

The Russian Army and the Conduct of Operations in 1914

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ABSTRACT

The scale of the fighting on the Eastern Front in 1914 is reasonably familiar but the Russian campaign of 1914, apart from Tannenberg, is poorly understood. The Russian Army's military strategy, the choices it made, what it was trying to achieve, why and how, are not well known. This article will analyse Russian strategy and operations in a thematic rather than narrative manner, placing the Russian conduct of operations in the context of Russian military thinking at the time. It will argue that the relative importance of the East Prussian and Galician Operations has been misunderstood, especially the Russian operations in northern Galicia. In late August 1914, the Russian Army faced strategic catastrophe on the entire Eastern Front, not because of events in East Prussia, but in northern Galicia where the chronic lack of correlation between ends and means in Russian military strategy became acute. The Russian high command's desire to launch a third operation into eastern Germany, in August 1914, distorted Russian strategy to the point where the Russian Army flirted with catastrophe in northern Galicia, a brush with disaster that rescued Russian strategy from its own illusions, enabling them to defeat the Austrians and force the German Army into a sustained two-front war.

'The history of the campaign of 1914 is nothing else but the story of the consequences of the strategical errors of the War Plan'¹

On 31 July 1914, Tsar Nicholas II authorised the mobilisation of the Russian Army, a defining moment² in the sequence of events that began the First World War, a war

¹ N.N. Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914* (London: Hugh Rees Ltd, 1933), p. 73.

² C. Clark, *The Sleepwalkers* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 509 regards the Russian mobilisation as 'one of the most momentous decisions of the July Crisis'.

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that inflicted millions of casualties on the Russian Army, social misery³ and ultimately two revolutions in 1917, which destroyed the Romanov dynasty. The war was a political, military, social and economic catastrophe. It was followed by the ghastly Russian Civil War (1918-21) from which the Bolsheviks emerged victorious to impose their version of utopia on a shattered society. There is a comprehensive, exhaustive and indeed exhausting literature on the origins of the First World War. However, this article will not analyse why Russia went to war, nor unless they influenced the planning and conduct of operations, will it analyse Russia's political aims. It will examine how the Russian Army planned to go to war and how it conducted operations in East Prussia, Galicia and Poland. It will analyse and explain Russian military strategy in 1914, what the Russians hoped to achieve and why *Stavka*, the Russian high command, made the strategic and operational choices that brought a combination of success and disaster. The Russian Army of 1914-18 seems indelibly associated with the image of an ill-equipped mass of brave, but limited soldiers, led by an inept officer corps, the representatives of a discredited Tsarist political system that went to war, ironically, amongst other things, to uphold Russia's status as a great power.⁴ The Russian Army of 1914 was a flawed instrument, the unwieldy tool of a Tsarist state incapable of harnessing Russia's military potential. However, it is a fact that while the Russian Army was regularly defeated by the Germans in 1914, it also inflicted a significant defeat on the Austro-Hungarian Army, one of the few decisive strategic events of the 1914 campaign.

The Legacy of the Russo-Japanese War

In August 1914, the Russians wanted to restore a military reputation trashed by the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. The Treaty of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, signed in September 1905, publicly acknowledged Japan's victory and Russia's humiliation. The army was defeated and the navy thrashed, with their performance depicted as symptomatic of a medieval Tsarist autocracy, ill-equipped for the modern world. Defeat in war provoked domestic unrest and, in October 1905, the Tsarist regime barely staved off revolution by granting a political constitution and an elected assembly, the Duma. The Russo-Japanese War revealed that 'we did not know

³ D. Stevenson, 1914-1918, *The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 102.

⁴ S. McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), takes a forthright view of Russian foreign policy and war aims. He believes that 'the war of 1914 was Russia's war even more than it was Germany's', p. 5. He further argues that Russia was planning a war of aggression against the Ottoman Empire as early as the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-09, p. 16, to believe Russian went to war for Serbia is 'naive' (p. 29) and that Russia had a 'lust for Austrian Galicia', p. 22.

modern war⁵ and initially the army was eager to discern and absorb its lessons.⁶ However, by 1908, unity of purpose had degenerated into bickering, cabalistic antics that undermined reform and disrupted Russian strategic planning despite the fact it was 'fuelled by the certainty of a general European War'.⁷ The Russian Army had five Chiefs of the General Staff in the period 1908-13: each was either a product of, embroiled in or consumed by endemic factionalism.⁸

Russia's leading military thinkers were convinced that the Russo-Japanese War had witnessed the birth of modern operations. At Sha-Ho River in October 1904, 400,000 Russian and Japanese troops fought for two weeks on a front 90 x 20 miles in depth, in an indecisive encounter that cost both sides approximately 40,000 casualties.⁹ Similarly, at Mukden in February-March 1905, three Russian armies of 300,000 men, had fought five Japanese armies of 280,000 troops, for nineteen days on a front 80 x 20 miles in depth. In 1907, Major Aleksandr Svechin argued that strategy, the use of military force to achieve national war aims and tactics, the command of fighting men in battle could not adequately explain Sha-Ho and Mukden.¹⁰ Russian theorists concluded Sha-Ho and Mukden were not battles, but engagements, fought at the operational level of war, namely the Sha-Ho Operation and the Mukden Operation.¹¹

⁵ A.A.Neznamov, *Sovremennaya Voina: Deistviya Polevoi Armii* (St. Petersburg: *Typografiya Gr. Skachkova*, 1911), p. 5.

⁶ Timothy C. Dowling, p.4 *The Brusilov Offensive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), suggests over 1,500 books were published on military affairs in the period 1908-10.

⁷ Richard W. Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-40* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), p. 39.

⁸ Alan Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army, volume 1* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), p. 70, lists them as Sukhomlinov, Myshlaevskiy, Gerngross, Zhilinskiy and Ianushkevitch.

⁹ Robert M. Citino, *Quest For Decisive Victory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 88-89.

