreement with the sovereign that would better provide for the welfare of laborers. Other Social Democratic factions

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<sup>203</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 94.

<sup>204</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 69.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 69.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 155, 187, 242.

accorded with Marx's ideal of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" which necessarily implies regime change.<sup>207</sup> Despite their differences, however, the divides among the Social Democrats were much less acrimonious than those of previous revolutionary groups.<sup>208</sup> By the dawn of the 20th century, the majority of Social Democrats, at least tacitly, approved of terrorism as a tactic among other groups, but they varied in their willingness to directly support or perpetrate violence on their own.<sup>209</sup> During the reign of Alexander III, the broad ideological and geographical dispersion of new and old revolutionary groups was not conducive to the direct perpetration of terrorism, but was well-suited to protect and incubate radical ideologies.

In addition to being physically imposing, Tsar Alexander III was also a man of nearly immovable convictions and he applied both in his politics.<sup>210</sup> Strength was undoubtedly the prevailing theme of Alexander III's reign. Nicholas II, Alexander III's eldest son and the last Tsar of Russia, however, was very different from his father. Although a man of discipline and devotion, Nicholas II lacked the force and resolve of his father and, as a result, was unable to maintain even the appearance of order in Russia during his reign.<sup>211</sup> In addition to his inadequacies as a ruler, Nicholas II presided over a time that was more tumultuous than nearly any in previous Russian history. In addition to the rash of terror from 1901–1908, the last Tsar also had to deal with tensions from industrialization, agricultural unrest, Jewish pogroms, the Russo-Japanese War, and a small-scale revolution in 1905. Two of the most significant influences on the trajectory of the terror outbreak in the first decade of the 20th century were Russia's industrialization and the agricultural woes of the 1890s. Alexander III's reign was a time of massive industrialization which caused a pronounced growth of urban centers and a major expansion of the industrial proletariat.<sup>212</sup> Industrialization was a mixed blessing for Russia. On one hand, an industrialization phase was necessary if Russia wished to be a

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<sup>207</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 6.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 239–240.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–7, 242.

<sup>210</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History Of Russia*, 364.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 367–368.

<sup>212</sup> Naimark, 23–24.

world power, but on the other, it substantially simplified the task of revolutionaries, especially once the Social Democrats began to turn their eyes on industrial workers as the fodder for revolution. The evidence of industrialization is evident in the social composition of the SR Party. In comparison to previous revolutionary groups, the SRs were poorer, more industrial and more urban. Additionally, urban locales were almost always the primary centers of terror campaigns.<sup>213</sup> Cities alone, however, were not the only locations where unrest emerged; in the late 1880s and early 1890s, the harmful effects of the emancipation of the peasants were beginning to manifest themselves in significant ways. Nearly all peasants owed heavy debts and had to severely over-farm their land to have any hope of paying them. That trend coincided with a growing rural population which further reduced the amount of land with which each peasant could work.<sup>214</sup> To complete the dire situation, there was a pronounced famine from 1891–1892. Moreover, growing literacy and greater connections to urban-dwellers made peasants more amenable to radical propaganda.<sup>215</sup> To a degree, Nicholas II was merely the unfortunate inheritor of the issues associated with industrialization and the inflammatory situation in the provinces, but he seemed equally unable to address the issues during his reign.

Another unique feature of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and its period of terrorism was the unprecedentedly large participation of Jews. On one level, analysts like Anna Geifman paint Jews as a variety of natural revolutionary because of their “messianic ideal” in which the Jewish nation is destined to create an earthly paradise.<sup>216</sup> In that light, idealistic or millennial notions like those of Karl Marx or other revolutionary groups would reasonably assert a substantial influence on the Jewish population. At the same time, the Jewish participation in the SR wave of terror can also be explained as the response to several vicious waves of anti-Jewish pogroms that took place first in the 1880s and later in 1903 and 1905. The unprovoked and brutal attacks on

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<sup>213</sup> Pomper, “Russian Revolutionary Terrorism,” 89; Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 73.

<sup>214</sup> Naimark, 25.

<sup>215</sup> Pomper, 88–89.

<sup>216</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 33.

Jewish lives and property provided a very legitimate grievance against the government and drove many Jews into the ranks of revolutionary movements.<sup>217</sup> It is also important to note that, like many members of terrorist groups, Jews were socially, politically, and economically isolated from the broader Russian society. Jews were even geographically isolated from the rest of the Russian population; the majority of Russian Jews were legally restricted to residence in towns and settlements in what was called the Pale of Settlement located in Western Russia.<sup>218</sup> In many cases, downtrodden Jews saw few alternatives to the life of a revolutionary.<sup>219</sup> Thus, as was the case with the women of the populist phase, the regime gave Jews a very limited range of legitimate options for making a living and expressing their political beliefs which motivated many to take up the flag of extremism and violence.

Nicolas II's government most clearly demonstrated its weakness by severely faltering in its handling of the Russo-Japanese War and the attempted revolution of 1905. Russia had a number of legitimate economic interests in the Far East, but, in a classic example of overextension and clumsy policy, Russia bumbled into war with Japan in 1904. The Japanese, perceived by nearly all Russians as ethnically inferior to the point of caricature, achieved victory after victory and laid waste to the Russian navy. The Japanese momentum only flagged once it met the central mass of the Russian army. By 1905, the Japanese lacked the depth of manpower and finances to defeat the Russian army, and the Russians were badly demoralized and politically crippled by unrest in the capitol. The two sides broke the stalemate in August 1905 with the Treaty of Portsmouth which was surprisingly favorable for Russia.<sup>220</sup> Despite the relatively acceptable outcome of the treaty, the war had done great damage. By the war's end, the situation for the regime was dire; the wave of SR terrorism was already well-advanced and the public outrage over Russia's humiliating performance against the supposedly inferior Japanese elevated domestic dissatisfaction to a fever-pitch.

