

"As long as I live, I will never trust that man again with the smallest thing," Nicholas said. Witte would meet the czar only twice more in the nine years he had left to live.

During this period of revolutionary upheaval, the czar for the first time had seriously to deal with the peasant question. Witte had long pleaded with the czar to break up the outdated peasant communes and to allow the peasants to purchase land. "It is natural for a human being to seek to improve his lot," Witte wrote Czar Nicholas in 1898. "This is what distinguishes the human from the animal, and it is this trait that makes for economic and political development, that makes for social order. But for man to make use of this impulse, suitable conditions must exist. They do not exist under slavery, which extinguishes this impulse in the slave because he realizes that it is impossible for him to improve his own lot and that of his close ones; as a result he becomes immobile. But liberty restores him to the condition of a human being." After getting rid of Witte, whom the czar feared, he allowed the new prime minister, Pyotr Stolypin, to institute the long-sought land reform. Under Stolypin, a land reform was carried out, but it was combined with a brutal and violent political crackdown which ultimately led to his own assassination in 1911.

From that point on, the pathetic Nicholas went from one blunder to another. In 1907, under pressure from the French, now fully entangled in the British web and without Witte's presence to counter the Anglophilia of much of the Russian court, Nicholas signed an Anglo-Russian Convention, effectively bringing Russia into the Triple Entente, that constellation of forces that made war with Germany a virtual certainty.

On Aug. 2, 1914, the czar issued a formal proclamation of hostilities at the Winter Palace. The palace square, one of the largest in Europe, was packed with thousands of sweltering, excited people carrying banners, flags, and icons and waiting impatiently for the moment when they could pour out their emotion in the presence of the sovereign. When Nicholas and Alexandra stepped onto the quay at the Palace Bridge, wave on wave of cheers rolled over them: "Batiushka, Batiushka, lead us to victory."

Returning to St. Petersburg in 1914, Witte tried to stop it. "This war is madness," he said. "Why should Russia fight? Our prestige in the Balkans, our pious duty to help our blood brothers? . . . That is a romantic, old-fashioned chimera. We must liquidate this stupid adventure as soon as possible." But by that point, the die had already been cast. The *punctum saliens* had come and gone. A new geometry had been formed—and there was no returning to the old. Within a year, Witte would be dead, allegedly of a stroke, but with a strong likelihood that foul play had occurred.

Leaving for the front in March 1915, Nicholas wrote his wife, "I am going with such a calm in my soul that I am myself surprised. Whether it is because I had a talk with our Friend [Rasputin] or because of the newspaper telling of the death of Witte, I don't know." Two years later, that same

## Great Britain's open door policy'

The British first succeeded in bringing the United States into their geopolitical gamesmanship with the launching of the so-called "open door policy" in the Far East. Already in March 1898, the British government confidentially invited the United States to cooperate in opposing any action that might violate the "open door" in China. President McKinley, through his Secretary of State John Sherman, told them his nation was not interested.

Previously, the British had had total hegemony in China. With growing Russian and French influence in the area, they were now agitating for "equal rights" for all foreign powers. In particular, they were incensed about the preferential tariffs that Witte had obtained from the Chinese government for the Chinese Eastern Railway. But, for political reasons, the British felt it would be better if the Americans, rather than the British, launched this proposal, as British intentions in doing so would be far too obvious. A.E. Hippisley, a British subject employed in China, while on leave in the United States, spoke to an American friend, W.W. Rockhill, who had served as a diplomat in China and was now a private adviser to the new secretary of state, John Hay, an anglophile and former ambassador to Great Britain.

Hippisley drew up a memorandum outlining the open door policy. Rockhill then put the substance of the memorandum into the form of diplomatic notes which, with minor changes, were adopted by Hay. In September 1899, Hay sent identical instructions to the U.S representatives in Berlin, London, and St. Petersburg, asking for assurances for an "open door" in China. In particular, the Hay note specified that "no power discriminate in favor of its own nationals in the matter of harbor dues or railroad charges." With the death of McKinley in 1901, the Hay shift toward Britain was consolidated under anglophile President Theodore Roosevelt.

czar, his wife, and his five children would be shot to death by Bolshevik executioners. During the course of the war, Russia would suffer 1.65 million killed, and almost 4 million wounded. The long-term costs would be even greater. The revolutionary upheavals resulting from it would put Russia under the heel of a communist dictatorship for the next 75 years.