¹⁰ A.A. Svechin, 'Strategy and Operational Art, in Harold S. Orenstein, *The Evolution of Soviet Operational Art, 1927-1991, volume 1, Operational Art*, (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 38. N. Varfolomeyev, 'Strategy in an Academic Formulation,' in Harold S. Orenstein, *The Evolution of Soviet Operational Art, 1927-1991, volume 1, Operational Art*, (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 38. Jacob W. Kipp, *Soviet Military Doctrine and the Origins of Operational Art, 1917-1936* in ed., Willard C. Frank and Philip S. Gillette, *Soviet Military Doctrine From Lenin to Gorbachev, 1915-1991* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 93.

¹¹ See V.A. Avdeyev, 'Posle Mukhden' [After Mukden], *Voyenno Istoricheskiy Zhurnal*, no. 8 (August 1992), pp. 2-9.

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The leading thinkers of the Russian Army may have reached a consensus on the existence of the operational level, but different theories existed about the type of operations to be conducted. Neznamov, a disciple of Germanic military thought, advocated massive operational encirclements carried out by two, three or even four armies.¹² In contrast, Svechin argued operational scale encirclement and annihilation represented exceptional, invariably unachievable 'extraordinary victory'.¹³ He endorsed successive operations, connected in time and space over several months into a campaign, with military force 'dosed out' not consumed in one, giant, risky operational encirclement.¹⁴

However, 'it was during World War One that the modern operation truly came into its own'.¹⁵ In August 1914, the initial stages of the Galician Operation were dominated by the desire to encircle and annihilate the Austro-Hungarian forces, to achieve an 'extraordinary victory'. Equally, at first sight the East Prussian Operation appeared to reflect the ideas associated with operational encirclement but it was also influenced by the Russian military tradition of the turning move, or *obkhod*, a fact confirmed by the strategic and operational directives issued by commanders in August 1914.¹⁶ The *obkhod* was not new.¹⁷ Indeed,

the Russian liking for the form of indirect approach known as the 'turning movement' probably stems from the tradition of Genghis Khan; certainly it has long been fundamental to Russian military thinking.¹⁸

¹² Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, pp. 31-35, has an extended discussion of Neznamov's ideas.

¹³ A.A. Svechin, 'Strategy and Operational Art', p. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁵ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 39.

¹⁶ For strategic directives see *Stavka's* instructions to Zhilinskiy, the commander of North-Western Front, on 10 August 1914, in which 1st Army was directly ordered to turn the enemy's left flank and 2nd Army was ordered round the south side of the Masurian Lakes, cited in Major-General Sir Edmund Ironside, *Tannenberg: The First Thirty Days in East Prussia* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons Ltd, 1933), p. 43. For the operational directives see Zhilinskiy's Instructions of 13 August 1914 in which the commander of the North-Western Front informed the 1st and 2nd Army that 'the Advance will be carried out by turning both flanks of the enemy situated in the Lake area' (cited in Ironside, *Tannenberg*, p. 45).

¹⁷ Christopher Bellamy, 'Heirs of Genghis Khan: The Influence of the Tartar-Mongols on the Imperial Russian and Soviet Armies,' *The Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, vol. 128, no. 1 (March 1983), pp. 54-55.

¹⁸ Richard E. Simpkin, *Deep Battle* (London: Brassey's, 1987), p. 33.

An *obkhod* involved a deep manoeuvre into the enemy rear to disrupt supply and communications, as well as to threaten the enemy's physical destruction. In the initial stages, a turning move resembled an operational encirclement, but, whereas an operational encirclement aimed to physically destroy an enemy, an *obkhod* sought to manoeuvre the mind and persuade the enemy to abandon his mission through the indirect, psychological threat of physical annihilation.

The Bosnian Crisis of 1908-9 revealed, in the face of Austria's determination to annex Bosnia, that the Russian Army could not seriously contemplate war and was in fact incapable of going to war, even against the wheezing conglomerate of Austria-Hungary.¹⁹ Russia capitulated and was exposed as a great power unable to use war as an instrument of state policy. The Russian press described the Bosnian humiliation as a 'diplomatic Tsushima'.²⁰ It cast a long shadow.²¹ During the successive Balkan crises of 1912-13, Count Thurn, the Austrian ambassador to Russia:

repeated on numerous occasions... that although the Russian leadership sought and badly needed peace, it would accept even a nearly hopeless war rather than face further humiliation.²²

In the period 1909-14, Russian foreign policy was dominated by an enduring desire to maintain its status as a great power, if necessary by force. It was driven by the need to cultivate allies, to avoid further humiliations, to advance Russian interests in the Black Sea and to restore Russian military power as a credible factor in international relations.²³ In August 1914, the Russian government chose to fight because in many ways it did indeed fear peace and humiliation more than war.

¹⁹ Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army, volume 1*, p. 65 cites the Chief of the General Staff, General Roediger as admitting the army was not even capable of defensive operations. See also Dominic Lieven, *Towards the Flame: Empire, War and the End of Tsarist Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), p. 223.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

²¹ D. Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 140-150, is a brilliant analysis of the enduring, deep impact of the Bosnian humiliation on Russian decision makers.

²² Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, p. 222.