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<sup>217</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 33; Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 202.

<sup>218</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 366.

<sup>219</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 33.

<sup>220</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 374–376.

By the end of the Russo-Japanese war, much of society had lost faith in the regime and needed only a small push to join the camp of open opposition. Such a push came on January 22, 1905, in what became known as Bloody Sunday.<sup>221</sup> The conflagration began when a large group of workers and their families gathered and began to march towards the Winter Palace with a petition for the Tsar. Unbeknownst to the demonstrators, Nicholas II was not at the Winter Palace that day, but the royal residence was still under guard. The demonstration was not violent but was very large, and as the marchers neared the palace nervous police opened fire on the crowd, killing well over a hundred and wounding hundreds more.<sup>222</sup> In its own right, Bloody Sunday was a major historical landmark because it launched the Revolution of 1905, but deeper details illuminate that it was even more significant in the context of the battle between the state and revolutionary terrorists. In many ways, the incident was a colossal victory for the Socialist Revolutionaries even though they played no direct role on January 22. Most of the demonstrators, in fact, were not revolutionaries at all; they marched toward the palace “with icons and the Tsar’s portraits, as faithful subjects, nay, children, of their sovereign, begging him for redress and help.”<sup>223</sup> In a profound irony, the procession was led by Georgii Gapon, an influential priest who was also in the employ of the *Okhrana* as a pro-monarch organizer.<sup>224</sup> Thus, a man tasked with agitating for the regime and leading a group of loyalists ended up providing some of the most effective fodder for revolutionary sentiment. It is likely that SR terrorist activity played into the violent response by the palace guards, without which the tragedy would not have taken place. By 1905, the wave of SR terror had been a feature of Russian life for nearly four years, and, although police were not then common targets, many had surely witnessed the brazen attacks on tsarist officials in the preceding years.<sup>225</sup> After 1905, however, countless Russian law-enforcement personnel were either primary or secondary victims of terrorist bombs. In some cases, a bomb blast was even a merciful end; SR terrorists were also fond of

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<sup>221</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 18.

<sup>222</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 380.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 380; Pomper, “Russian Revolutionary Terrorism,” 96.

<sup>225</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 39.

dousing policemen with sulfuric acid which would cause a lifetime of pain and disfigurement.<sup>226</sup> Thus, it is not difficult to imagine the tremendous uneasiness of the Winter Palace guards as they watched a very large mass of people approach them that January morning.

One of the regime's responses to the 1905 Revolution was to grant one of the most long-standing goals of regime oppositionists: a popular legislative assembly. In the Imperial Manifesto of October 17, 1905, Nicholas II founded the State Duma.<sup>227</sup> Unfortunately for the Tsar, the concession did not have the intended effects; to the contrary, the greatest violence took place after the October Manifesto. Terrorists around the empire killed or wounded a staggering 3,611 tsarist officials and many more civilians in the year after decree, and recorded similar numbers each year until the outbreak slowed at the end of 1907.<sup>228</sup> To some, the result of the legislative concession was perplexing; theoretically, the terrorists should have subsided when their demands were met. In reality, however, the terrorist groups perceived the move as a retreat on the part of the government and grew even more resolved to achieve radical structural change.<sup>229</sup> Moreover, while the Combat Organization of the SR Party was almost the sole perpetrator of terror from 1901 through 1905, revolutionaries from many other factions joined the fray once the regime countenanced what they perceived as weakness in the Imperial Manifesto.<sup>230</sup> Thus, by 1905, terrorists had, once again, placed the regime in a place in which it had no good options; even a conciliatory move by the Tsar spawned increased violence.

While the twenty years of relative quiet after the assassination of Alexander II may have seemed to represent a victory for the regime, it was actually an incubation period for the much more severe wave of terrorism that took place from 1901 to 1908. The SRs entered an environment that was characterized by a new Tsar, revamped law

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<sup>226</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 40.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

enforcement, and plentiful oppositionist groups. Moreover, revolutionaries of the time received a substantial benefit from the industrial revolution which not only brought more people to the cities but also promoted new technologies that could be used in acts of terrorism. Even provincial Russia, theretofore a bastion of monarchism, was beginning to drift away from its presumed imperial benefactor. Agricultural woes and greater literacy drew the peasants away from the tsarist camp and vicious pogroms and government-sponsored isolation drove Jews into the arms of extremists. Finally, horrendous imperial missteps like the Russo-Japanese War and Bloody Sunday dissipated what little social credit the government had left. Even the appeasement measure of founding a popular legislative body failed to stem the violence. In short, the Socialist Revolutionaries entered a scene that was well-primed for violence, and they took full advantage of their situation and contributed to even greater violence as the movement matured.

