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## Book Review: Dominic Lieven. *The End of Tsarist Russia*. New York, New York: Viking, 2015.

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Book Review

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Daniel Rosko

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Russia is a country steeped in rich history and fascinating culture, and to this very day it can be a polarizing country in a global context. Books written about this country tell of the changes in Russia and its government, its impact on the world, and of a distant era when the Czar was the ruling monarch of the Russian people. In his book, *The End of Tsarist Russia*, author Dominic Lieven details three important phases of history: Russian foreign policy prior to the First World War, Russian involvement during the First World War, and the beginning of the Russian Revolution of 1917. One unique characteristic of this book is that it is written from a Russian perspective. The book goes into great detail about Russian foreign policy of the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century, and how it shaped the course of events that ultimately led to the collapse of the Czarist regime. Lieven explains the constant conflict between nationalism and imperialism in Russian foreign policy. For this purpose, Lieven utilizes a number of resources he was able to find within Russia and its Foreign Ministry.

The book details how Russian foreign policy played an integral role in events prior to the start of war in 1914. Lieven explains how, throughout Europe, the major empires were faced with strong nationalism within their kingdoms, and within their spheres of influence. In Russia throughout the late nineteenth century, foreign policy was in favor of Germany for the purpose of maintaining a strong, militaristic empire. Yet, as the new century began, Russian foreign policy drifted towards the entente that Russia had with both France and England. The reason for this change in policy was a strong national opinion within Russia, which called for protecting the Slavic peoples located in the Balkan region. Lieven describes how the foreign policy of the country in the early twentieth century was guided by public opinion. Czar Nicholas II sought to unite his subjects with a revival of Russian history and patriotism. As the book explains, the Slavophile ideology, whether or not it was in the best interest of the country, aided in establishing the political climate in Europe that would lead to war on the continent.

At the beginning of the First World War, nationalism and imperialism presented another problem for Russia. As Lieven points out in the book, the

Ukraine was an important key for the Russian Empire. One of the long-standing worries within Russia was the potential for the Ukraine to seek independence in a nationalist movement. The danger to any imperial nation is the threat of ethnic and nationalist groups within the empire. Along with the threat of nationalism to the empire, recent failed military campaigns also played a significant part in reducing the country's ability to mobilize for war. Russia's military had still not recovered from its defeat in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War. Lieven describes this failure to recover through the memoirs of men like Baron Roman Rosen. Rosen was an experienced minister who had served in Japan, but when he opposed going to war against that country, his admonition was ignored. This war was a major setback for the Russian military. It showed how inferior its naval fleet was in the Pacific, and it was a huge embarrassment for the people of Russia. This failure a decade prior to the Great War was still felt when Russia entered the cataclysmic struggle against Germany and Austria-Hungary. The inability of Nicholas II and his ministers to retain public favor would have disastrous effects, not only for Russia and its entry into the war, but also for the ruling Romanov family.

The author points out a series of events in 1917 that brought down the Czar and the Romanov family. While contributing factors can be found in insufficient food transportation, social disorder, and the failure of Nicholas II to honor his promises of reform made in 1906, another major factor in the fall of the Romanovs was the military. When a revolution had occurred in Russia in 1905-1906, the Czar had had the backing of his army and its officers. In 1917, Nicholas II lost his key military leaders, and because of this, he was not able to maintain his rule. Lieven goes into detail throughout the book to make the case of how important the military was to Nicholas II. Military matters were closely associated with the Czar, and his diminished military ultimately cost him his crown and his life.

The recommendation to read this book is based on the author Dominic Lieven and how he presented the material within. Although the context of the First World War could not be ignored, the author places the events in the larger context of Russian history. The removal of the Western European viewpoint when it comes to Russia and the First World War is very refreshing, and it provides the reader with a new look at a well-known time period in the world. The source material from Russian diplomats and leaders makes this book about Russian history inherently Russian, and it is a welcome addition to the library of any historian of the twentieth century.