²³ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, p. 28, argues that Russian policy makers had 'a widespread obsession, bordering on panic with the Straits question', a position driven partly by the fact that Russian warships had been banned from the Straits since the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

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Myth of the Steamroller

In the wake of the Bosnian humiliation, the army benefitted from enormous investment in road and rail infrastructure as well as manpower and equipment. The Great Programme envisaged an army of 1.7 million men by 1917: a bigger, better army, capable of rapid mobilisation and sustained operations, with more firepower, greater reserves and increased flexibility.²⁴ The vision impressed France and haunted Germany, which feared a reformed Russian Army would become an unbeatable strategic colossus. In February 1914, Moltke explicitly stated that 'Russia's preparedness for war has made gigantic strides since the Russo-Japanese War and is now much greater than ever in the past'.²⁵

Yet, 'for all these improvements, the army still lagged dangerously behind its probable enemies'.²⁶ One of the enduring myths of the twentieth century, then as now, was the perception if not reality, of Russia's unlimited manpower. True, in August 1914, the Russian Army was the largest in the world but it was a superficial superiority. Russia mobilised a smaller percentage of her manpower than France or Germany while the notorious exemption system ensured many who could serve, did not, while those who did were of inferior quality. Quantity did not offset poor quality and the exemption regime also robbed the officer corps of capable individuals who were not, like the aristocracy, socially conditioned to serve in the army.²⁷ Yet, Russia's allies and rivals, especially Germany, persistently overestimated the Russian Army, convinced it was shifting the balance of power towards the Triple Entente.²⁸ The Dual Alliance evolved from a nervous strategic insurance policy, driven by fear of Germany, to a more confrontational military alliance. French and Russian joint military planning was more urgent and meaningful in the period 1911-14. Russia's perceived military recovery influenced French strategic planning while Russia's alliance with France dominated Russian strategy in August 1914. It was a strategy defined by an enduring struggle to reconcile ends and means.

The Dilemmas of Russian Military Strategy

In the period 1909-14, Russian strategic planning was dominated by the struggle to establish a war plan capable of reconciling the need to fight a two-front war against Germany and Austria, support the French, defend Poland, invade Germany and protect Serbia.²⁹ These strategic dilemmas remained unresolved in August 1914;

²⁴ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 40.

²⁵ Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 37.

²⁶ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 40.

²⁷ Stone, *The Eastern Front*, p. 21.

²⁸ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, pp. 311-313.

²⁹ Bruce W. Menning, 'War Planning and Initial Operations in the Russian Context', in Holger Herwig and Richard F. Hamilton (eds.), *War Planning 1914* (Cambridge:

indeed they haunted the campaign. The dilemmas revolved around a series of key strategic questions which were distinct and problematic in their own right but also interacted with each other in a complex, elusive manner. These were not esoteric puzzles but urgent questions of military strategy, in a world where:

by 1912 the inevitability of a war between the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance was a subject of general discussion in the capitals of Europe.³⁰

First, should Russian strategy be offensive or defensive? Second, how could Russia simultaneously support the French, fight the Germans, challenge the Austrians and defend the Serbs? Third, if Russia attacked, should its priority be East Prussia, an invasion of eastern Germany on the Berlin axis, or the Austrians in Galicia? Fourth, was the Polish salient a key strategic asset, one that presented offensive and defensive options against Austria and Germany or an indefensible strategic liability, full of bitter Poles?³¹ Fifth, should Russia seek a decisive victory over Austria but adopt a more defensive strategy against Germany or, *vice versa*, attack Germany and conduct defensive operations against the Austrians? Sixth, was a rapid Russian victory over the Germans a realistic possibility, and if not, why waste forces on bloody, indecisive or unsuccessful operations against Germany at the expense of a strategic offensive against Austria? Seven, was a defensive strategy against the Germans actually possible when France required a Russian offensive to divert German troops from the west? Eight, could Russian strategy focus on Austria based on the widely held assumption the main German forces would strike west? If Russia prioritised Austria, but the Germans drove east, a strategic catastrophe loomed. It was unlikely but had to be considered.³² Nine, the Russo-Japanese War and the Bosnian humiliation seriously questioned the idea that Russia's ability to defeat the Austrians, never mind the Germans. Finally, tenth, how, if at all, could Russia actually protect the Serbs and Russia's interests in the Balkans?

The 1910 War Plan, Plan 19, committed four Russian armies, 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th to the East Prussian border but only 3rd Army against the Austrians in Galicia, while 6th

Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 80-142, is an excellent analysis of the issues which influenced Russian planning.

³⁰ William C. Fuller, Jr, *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 438.

³¹ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, p. 19, suggests 'Poland was the supporting wound of Russian military planning, subject of hundreds of anxious analyses and endless war gaming'.

³² Iu. N. Danilov, *Rossiia v Mirovoi Voine, 1914-1915* (Berlin: Knigoisdatel'stvo, 1924), p. 88. Danilov was *Stavka's* Chief of Operations in 1914-15 and played an important role in Russian strategic thinking in the period 1908-15.

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Army guarded St. Petersburg and 7th Army the Romanian border.³³ Plan 1910 was a defensive strategy which resolved the issue of a two-front war by committing the main Russian forces against Germany. It was decisive but controversial as it effectively abandoned Poland to secure Russian mobilisation. It was criticised as unduly defensive, conceding the strategic initiative, failing to support France and exposing Russian interests in Poland and Galicia to Austria. However, Plan 1910 was also a sobering, perhaps realistic assessment of the Russian Army's capabilities, not its aspirations.³⁴

However, in just two years Russian strategy moved from defence to attack. Plan 1912 contained two strategic variants, Plan A and Plan G. In Plan A, considered the most likely scenario, the main German effort would be in the west. Russian forces would now attack East Prussia, not just defend the border, but with only two armies, 1st and 2nd Russian, not four as in Plan 1910. 1912 Plan A also advocated the simultaneous commitment of three Russian armies, 3rd, 4th and 5th to offensive operations against the Austrians, not one as in Plan 1910. In 1912 Plan G, the main German effort was in the east. Three Russian armies, 1st, 2nd and 4th Armies, would concentrate on East Prussia, thus shifting the Russian centre of gravity north in comparison with 1912 Plan A, but only two armies, 3rd and 5th, would conduct defensive operations against the Austrians. 1912 Plan G was essentially an evolution of Plan 1910, but in the most likely war scenario, 1912 Plan 'A', Russia would attack not defend.³⁵ Therefore, in the event of war, the fundamental strategic question of whether the Russian Army would attack or defend had been answered. However, a strategy of attack presented as many operational dilemmas as it solved, dilemmas that Plan 1910, whatever its limitations, had only addressed by not considering them.³⁶

The East Prussia Option

A strategy that proposed offensive operations in East Prussia faced significant hurdles. First, Russia could not dismiss the possibility, if not probability, of a German attack from East Prussia. Second, any Russian offensive in East Prussia required the defence of northern Poland, important in itself and as a springboard for subsequent offensive

³³ The correct term is Plan 19 of 1910 followed later by the updated Plan 19 of 1912 with version 'A' and 'G'. However, for ease of understanding I will refer to them as Plan 1910 and Plan 1912.