## **B. MAJOR IDEOLOGUES**

To a large degree, the Socialist Revolutionaries were shaped and facilitated by their environment. The tumult and dissatisfaction that were endemic to the era were a substantial benefit to the SRs, but they also benefitted from the tactical and ideological input from a number of individuals and groups. As with earlier terrorist factions, the SRs drew substantially from their revolutionary predecessors, but contributed their own elements of thought and methodology. In terms of actually perpetrating terrorism, the SRs were the descendant of *Narodnaya Volia*, but their scientific Marxism made the SRs a new entity.<sup>231</sup> One of the most salient characteristics of the Socialist Revolutionary wave of terrorism was the quantum leap in the scope of violence. Historians like Anna Geifman and Norman Naimark indicate that one of the key elements that made the movement so destructive was the individualization and decentralization of terrorist activity. There were no universally recognized or enduring leaders for either the Social Democrats or the Socialist Revolutionaries. Moreover, the groups' titles served primarily as a means of classifying and differentiating the groups and they did not necessarily

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<sup>231</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 5.

imply ideological or tactical uniformity.<sup>232</sup> Even though major figures like Evno Azef held high positions in extremist organizations, they never truly held a monopoly on either the indoctrination or tactical control of terrorists during the SR phase. However, despite the diffuse and individual nature of radicalism in the last years of the 19th century and early years of the 20th, a number of groups and individuals did make an impact on the movement.

### 1. Georgii Plekhanov

One of the most significant and lasting voices in the sphere of Russian revolutionaries, especially among those of the Marxist inclination, was that of Georgii Plekhanov. Plekhanov enjoyed a very long career as a revolutionary that included influential roles in Land and Freedom, Black Repartition, and the Social Democratic movement.<sup>233</sup> The most important purpose that Plekhanov served, however, was being one of the first major importers of Marxism to Russia.<sup>234</sup> Despite his influence on terrorism, Plekhanov was no terrorist, himself. In fact, Plekhanov stridently opposed terrorism from the time of his membership in Land and Freedom for the remainder of his revolutionary career and life.<sup>235</sup> Plekhanov's perspectives, although they seem more pacifistic than those of his contemporaries, won him more opponents than friends. It is not surprising that members of *Narodnaya Volia* viewed Plekhanov as too passive and agrarian-focused, but even Vera Zasulich, a co-member in Black Repartition and later a co-author with Plekhanov in *Iskra*, evaluated him as excessively theoretical.<sup>236</sup> Ironically, Karl Marx was far more enthusiastic about the exploits of *Narodnaya Volia* than the efforts of his self-proclaimed apostle, Plekhanov.<sup>237</sup> Even though Plekhanov and his retinue opposed terrorism, they were still revolutionaries and, therefore, targets of state authorities. To escape the disruptive scrutiny and attacks by the police, Plekhanov

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<sup>232</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 3; Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 5–6.

<sup>233</sup> McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 23, 102; Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 85.

<sup>234</sup> Naimark, 79.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>236</sup> McCauley and Moskalenko, 23.

<sup>237</sup> Naimark, 70.



and a number of his followers left Russia for Western Europe in 1880.<sup>238</sup> Outside of Russia's borders, Plekhanov continued his revolutionary work and devoted a substantial amount of time to translating Marx's *Communist Manifesto* and building his Emancipation of Labor Party.<sup>239</sup> Historians dispute the extent to which Plekhanov directly influenced the formation of the Social Democrat Party, but it is generally agreed that the Social Democrats and Emancipation of Labor interacted as equals during the 1880s.<sup>240</sup> One of Plekhanov's major works was the pamphlet entitled "Our Differences." The publication met widespread acclaim among Social Democrats and even induced a significant number of members of *Narodnaya Volia* to join the Social Democratic Party.<sup>241</sup> Despite his successes, however, Plekhanov cuts a sad figure; his opposition to violence distanced him from the majority of his contemporaries and even from the ideologue to whom he was most devoted, Karl Marx. Moreover, under the flag of Marxism, which Plekhanov helped bring into Russia, the Socialist Revolutionaries would unleash a terrorist campaign of unprecedented scope and brutality.

## 2. The Social Democrat Party

If Plekhanov was one of the major individuals to import Marxism into Russia, then the Social Democrat Party was the group that cultivated the seed. Once again, the title of Social Democrat does not and should not imply universal ideological uniformity; the members of the Social Democratic movement were spread in terms of both location and ideology. Even the birth of the Social Democratic movement in Russia cannot be traced to a single source. Inside Russia, the first group to call itself Social Democrats arose in 1885 and was composed of a small group St. Petersburg students who rejected the violent and unscientific tenets of populism, ascribing instead to the teachings of Marx and Lassalle. At roughly the same time, Plekhanov and his Emancipation of Labor Party, comprised largely of Russian émigrés, began to supply Marxist literature to the Russian

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<sup>238</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 12.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 71, 78.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 78–80.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

underground.<sup>242</sup> The Social Democrats and Emancipation of Labor Party grew to have healthy correspondence and mutual cooperation.<sup>243</sup> To the man, the founding members of the Social Democratic party opposed terrorism, but by 1886 members of Social Democratic circles had already developed a terrorist conspiracy that called itself the Terrorist Fraction of *Narodnaya Volia*. The group intended to assassinate Alexander III and included in its membership Alexander Ulyanov, the elder brother of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin).<sup>244</sup> Before conspirators were able to achieve their goal, the police foiled the plot and arrested the would-be assassins. Around the same time, the police were also able to infiltrate the Social Democrat Party which precipitated the arrest many of the group's members. However, even before the drastic reduction in its number, the Social Democrats had already begun to decentralize their organization; the members met only sparingly and there was no recognized central organizing authority.<sup>245</sup>

Although the Social Democrats were unable to conduct a *fait accompli* like *Narodnaya Volia*, their legacy was still critical to the Socialist Revolutionary phase of terror. The Social Democrats greatest contributions to the revolutionary movement of the period were its organizational decentralization and ecumenism. Nearly all of the revolutionary groups since the nihilists displayed a tendency for factionalism, but the Social Democrats were unique in that they were able to accommodate a relatively wide spectrum of revolutionary perspectives. The ideological tolerance of the Social Democrats was largely the result of pragmatism that arose intrinsically within the movement. Even the beginnings of social democracy heralded its ecumenical nature, for the movement began as a collaborative effort between different groups. Additionally, once the authorities infiltrated the organization and broke up the assassination attempt on Alexander III, the splintered organization was forced to adapt to operating without a centralized system of authority which precluded the group's ability to maintain strict

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<sup>242</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 71, 74.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

ideological unity.<sup>246</sup> Social Democrats were also pragmatic concerning terrorism. The founding figures of the movement refused to participate in terror personally, but they did not oppose the practice among other groups.<sup>247</sup> The inclusive nature of the Social Democrats also carried on into future revolutionary groups. The decentralized and practical approach of the Social Democrats is clearly visible in the Socialist Revolutionary method of terror after 1905. The SRs condoned and even encouraged individual and unsanctioned acts of terror, which contributed significantly to the massive scope of violence that took place in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>248</sup> In essence, the Social Democrats and later the Socialist Revolutionaries became brand names under which individuals could partake in extremism, even if they did not completely accord with the full ideological program of the group.

### **3. The Socialist Revolutionary Party**

The single most deadly organization from the start of the revolutionary movement up to the rise of the Bolsheviks was Socialist Revolutionary Party. The Socialist Revolutionary Party came into existence in 1901 when several autonomous revolutionary parties merged into a single group.<sup>249</sup> From the outset, the SRs unabashedly supported terror, and the party's Combat Organization was able to carry out assassinations of an impressive number, success rate, and rank of victims.<sup>250</sup> Some of the most notable victims of the Combat Organization were Interior Minister Dimitrii Sipiagin in 1902, Governor N. M. Bogdanovich in 1903, Interior Minister Viacheslav von Plehve in 1904, and Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich in 1905.<sup>251</sup> The SRs also killed 49 city governors, vice-governors, governors, and governors general throughout Russia.<sup>252</sup> The Combat Organization disbanded after Nicholas II's October Manifesto, but reconstituted

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<sup>246</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 75.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>248</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 5–6.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> Geifman, *Death Orders*, 28–29.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

itself by the start of 1906 to counter the still potent regime.<sup>253</sup> However, by the time the faction disbanded, it had unwittingly achieved the primary extent of its historical legacy; it had motivated revolutionaries of all parties to partake in a proverbial explosion of terrorism and revolutionary crime that rocked all corners of the Russian empire.

In addition to its name, the SR Party contributed a great deal to the terrorist movement of the period. Up until 1905, the SRs were the only leftist party that formally incorporated terrorism into its platform, and they paved the way for the colossal outbreak of terror that occurred between 1905 and 1907.<sup>254</sup> The Socialist Revolutionary Party was unique among other revolutionary organizations in its ability to be all things to all people. In addition to having a centralized assassination group, the Combat Organization, the SRs exercised terror by personal initiative.<sup>255</sup> Especially after 1905, any member of the SR Party could perpetrate an act of terrorism on a vast array of targets and face relatively little scrutiny from his or her comrades even if the attack caused collateral damage or targeted a person only peripherally connected to the regime.<sup>256</sup> In addition to promoting terrorist violence on an unprecedented scale, the SR phase also witnessed the large-scale birth of crime for revolutionary causes. Revolutionary crimes, called expropriations, were primarily financial in nature and included extortion, kidnapping, robbery, and similar acts. The profusion of expropriations generated a colossal amount of funding for revolutionary organizations, but ultimately obscured the line between revolutionaries and bandits. To say that all of the violence and disorder between 1905 and 1907 was directly related to the Socialist Revolutionary cause would not be accurate; many of the perpetrators of the period were affiliated with different extremist parties, and many others were simply criminals that capitalized on the situation for personal gain.<sup>257</sup> A sad fact of the era was that violence and expropriations were conducted at such a great scale that some of the revolutionary groups occasionally got into disagreements over

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<sup>253</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 92.

<sup>254</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 45.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 43.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

which group should take credit for a terrorist action or which group completed more.<sup>258</sup> While the SRs were not complicit in all of the violence of the time, they deserve credit as the motivators of the outbreak. Moreover, the violence of 1905 to 1907 seriously reduced the legitimacy of the regime and produced a high degree of fear among government functionaries which accorded strongly with SR goals.<sup>259</sup> One of the key weaknesses of the movement, however, was that the indiscriminate nature of the violence also harmed and intimidated large portions of the general population. The predictable result of the civilian bloodletting was the erosion of support for radicalism. Ultimately, the loss of public support combined with a new round of government repression and revulsion over Azef's duplicitous activities brought the last prerevolutionary phase of terror to an ignominious close.<sup>260</sup>

#### 4. Evno Azef

Evno Azef is perhaps one of the most intriguing and complex individuals of the entire revolutionary movement. At different junctures, Azef occupied leading roles in both the Combat Organization of the SR Party, and its fastidious rival, the tsarist *Okhrana*.<sup>261</sup> In many ways, Azef is a fitting personification of the period, as a whole. He combined duplicity, insecurity, and self-interest into a single individual who contributed significantly to the perpetration of the SR phase of terrorism but also its termination. Azef was born into a Jewish family in Lyskovo in 1869, and was an archetypical example of the socioeconomic dilemma in which Russian Jews found themselves at the time. Azef's family, like most other Jewish families, was endemically poor and lived under the near constant shadow of the pogroms that periodically wracked the Jewish community. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Azef was able to escape from the Jewish Pale. Azef attended the Petrovskii Technical High School in Rostov and graduated at the age of 21 in 1890.<sup>262</sup> Although very intelligent, Azef struggled through school, particularly in the

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<sup>258</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 40.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.