³⁴ For further details on Plan 1910 see J. Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (London: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 166-173; Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 43; Stone, *The Eastern Front*, pp. 33-34.

³⁵ Fuller, *Strategy and Power*, pp. 444-445.

³⁶ Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive*, p.172; Stone, *The Eastern Front*, pp. 34-35; Fuller, *Strategy and Power*, pp. 442-43.

operations. Furthermore, an offensive in East Prussia required separate but linked operations in southern and eastern Prussia, while guarding Poland. The terrain, German resistance and poor Russian communication meant co-ordinating these operations would be problematic. Finally, the manpower requirements of combined operations in East Prussia and Poland appeared to rule out sustained offensive operations against the Austrians.

The Polish Option

The French wanted a Russian invasion of eastern Germany from Poland. It would seize the strategic initiative and fulfil Russia's obligations to France, but also expose Russian strategic and operational supply lines to German attack from East Prussia. In addition, any Russian drive on the Polish-Silesian axis risked an Austrian advance into southern Poland, even the nightmare scenario of an Austro-German strategic encirclement.³⁷ The Russians were distinctly nervous about Polish unrest in response to seductive Austrian or German promises about Polish freedom and culture.³⁸ Therefore, an invasion of Germany required substantial Russian forces merely to protect northern and southern Poland, forces diverted from East Prussia and Galicia.

The Austrian Option

The intricate complexities of East Prussia and Poland seemed to recommend an Austrian offensive and a defensive strategy against Germany. First, the Russian Army was inferior to the Germans but arguably superior to the Austrians. Second, many Russian officers favoured an offensive against Austria.³⁹ If Russia defeated Austria in Galicia while the Germans were contained in the west and East Prussia, Germany would be isolated. Third, Galicia's terrain suited offensive operations more than East Prussia and was less risky than an invasion of Germany. Fourth, a Galician offensive would fix the Austrians, indirectly support Serbia and galvanise Russian public opinion, a key issue after 1905, as well as protect Russia's wider Balkan interests. Yet, Russia's ability to achieve a rapid, decisive victory over the Austrians was debatable and a defensive strategy in the north would not divert German troops from France. If Russia was to emerge victorious from a European war France had to survive, but if Russia prioritised Austria, this appeared less not more likely.

³⁷ A massive Austro-German strategic encirclement of Russian forces in Poland with the Austrian coming from the south and the Germans from East Prussia, was the cherished dream of the Austrian Chief of the General Staff, Conrad von Hotzendorf.

³⁸ Danilov, *Rossiya v Mirovoi Voine*, p.86; Fuller, *Strategy and Power*, op.cit. p. 440.

³⁹ In 1912, Alekseev, Chief of Staff of the Kiev Military District, successfully argued for a rebalancing of the proposed Russian deployments in Plan 1910 in favour of offensive operations against the Austrians. See Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive*, pp. 174-178. See also A.M. Zaionchkovskii, *Podgotovka Rossii k Imperialisticheskoi Voine*, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1926), p. 237.

The French Connection

In theory, Russia could exploit its traditional strengths of manpower, geography, distance and time in the Russian interior, but an entirely defensive strategy, similar to Plan 1910, risked French defeat and Russian isolation. If successful in the west, Germany was likely to march east. The German Army believed war with Russia was inevitable, the sooner the better, even with French support, so it would not fear an isolated Russia. This was not 1812: as later events in 1915 demonstrated, the German Army was more than capable of invading European Russia. Russian manpower was not limitless, nor was it clear that the brittle political, social, cultural and economic compromise that was Tsarist Russia would survive a German onslaught. In 1905, defeat had provoked revolution, not solidarity.

The French connection dominated Russian strategic thinking. The Bosnian crisis had revealed that without France, Russia possessed few military options. French support for Russia during the Bosnian crisis had been lukewarm, but:

it was well understood in Petersburg that the principal reason for Austria's triumph had been the firm support of Germany.⁴⁰

France had inadvertently exposed Russia's military weakness, and the passive, defensive nature of Plan 1910 horrified the French.⁴¹ In the period 1911-14, it was the strategic necessity of enhancing Russia's military credibility, to serve French interests, which induced France to risk war for Russia in the Balkans.⁴² French support underwrote Russia's risky support of Serbian nationalism and its aggressive foreign policy towards the Austrians during the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. Russia's wobbly status as a great power was upheld but the Russian Army's credibility was inextricably linked to France. If the French were not there, the Russians were nowhere. Indeed,

the only way Russia could be sure that the French would be there when it needed them was by convincing them that Russia was in a position to deliver early and powerful blows against Germany.⁴³

In the final analysis Russian strategy in August 1914 was driven by the French alliance. If Russia had to fight, it could not fight alone. Success in the east required French

⁴⁰ Fuller, *Strategy and Power*, p. 422.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 433; Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, p. 304.

⁴² Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, pp. 293-299 and also p. 558, describes what he calls 'the Balkanization of the Franco-Russian Alliance'.

⁴³ Fuller, *Strategy and Power*, p. 439.

survival in the west, while survival in the east required Russian offensives in the east. This is not to suggest that Russia selflessly sacrificed itself for the French.⁴⁴ Russia did not go to war for France, but Russia's strategic options were dependent on her alliance with France. The French and the Russians were partners in the Dual Alliance but each manipulated the other while officially acknowledging the interests of their ally. The French wanted a Russian invasion of eastern Germany as well as East Prussia because for France, the alliance was about Germany, not Austria.