<sup>260</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 43; Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 98.

<sup>261</sup> Geifman, *Entangled in Terror*, 4.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

social realm. The young Azef was apprehensive about his contemporaries, ridiculed for his portly build, and disdained for his penchant to inform instructors of other student's misdeeds.<sup>263</sup> One of the only places in school that Azef could find acceptance was among circles of revolutionaries. Membership in the revolutionary milieu gave him the sense of identity and belonging that he craved, yet it ultimately failed to disabuse him of his chronic personal insecurity.<sup>264</sup> Azef, fearing incarceration when Rostov police began to arrest the members of his group, fled abroad with 800 rubles. In Germany, the money dried up quickly, forcing Azef to pursue new employment. After attempting a number of odd-jobs, Azef resolved to become an informant for the police. On June 10, 1893, Azef entered the payroll of the *Okhrana*.<sup>265</sup> The same characteristics that made him a social outcast in school made Azef a great asset for the police. Azef lived in Germany for several more years, all the while building his connections with the revolutionary subculture and his reputation with the Imperial Police.<sup>266</sup> In 1899, Azef's employers ordered him to return to Russia to continue his work. Azef's aptitude as a spy facilitated his presence at the revolutionary conference that produced the Socialist Revolutionary Party, during which he began building relationships with many of the movement's leaders.<sup>267</sup> By 1906, Azef became a full member of the Central Committee of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries and served as a crucial liaison between the Central Committee and Combat Organization, all the while maintaining contact with the *Okhrana*.<sup>268</sup> Azef was so talented that none of his colleagues ever suspected his treachery before his unmasking in 1908.<sup>269</sup>

In that light, Azef appears to be a veritable hero of espionage, albeit a rude and amoral one. He provided the authorities with a tremendous amount of information that led to the prevention of numerous assassination attempts, to include ones that targeted the

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<sup>263</sup> Geifman, *Entangled in Terror*, 18–20.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 25–26.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–29, 32, 34.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–51.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.

<sup>269</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 97.

Tsar and the Prime Minister.<sup>270</sup> However, Azef's profession did have an uglier side. In order to maintain his revolutionary credibility, Azef had to be complicit in many successful terrorist activities, and in order to keep his police handlers satisfied, he had to repeatedly betray his supposed comrades. Azef's masquerade could not continue indefinitely. Near the end of 1908, one of Azef's fellow revolutionaries, with the assistance of a number of turned *Okhrana* agents, revealed Azef's double game to the SRs.<sup>271</sup> Unlike many other discovered agents, Azef survived the ordeal but was immortalized as the "Russian Judas" and a host of other demonic epithets.<sup>272</sup> While Azef may not have been the devil incarnate, he was certainly no angel. In a legitimate, yet ironic, turn of events, the SRs were so disgusted with Azef's conduct that they officially accused him of provocation before the tsarist legal system.<sup>273</sup> The ability of the SRs to overtly raise a case in government was a relatively new development. The Imperial Manifesto of 1905, as part of allowing the gathering of a Duma, allowed the revolutionary groups to openly exist and participate in government.<sup>274</sup> To a large extent, the accusation was also an attempt to defame the *Okhrana*, but the SRs did genuinely believe in Azef's guilt. If convicted, Azef, and by extension the *Okhrana*, would have been considered responsible for instigating many of the Combat Organization's high-profile assassinations, a very serious charge.<sup>275</sup> Ultimately, Azef was found not guilty, but even if he was convicted, the point would have been moot because Azef had fled the country by that time.<sup>276</sup>

The circumstances surrounding his unmasking and subsequent escape from the vengeance of the SRs demonstrate with great clarity that the only cause that Azef truly cared about was his own personal comfort and safety. When Azef discovered that his connections to the *Okhrana* had been revealed, he promptly fled the country to Germany.

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<sup>270</sup> Geifman, *Entangled in Terror*, 4.

<sup>271</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 97.

<sup>272</sup> Popmer, 96; Geifman, *Entangled in Terror*, 2.

<sup>273</sup> Geifman, *Entangled in Terror*, 130.

<sup>274</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 383–385.

<sup>275</sup> Geifman, *Entangled in Terror*, 130–132.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

As he left his home, Azef took care to gather whatever money he could lay hands on, but made no efforts to bid farewell to his children, who he would never see again.<sup>277</sup> Despite appearances, however, Azef was in no way struggling financially. In addition to his colossal salary from the *Okhrana*, Azef had also embezzled a tremendous amount of money from the SR Party. Following his escape from Russia, Azef lived a life of astounding profligacy; he had amassed the financial means to spend over 75 thousand francs per year on all varieties of luxuries.<sup>278</sup> Azef's duplicity decisively destroyed whatever was left of the image of a virtuous assassin and sounded the death-knell of the final prerevolutionary phase of terrorism.<sup>279</sup> Ultimately, tsarist legal officials cleared Azef of the more odious charges of provocation, but he is still a personification of the moral erosion of the era and a demonstration of the lengths to which the regime would go to silence opposition.<sup>280</sup>

### C. WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A TERRORIST

In an analysis of the Socialist Revolutionary phase of terror, there lies a danger of associating the violence with a unified command structure as was the case with previous terror groups. The SR party did have the Combat Organization which functioned similarly to the Executive Committee of *Narodnaya Volia*, but the victims of the Combat Organization, while high in rank, accounted for a relatively small percentage of the victims of the broader movement. The vast majority of the casualties were instead caused by individuals who, at best, were only nominally connected to a revolutionary faction and, at worst, were thinly disguised bandits. Thus, while the ideologues of the movement were important, the individual-level characteristics and motivations of SR-phase terrorists are even more instructive.

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<sup>277</sup> Geifman, *Entangled in Terror*, 145.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 145, 150.

<sup>279</sup> Pomper, 97.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*



## 1. Profile of a Terrorist in the SR Phase

In many cases, the profile of the typical terrorist changed in the SR phase. While populists were often intellectuals that were raised as denizens of the upper classes, the SRs were less gentrified and connected far more loosely to high-minded ideals. In fact, most intellectual revolutionaries of the period were not members of the SR party and instead associated with other groups like the Social Democrats or Kadets. Although the more liberal groups usually refused to directly participate in acts of terror, they still generally accepted terrorism as a tactic among other groups either by direct admission, as was the case with the Social Democrats, or through their silence on the matter, as was the case with the Kadets.<sup>281</sup> During the 1905 to 1907 outbreak of mass violence, there was often little that separated a terrorist from a bandit or common criminal. Moreover, members of nearly all oppositionist factions partook in the chaos including small, unaffiliated, and local groups.<sup>282</sup> Thus, during the late stages of the SR phase of terror, the violence got so out of control that the notion of a typical terrorist essentially disintegrated.

## 2. Motivations

The growing profusion of violence that occurred throughout the SR phase not only destroyed the profile of a terrorist but it also led to the demise of specific and coherent motivations to engage in acts of terror. The de-rationalization of terror during the period of 1901 through 1908 is most clearly demonstrated by changes in the primary targets of terror and by the backslide of expropriations into little more than petty theft. The trajectory of terrorist targeting in the SR phase rapidly transitioned from very precise attacks on high ranking government functionaries to indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population. The Combat Organization of the Socialist Revolutionary party begun operations in 1902 and was the primary initiator of violence of the period.<sup>283</sup> As the period progressed, terrorists began to target government functionaries of increasingly low

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<sup>281</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 5; Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 209.

<sup>282</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 6.

<sup>283</sup> Geifman, *Death Orders*, 28.

rank and importance; after 1905, the targeting of civilians became commonplace.<sup>284</sup> The evolution in the tools of terror is also instructive. The Combat Organization primarily used precise weapons like knives and pistols in its assassinations, but as terror became more decentralized, the use of indiscriminant weapons like bombs became the norm, causing a predictable rise in harm to bystanders. Another major indicator of the collapse of purely ideological motivations during the SR phase was the evolution of expropriations from a fund-raising scheme for a revolutionary party to little more than theft for personal gain. Terrorism is an expensive endeavor, and drastic fund-raising measures became increasingly necessary as members of terrorist organizations grew less wealthy. In some cases, revolutionary groups sought to collect from their own members, but the results were usually scant.<sup>285</sup> Eventually, revolutionary groups began to adopt the practice of extracting funds from their communities through extortion, intimidation, or outright theft. From 1905 through 1907, many nominal terrorists committed expropriations simply for personal gain. During that period, revolutionaries and bandits expropriated an estimated 7,000,000 rubles throughout Russia, and it is certain that much of that went to non-revolutionary causes.<sup>286</sup>

### **3. Mystique**

Although many terrorists gave their lives for the revolutionary cause from 1901 to 1905, the greatest casualty for the revolutionaries of the period was the myth of the virtuous assassin. Even by the accession of Nicholas II to the throne, much of the idealism of the revolutionary movement had eroded amongst populists and Social Democrats, alike.<sup>287</sup> Many of the notions of a brighter socialist future had lost their luster. By the time the SRs began their efforts, the revolutionary movement became more of a war of attrition than an ideological outcry. Moreover, as general violence broke out in 1905, any claims of honor in terrorism were nearly laughable. Although the notion of virtue in terror had dissipated among the broader movement, some dedicated

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<sup>284</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 40, 43.

<sup>285</sup> Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 75.

<sup>286</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 22.