The Russians' 'natural' foe was the Austrians, not the Germans, but Russia feared the Germans and could not contemplate war with Austria without France.⁴⁵ If Germany supported Austria, as in the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-9, Russia had no options. The French and the Russians needed each other. Without the Dual Alliance neither could seriously contemplate the use of force to achieve political objectives in Europe. Therefore, in August 1914, Russia attacked Germany to support France and in return gained the opportunity to settle accounts with Austria. The Dual Alliance explains why Russia attacked both Germany and Austria, how it attacked and where it attacked, but, critically in 1914, it exercised a disproportionate influence on when the Russians attacked, 'with fatal effect upon the course of the first operations of the World War.'⁴⁶

In May 1913, Zhilinskiy, the Chief of the General Staff, agreed to launch Russian offensive operations against Germany just fifteen days after mobilisation, despite the fact that the Russian Army could not hope to mobilise, equip, command, control, supply and effectively deploy 800,000 men for sustained operations in fifteen days.⁴⁷ Therefore, in August 1914, speed influenced Russian as much, if not more than, German strategy and bound the Tsar's forces to a Day 15 commitment.⁴⁸ It was not

⁴⁴ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, p. 78, argues that 'of all the myths that cloud understanding of the First World War, the hoariest of all must be the notion that Russia "fell on its sword for France"'. See also Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive*, p.182, who argues that 'only Russia's own interest in saving France can explain this decision.'

⁴⁵ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, pp. 79-80, maintains the majority of the Russian political and military elite was not interested in East Prussia and did not believe it could defeat the Germans.

⁴⁶ N.N. Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914* (London: Hugh Reed Ltd, 1933), p. 54.

⁴⁷ Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive*, p.181, argues that 'Zhilinskii simply told the French what they wanted to hear.'

⁴⁸ B. Menning, *Bayonets Before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army 1861-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 252, has a wider discussion on the

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enough to declare war: in order to support France, Russia had to attack and attack quickly.

Ends and Means: The Third Offensive

On 1 August 1914, just twenty-four hours after Russian mobilisation, the French requested a Russian invasion of eastern Germany, in spite of the fact that Russia's existing strategy was built around simultaneous operations in East Prussia and Galicia.⁴⁹ If it was to divert German troops from the west, a third operation in the east had to be launched simultaneously but this could only be done if it replaced either the East Prussian or Galician Operations. Such a decision would introduce chaos into the Russian mobilisation plan, uproar in the army and from a Russian strategic perspective, if not French, cause more problems than it solved. Furthermore, a third operation would shift the Russian strategic centre of gravity west and into the centre of the Eastern Front, a move with serious operational implications for East Prussia and the Galician Operation.

The 4th Army was the most northerly Russian formation committed to the Galician Operation. It was the only Russian unit in a position to even contemplate imminent operations on the Warsaw-Berlin axis. It could not do this, however, on its own and any diversion would compromise its role as the northern wing of the South-Western Front's encirclement of the Austrian forces in Galicia. In addition, 4th Army was the strategic fulcrum of the Russian front, the formation that connected the North-Western Front (NWF) in East Prussia and South-Western Front (SWF) in Galicia into a coherent whole.

It might be argued that the 'Warsaw pivot' (i.e. 4th Army) enabled the Russians to claim they had a Warsaw-Berlin option, while in reality Galicia was always the main Russian effort.⁵⁰ Yet, it is a fact that on 6 August 1914, *Stavka* made decisions, either for the purposes of window dressing or genuine strategic intent, that addressed French concerns in a manner which had substantial strategic, operational and tactical implications for the East Prussian and Galician Operations, decisions that shaped the 1914 Russian campaign.

The Guard Corps and 1st Corps – promised to 1st Army in East Prussia – were redeployed to Warsaw, as was 18th Corps from St. Petersburg. *Stavka* announced that these units

disparity between the Russian Army was committed to in terms of mobilisation and the Kiev manoeuvres of April 1914.

⁴⁹ Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914*, p. 83.

⁵⁰ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, p. 80.

will form the advanced guard of a new army for action against the Germany.⁵¹

In short, three corps were diverted to Warsaw, to be joined later by the entire 9th and 10th Armies. In addition, *Stavka* diverted 20th Corps from 4th Army to 1st Army in eastern Prussia.⁵² On 10 August 1914, Ianushkevitch declared Russia's support for France 'must take the form of the quickest possible action against Germany'.⁵³ By re-deploying these formations from NWF and SWF, in addition to 9th and 10th Army, *Stavka* attempted to orchestrate a third Russian offensive operation, an invasion of eastern Germany.⁵⁴ In making these decisions, *Stavka* courted disaster in Galicia and East Prussia, a strategic catastrophe that would have destroyed the Triple Entente as an effective military alliance and relieved Germany of the strategic burden of a two-front war regardless of events in the west.

The East Prussian Operation

The strategic isolation of East Prussia condemned 8th German Army to fight a separate war but at the operational and tactical level. East Prussia, the subject of numerous staff rides, exercises, papers and plans by the German General Staff, was easier to defend than it appeared. German commanders were well versed in the defence of the region with secure strategic and operational lines of supply. The German plan envisaged an extended delaying operation in which 8th Army created time for German forces in the west to be moved east before launching a counter offensive. The 8th Army was to avoid a decisive encounter even if this involved liberating not defending eastern Prussia.

The Angerapp Line incorporated natural and artificial obstacles as well as the Masurian Lakes. Forests, fortifications and killing zones channelled enemy attacks and hindered manoeuvre. In addition, the East Prussian road and rail network had been designed to facilitate operational mobility and tactical agility. Consequently, despite being heavily outnumbered in August 1914, the German defences rested on solid foundations. Therefore, any invasion of East Prussia was a deceptively complex

⁵¹ Ironside, *Tannenberg*, p. 40; Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914*, p. 90.

⁵² Danilov, *Rossiya v Mirovoi Voine*, 1924, pp.135-136, discusses the need to deploy 9th Army; Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914*, p. 97.