<sup>287</sup> Naimark, 239.

revolutionaries still clung to the belief. The revulsion with which many revolutionaries viewed the Azef affair indicates that significant numbers of radicals still saw good in their ultimate program and in the people that labored toward it. Revelations of Azef's duplicity decisively crushed what little virtue revolutionary terrorists perceived in their profession. Although the new government crackdown engineered by Prime Minister Stolypin deserves a substantial portion of the credit for drawing the third and final phase of prerevolutionary terror to a close, it is likely that the collapse of the belief in the praiseworthiness of terrorism played at least as large a role.<sup>288</sup>

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

After nearly twenty years of apparent peace following the assassination of Alexander II, the Combat Organization of the Socialist Revolutionary party revived the tradition of revolutionary terror in 1901 which touched off a wave of violence that endured until 1908. The SRs, however, entered an environment that was rather different from the one in which their radical predecessors existed. The SRs faced a new Tsar, a revamped police force, and a great deal of national tension caused by both internal and external developments. The uneasy national context was conducive to the outbreak of violence and what began as few, precisely-targeted assassinations by the Combat Organization of the SR party eventually gave way to violence and chaos on a national scale. Some of the major ideological and tactical trends to arise during the period were the decentralization in of revolutionary groups and the replacement of populism with Marxism as the foundational revolutionary ideology. The SR phase affected state policy in more tangible ways than in previous waves of terrorism, and even helped to motivate Nicholas II to found the first parliamentary assembly in 1905. Contrary to the regime's hopes, the new accession did not pacify the terrorists. In fact, the most brutal and widespread violence came after the gathering of the first Duma. The major outbreak of violence from 1905 to 1907, while it did have the predictable effect of hampering the regime, damaged the image of a virtuous terrorist in a profound way. The orgy of violence robbed revolutionaries of the ability to claim any sort of moral high ground in its

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<sup>288</sup> Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," 98.

conflict with the state. In 1909, the revelations of Evno Azef's duplicitous dealings with both the SR party and the *Okhrana* dealt the deathblow to the notion of honor in the revolutionary movement and completed the nationwide retreat from rampant terrorism. Ultimately, the legacy of the SR phase of terror is somewhat self-contradicting; terrorists in the SR phase initiated violence of a scope theretofore unseen in the Russian empire, yet in doing so defeated themselves by exceeding the public's tolerance of the chaos and provoking still another crackdown from the regime. Even within the revolutionary groups justification for violence was relatively thin and much of the earlier idealism had thoroughly expired.

Although the course and context of the SR phase of terrorism diverged from those of the previous phases, many of the underlying factors remained the same, especially concerning the influence of the environment, ideologues, and individual motivations. Once again, the national context played a major role in the reemergence of terrorism in 1901. National trends like continued government repression, industrialization, urbanization, agricultural woes, and racial tensions combined with significant popular outcry over regime failings like the Russo-Japanese War, Bloody Sunday, and the general weakness of Nicholas II's leadership to produce widespread public dissatisfaction. Interestingly, at no time before the SR phase of terrorism was discontent so widespread throughout the empire, and no terrorist movement before the SR phase was nearly as destructive. The breadth and intensity of the outbreak of terrorism from 1901 to 1908, while strongly affected by the national environment, would not have been as pronounced without the influence of the ideologues of the period. In particular, the introduction of Marxism and the growing trends of ecumenism and decentralization among revolutionary groups played large part in setting the course of the movement. The individual motivations of terrorists also experienced a profound change during the SR period. By the period's end, it was clear that the previously championed ideals of a revolutionary brotherhood and a virtuous cause had given way to greed and chaos. Although a severe government crackdown deserves a notable amount of credit for bringing the outbreak to a close, it is instructive that the SR terrorist movement lost its momentum in conjunction with the destruction of the ideals to which radical groups had long clung.

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## **V. SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION**

Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to explore a single, mystifying question—Why would privileged and well-educated persons embrace political violence or what is today called terrorism? It is distressing and puzzling that so many individuals, most of whom were young and of sound mind, accepted tremendous personal risk and privation in order to perpetrate acts of terrorism against the leading estates and dynasty in Russian society. This thesis can hardly hope to answer the question in full, but its analysis, based upon environmental, ideologue-driven, and individual motivators, does reveal a number of important trends.

### **A. RESUME**

In each of the phases of revolutionary terrorism, whether from 1866 through 1871, 1878 through 1882, or 1901 through 1908, environmental factors, that is, factors of ideas, society, state, culture, as well as personality, played a significant role in the development of the radical movements and their subsequent turn to violence. In late imperial Russia, the tsarist government, in its struggle with mass politics as well as the changing shape of state and society in Europe generally, was one of the primary environmental influences. Since the Middle Ages, the Russian autocrat resided at the heart of politics. Unfortunately for Russia's last Tsars, the late nineteenth century was characterized by the ever-increasing obviousness of Russia's backwardness in the face of rapid change in society and economy elsewhere in Europe, of which Russia was a part. The Russian state generated numerous grievances among the population through the institution of serfdom, intellectual repression, and the suppression of women and minorities, to name but a few. Moreover, the regime repeatedly demonstrated its own weakness through severe mismanagement of internal crises and international debacles like the Crimean War (1853–56), Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05). In all three phases of terrorism, when dissent movements arose in response to the national grievances, the regime's reflexive response was to crack down which only exacerbated the problem. Tsarist crackdowns eliminated productive and