⁵³ Ironside, *Tannenberg*, p. 43; Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914*, p. 90. Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive*, p.194, suggests Danilov and *Stavka* were very concerned about the German's success at Liege.

⁵⁴ H. Strachan, *The First World War, Vol 1: To Arms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 315, argues that *Stavka* effectively regarded the East Prussian and Galician Operations as prelude to the invasion of Germany. Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive*, p.160, indicates that 'this third axis of attack was added at the very last minute.'

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matter, indeed, Joffre, the French Chief of the General Staff, regarded East Prussia as an operational ambush.⁵⁵

Russian Operational Plan

The North-Western Front, commanded by Zhilinskiy, the former Chief of the General Staff who had agreed to the Day 15 deadline, numbered 400,000 men. It consisted of Rennenkampf's 1st Army on the eastern border of East Prussia and Samsonov's 2nd Army, north of Warsaw, on the south-eastern border of Prussia. The strategic position of East Prussia suggested an operational encirclement of 8th Army but, Zhilinskiy's initial plan, presented to *Stavka* on 10 August 1914, envisaged 2nd Army moving north merely to strike 8th Army's southern flank at the same time as it was engaged by 1st Army from the east.

However, *Stavka* rejected Zhilinskiy's plan as incompatible with its strategic imperative of 6 August 1914, which required 'the quickest possible advance against Germany'.⁵⁶ *Stavka* ordered 1st Army north of the Masurian Lakes in order to turn 8th German's left flank. It was to conduct dynamic aggressive operations in eastern Prussia 'with the object of drawing upon itself the greatest possible enemy strength'.⁵⁷ The 2nd Army was to advance north but further west of the Masurian Lakes than in Zhilinskiy's initial proposals. It was to move into the operational rear, not just the southern flank, of the German forces drawn east by 1st Army. It was to destroy remaining German troops and prevent an enemy withdrawal to the Vistula.⁵⁸ In short, 'the enticing of the Germans eastwards was the basis of the Russian plan to cut them off from the Vistula'.⁵⁹

Stavka's strategic aim was not to encircle 8th German Army but:

was, in fact, to clear East Prussia with the First and Second Armies.⁶⁰

This was better served by a strategic *obkhod*, not a time-consuming, bitterly contested encirclement of 8th Army. Zhilinskiy was instructed that once 1st and 2nd Army drew level with Warsaw, the NWF'S left wing was to invade eastern Germany with 9th Army. The 2nd Army's interception of enemy forces east of the Vistula was

⁵⁵ Stone, *The Eastern Front*, p. 54.

⁵⁶ Ianushkevitch, 10 August 1914, to Zhilinskiy cited in Ironside, *Tannenberg*, p. 43.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ General'nyi Shtab RKKA, *Votstochno-Prusskaya Operatsiya*, part of the Red Army series *Sbornik Dokumentov Mirovoi, Imperialisticheskoi Voiny na Russkom Fronte, 1914-1917* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1939), pp.61-62. Hereafter *Vostochnno-Prusskaya*.

⁵⁹ Ironside, *Tannenberg*, p. 67.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

designed to prevent an organised German withdrawal threatening Russian operations on the Warsaw-Berlin axis. *Stavka's* intervention reshaped the East Prussian Operation in line with its strategic imperative of launching a third operation into eastern Germany, not the operational environment of East Prussia. On 13 August 1914, Zhilinskiy issued revised instructions which complied with *Stavka's* strategic intentions. The 1st Army was ordered to turn 8th German's northern flank and cut off Königsberg. Samsonov's 2nd Army was to turn the German southern wing and advance north, to the west of the Masurian Lakes.⁶¹ Indeed, on 14 August 1914, Zhilinskiy declared 8th Army was to be driven out of East Prussia not encircled.⁶²

The Battle of Gumbinnen: 20 August 1914

On 17 August 1914, the 1st Army crossed the East Prussian border on a 35 mile front, with three corps, 20th, 3rd and 4th Corps, deployed from north to south. The battle of Stallupönen gave 1st Army a bloody nose but it continued west. However, on 19 August 1914, despite *Stavka's* request for dynamic operations, *Rennenkampf* halted 1st Army to address concerns about communications and supply. The 1st Army's positions were broadcast *en clair* and identified by German intelligence. In response, Prittwitz, 8th German Army's commander, abandoned the idea of a delaying operation in favour of a decisive engagement east of the Angerapp Line.

The 1st Russian Army, more by accident than design, had achieved its main operational objective of drawing upon itself the greatest possible enemy strength. Three of 8th German Army's four corps', I Corps, 17 Corps and 1st Reserve Corps moved east, leaving just 20th Corps to monitor 2nd Russian Army. The battle of Gumbinnen began well for the Germans.⁶³ In the north, 1st German Corps achieved rapid success, but in the centre 17th German Corps reeled back under a storm of Russian artillery fire. On the southern wing, 1st German Reserve Corps, advancing north-east from Goldap was blocked by 4th Russian Corps. The German corps' fought isolated tactical battles with no real operational plan: I Corps had been committed too early, 17th Corps suffered 8,000 casualties and I Reserve Corps was bloodied. By 18.00 hours on 20 August 1914, Gumbinnen was over. 1st Russian Army had incurred heavy casualties but it had not been destroyed and 8th German Army had been drawn east.

It has been argued that 'Gumbinnen must be counted a German victory' but as the dust settled, reports confirmed Samsonov's 2nd Army had crossed the East Prussian

⁶¹ *Vostochno-Prusskaya Operatsiya*, p. 263.

⁶² Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, pp. 46-47.

⁶³ Strachan, *The First World War*, pp. 321-322, gives a pithy account of the essential details of the battle of Gumbinnen. See also, W. Bruce Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), pp. 67-69.