peaceful means of political expression and left violence as the only means by which dissenting groups could make themselves heard. In addition, law enforcement operations against revolutionaries, while they did help to slow revolutionary activities, created martyrs that the movements could use for recruitment or motivation. In all three phases of terror, the police did eventually gain control of the situation, but not until after terrorist activity reached a level that exceeded the public's ability to accept. The disturbing trend in late Imperial Russia, was that the public grew increasingly tolerant of terrorism as time went on. While the murder of a single individual was enough to turn the public against the nihilists, the public did not reject the SRs until the massive and generalized outbreak of violence from 1905 to 1907. In fairness to the regime, some contemporary trends and events that contributed to radicalism were out of its control. The regime could not have feasibly rejected the industrialization that accompanied the closing years of the 19th century nor could it have stemmed the spread of leftist ideologies among its European neighbors. Despite its historical misfortunes, however, the tsarist regime was the primary contributor to the environmental conditions that produced terrorism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Environmental conditions were an extremely important factor in the development of Russian terrorist groups, but the influence of the many ideologues of the time also proved to be quite important. Even if societal grievances are severe enough to precipitate violence, uncoordinated attacks by private individuals do not constitute a movement. A movement requires some form of coherent ideology and organization, both of which require ideological leadership. In the case of Russian prerevolutionary terror, ideologues clarified issues, supplied alternative visions of the future, and generated tactical plans. In each different phase of revolutionary terror, ideologues varied in nature and function. The nihilist phase was characterized primarily by the development of radical doctrines. In many ways, the nihilists served as the ideological and organizational trailblazers of revolutionary terror. Nihilist ideologues, through their writings and meetings, built a basic foundation to support further revolutionary activity. Individuals like Chernyshevsky, Zaichnevsky, and Bakunin, through their writings gathered a group of people that were in general agreement on the contemporary problems and possible

solutions. Nechaev and his retinue added to the ideological foundation of the movement and pioneered organizational schemes; in his case, the blueprint of a conspiracy. While the nihilist ideologues were primarily individuals, groups provided the major ideological and tactical guidance for the populists. A very significant feature of ideological leadership is its cumulative nature; even failures provide enduring lessons for future groups. The populists were able to build upon the lessons from the nihilists and dedicate more time to its operations, to include terrorism. By the SR period, revolutionaries had an even broader tactical and ideological framework upon which to build. As a result, the ideologues of the Socialist Revolutionary phase were able to dedicate most of their time and energy to shaping the revolutionary activity into the form that they believed was most advantageous. Ultimately, the environment provided the fertile soil for extremism to grow, and a large contingency of ideologues cultivated the crop of violence.

The most integral part of any of the Russian revolutionary terrorist groups was their rank-and-file membership. The individual members provided the muscle to the ideological skeleton. Since all people are unique, the specific motivations to engage in terrorism vary from person to person, but certain motivations proved more influential and enduring than others. At a basic level, the influence of the national context and ideological leadership played a part in driving individuals to violence. The national environment produced grievances which the ideologues shaped and leveraged to build terrorist organizations. That explanation, however, is largely tautological and is not complete. To say that individuals will turn to violence simply because clever leaders take advantage of their frustration gives the ideologues too much credit and removes the foundational element of individual volition. Ultimately, the young Russians who joined terrorist movements had to choose the path and accept the risks and hardships therein. The demographic profile of Russian revolutionary terrorists is extremely informative. In the vast majority of cases, the perpetrators of terror were young, unmarried, educated, urban, and of relatively secure financial means. Based upon those conditions, it is clear that the individuals who partook in revolutionary terrorism had greater freedom of action and comparatively less at risk than their married, laboring, or poor countrymen. Moreover, the importance of the image of the virtuous assassin cannot be understated.



The belief in a righteous cause coupled with support and acceptance from a revolutionary brotherhood led individuals to greatly exceed what they would have been likely to achieve on their own, both in terms of perseverance and atrocity. The end of the SR phase stands as a prime example of the significance of the concepts of revolutionary honor and brotherhood. Although the terrorists at the end of the period were harassed by police and bereft of popular support, the true death blow to the movement was the destruction of the image of terrorist virtue caused by the Azef affair. The notion of revolutionary brotherhood also evaporated during the period of general violence from 1905 to 1907 because terrorism left the close conspiratorial circles of previous movements and became a public phenomenon. The growth of the image of a virtuous assassin accompanied the growth of Russian revolutionary terrorism, and the death of the spirit of virtue and camaraderie came hand-in-hand with its demise. Thus, the assertion that societal grievance and cunning ideologues alone can produce a terrorist movement ignores the critical factor of individual volition among the would-be terrorists. Certainly, some national and social situations are more conducive to extremism than others, but individuals must ultimately choose to take part.

## **B. CONCLUSION**

Terrorism is a broad and complex topic and every terrorist movement has its own peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. Even the three phases of terrorism in late Imperial Russia differed from one another in significant ways. However, as different as the phases were, all were affected by environmental, ideologue-driven, and individual motivations and trends. Significantly, the three factors remained consistent and cumulative throughout all three movements. Grievances connected with the regime were endemic to the entire period, ideologues carefully crafted the groundswell of public dissatisfaction into coherent frameworks and groups, and individuals, often with the zeal of warriors for a virtuous cause, comprised the groups and carried out the business of terrorism. In the modern day, terrorism has again risen to a prominent spot in the policymaking realm, and effective policy requires accurate understanding. As with most modern trends and events, a current understanding of terrorism is not complete without a thorough examination of its historical roots. To that end, it behooves modern terrorism analysts to reach a high

level of familiarity with terrorism in prerevolutionary Russia. At the same time, no successful policy can neglect the inevitable impact of change, especially regarding highly dynamic phenomena like terrorism. Even the terrorist movements in late imperial Russia changed substantially throughout the course of the three phases. In order to accommodate change, analytical frameworks are often more effective than theory or doctrine. Although this thesis is specific to terrorism in late Imperial Russia, the tripartite analysis involving environmental, ideologue-driven, and individual factors is also likely to be useful in analyzing other historical and modern instances of terrorism. In closing, this thesis seeks to explore the factors that helped generate the world's first experience with modern terrorism and suggest an analytical method that may help to understand other terrorist movements throughout history and into the modern day.

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