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border.⁶⁴ It was moving north into the rear of 8th Army. In a wave of catastrophic pessimism, Prittwitz concluded 8th Army faced disaster. Strategically, it risked being cut off from Germany. Operationally, three corps' were fixed by 1st Russian Army. Tactically, 20th German Corps faced the entire 2nd Russian Army. At 21.30 hours, on 20 August 1914, Prittwitz informed a stunned German high command in Coblenz that East Prussia was lost and 8th Army was withdrawing to the Vistula.⁶⁵ The Russian *obkhod* had persuaded Prittwitz 8th Army faced annihilation and could not achieve its mission. In short, the Russians had successfully manoeuvred his mind and achieved in theory, if not yet in practice, *Stavka's* strategic aim 'to clear East Prussia with the First and Second Armies'.⁶⁶ An historic Russian victory appeared imminent, one that would create optimum conditions for *Stavka's* third operation.

The Aftermath of Gumbinnen: Triumph & Disaster

In order to transform the operational possibilities created by Gumbinnen into strategic victory the 1st Russian Army had to fix the 8th German's forces in eastern Prussia. Yet, 1st Russian did nothing. It did nothing for three days. Indeed, Rennenkampf ordered it to rest while three German corps disengaged from the 1st Russian Army and converged on 2nd Army. On 23 August 1914, 1st Army resumed its advance but Zhilinskiy did nothing to energise it while hounding 2nd Army. Zhilinskiy's vision of the East Prussian Operation remained, in essence, his original operational plan, the one rejected by *Stavka* on 10 August 1914. Zhilinskiy had complied with *Stavka's* requirement to cut off the German retreat to the Vistula but did not appreciate, or perhaps accept, the finer strategic nuances of *Stavka's* plan, in which the actual physical destruction of the German forces in East Prussia was less important than the speed with which 8th Army was flushed out. Zhilinskiy believed 1st Army had fulfilled its operational objective and did not question Rennenkampf's indolence after Gumbinnen. Indeed,

Jilinsky sent him no orders to push on and made no comment on his failure to keep in touch with the enemy.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 47. See also Golovine, who argues 'despite the defeat inflicted upon the Germans in the centre, all the advantages lay upon their side' on the evening of 20 August 1914.

⁶⁵ Robert B. Asprey, *The German High Command at War* (London: Warner Books, 1991), p. 57.

⁶⁶ The strategic aim of the East Prussian Operation as articulated by Ianushkevitch to Zhilinsky on 10 August 1914. Cited in Ironside, *Tannenberg*, p. 44.

⁶⁷ Ironside, *Tannenberg*, p. 199.

In Zhilinskiy's mind it was 2nd Army's job to complete 1st Army's work. Therefore, on 22 August 1914, while 1st Army rested, Zhilinskiy demanded 'immediate and decisive operations' from 2nd Army.⁶⁸

The NWF was supposed to conduct one operation with two armies but, although Zhilinskiy was determined 8th Army would not escape, his actions turned the East Prussian Operation into two operations by individual armies. On 26 August 1914, Zhilinskiy ordered two of 1st Army's corps, half its strength, to cut off Königsberg.⁶⁹ This amounted to a separate operation at a time when 1st Army's direct co-operation with 2nd Army was critical to fixing German units. Zhilinskiy's directive isolated 2nd Army and relieved 8th German Army's fears that 1st Army would fall on its rear. Zhilinskiy was so obsessed with the phantom menace of the Königsberg garrison that he failed to foresee, detect or understand 8th Army's disengagement from 1st Army. In the process, Zhilinskiy created a window of opportunity that enabled the Germans to snatch victory from disaster. It was a catastrophic failure of operational art.

The Advance of 2nd Russian Army

On 19 August 1914, 2nd Army began operations with five corps 2nd, 6th, 13th, 15th and 23rd deployed on the south-eastern border of Prussia to carry out Zhilinskiy's Instruction No.1.⁷⁰ This ordered 2nd Army to advance north but also west of the Masurian Lakes so as to cut off a German withdrawal to the Vistula. The 2nd Army's advance shook the Germans to the core but 2nd Army was actually a far less coherent and powerful force than it appeared. Zhilinskiy and Samsonov had a querulous, antagonistic relationship and clashed on 16 August 1914. Samsonov believed 2nd Army should move north but also further west to fulfil *Stavka's* orders, while Zhilinskiy's insisted 2nd Army move directly north.⁷¹ Samsonov was insubordinate but possessed a better understanding of *Stavka's* strategic intent than Zhilinskiy. Zhilinskiy's directive may have used the language of turning moves but his actions and orders throughout the East Prussian Operation seem designed to launch an *okhvāt*, or flank attack, not an *obkhod* or turning move.

The 2nd Army's communications were unreliable: Samsonov and his corps commanders could not communicate effectively.⁷² Indeed, the communication

⁶⁸*ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶⁹ *Vostochno-Prusskaya Operatsiya*, pp. 228-229. See also Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914*, pp. 303-304.

⁷⁰ Artamanov's 1st Corps was not originally part of 2nd Army but came to assume a position on the western flank of 2nd Army's position.

⁷¹ Ironside, *Tannenberg*, p. 124.

⁷² *Vostochno-Prusskaya Operatsiya*, p. 264. Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 326, argues 2nd Army's internal communications had collapsed by 20 August 1914.

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systems of the entire Russian Army in 1914, as well other armies, were hopelessly unsuited to the scale of operations in 1914.⁷³ In truth, 2nd Army marched into Prussia more as five separate, co-located tactical groups than a coherent operational force, capable of sustained, co-ordinated manoeuvre. The key to operational manoeuvre and supply in 1914 was not strategic rail arteries but regional networks. The North-Western Front, especially 2nd Army, was tasked with rapid, sustained operations in an area virtually bereft of logistical infrastructure. The local road and rail network was poor, the legacy of a deliberate Russian strategy to deter a German offensive. The NWF's operational and tactical options were limited, its lines of advance predictable. It was a steamroller, which by definition lacked agility, reliant on mass to generate a crushing strategic and operational momentum to defeat the enemy.

Yet in August 1914, the NWF could not sustain rapid manoeuvre over greater distances nor did it possess 8th Army's tactical agility. Rapid operations fixed the Germans but the NWF never developed the strategic, operational and tactical momentum required to defeat 8th Army. It met the Day 15 deadline but it was not prepared for sustained operations. Its rear services were in chaos before operations began but the strategic imperative of speed in order to support France drowned out reality. As a result, the Russian logistic effort in August 1914 was disastrously inefficient, especially in East Prussia. Horses were essential but fodder created a massive supply burden. Officers in 1st Army complained of logistic shortages just 48 hours into the operation. The 2nd Army's soldiers marched for days over sandy earth, in stifling heat, tormented by thirst, living a hand to mouth existence before they engaged the enemy. In East Prussia and Galicia, Russian units went into action missing 20% of their manpower but still had too many troops to supply.⁷⁴ Therefore, the Russian Army struggled to supply rushed, inadequately prepared operations it had actually been contemplating for twenty years. Speed, momentum and fighting power were vital but the disintegration of the Russian rear made them incompatible as well as essential.

The NWF and Samsonov had little idea 2nd Army was marching into a German trap. Zhilinskiy remained unaware that 20th German Corps was conducting a deliberate delaying action to enable 8th German forces in the east to manoeuvre west against 2nd Army. The 2nd Army was bedevilled by poor intelligence, intermittent communications, inept command, shattered troops, chaotic logistics and problematic terrain. On 23 August 1914, Samsonov requested a pause to sort out 2nd Army's rear.

⁷³ David R. Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015), p. 72.

⁷⁴ Max Hastings, *Catastrophe* (London: William Collins, 2013), p. 268.

Zhilinskiy refused, insisting that 'the enemy has apparently left only insignificant forces facing you'.⁷⁵

Samsonov's request reflected the views of tough, competent soldiers like 15th Corps' General Martos. However, a staggering outburst on 24 August 1914, Zhilinskiy commented that:

to see an enemy where he does not exist is cowardice, but I will not permit General Samsonov to play the coward and demand of him the continuation of the offensive.⁷⁶

The blind led the blind, but in an operational situation smothered in the fog of war, on 24 August 1914, German intelligence intercepted 2nd Army's communications, broadcast *en clair*. The Germans discovered the position, intentions and future movements of 2nd Army, as well as its chaotic supply situation. On 25 August 1914, further interceptions confirmed 1st Army was not actively co-operating with 2nd Army, an impression confirmed on 26th August 1914 when Zhilinskiy ordered 1st Army's forces to Königsberg.

The German Counterstroke

In the aftermath of Gumbinnen, Prittwitz was replaced by Hindenburg and Ludendorff and the Germans assumed the Russian aim was to encircle 8th Army.⁷⁷ In response, 1st Army was to be screened while German forces in eastern Prussia re-deployed south and west to confront 2nd Army, which was considered the greater threat. The Germans gambled on holding the passive 1st Army with just two divisions, in order to concentrate eight against 2nd Army. The 20th Corps anchored the German position while troops manoeuvred against 6th Russian Corps on the Russian right and 1st Russian Corps on 2nd Army's extreme left. It was an astonishingly risky plan dependent on the rail network, accomplished staff work and the inept complicity of 1st Army.⁷⁸ The stage was set for Tannenberg.

On 26 August 1914, 17th German Corps, coming from the north-east, smashed through 6th Russian Corps and drove south-west. The 2nd Army's right wing was completely exposed but 6th Russian Corps failed to inform Samsonov, who remained ignorant of its fate. At dawn on 27 August 1914, 1st German Corps destroyed 1st

⁷⁵ *Vostochno-Prusskaya Operatsiya*, pp. 263-264; Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914*, p. 195.

⁷⁶ Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914*, pp. 204-205.

⁷⁷ Hastings, *Catastrophe*, p. 273.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.275, although Hastings points out that similar manoeuvres had been the subject of German exercises in 1891, 1898 and 1899.

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Russian Corps at Usdau on the left-wing of 2nd Army. It marched east to meet 17th German Corps, while in the centre 20th German Corps wrestled 2nd Army's central corps, 13th and 15th, in bitter, positional fighting. By dawn on 28 August 1914, the 2nd Army was encircled. In response, Samsonov moved into the pocket to assume personal command, perhaps, who knows, to show Zhilinskiy, he was no coward. It was a futile gesture. The NWF and 2nd Army had been out-thought, out-maneuvred and out-fought. During the night of 28-29 August 1914, 2nd Army began to disintegrate. Command broke down as shattered, desperate groups of exhausted men struggled and invariably failed to escape the forests of East Prussia.

During the night of 29-30 August, an overwhelmed, despairing Samsonov committed suicide. Tannenberg was a catastrophe: by 31 August 1914, 2nd Army was gone: 18,000 Russians were dead, with 92,000 taken prisoner.⁷⁹ In a series of battles in the Masurian Lakes (7-17 September 1914) the Germans drove 1st Army east, inflicting heavy casualties but failed to destroy it. A fighting withdrawal, conducted through a series of gruelling forced marches saved 1st Army from destruction. Yet nothing could disguise the fact the East Prussian Operation had been a complete failure. By the end of September 1914, the Russians had withdrawn from East Prussia having suffered 250,000 casualties in six weeks.⁸⁰ The original NWF had ceased to exist as a coherent fighting force.

The Galician Operation

The South-Western Front commanded by Ivanov had four armies, deployed in two groups, northern and southern.⁸¹ The northern group of 337,000 consisted of Zaltse's 4th Army and Plehve's 5th Army, while the southern group, numbering 354,000, was made up of Ruzskiy's 3rd Army and Brusilov's 8th Army.⁸² The Russian strategy envisaged a concentric advance with the northern group moving south-west, while the southern group moved west from eastern Galicia, towards Lemberg, in a massive encirclement operation. However, as in East Prussia, *Stavka* and SWF disagreed about the sequence of operations. *Stavka* wanted the northern group to fix the Austrians for the southern group whereas SWF wanted the southern group to pin the Austrians in eastern Galicia for the northern group. In addition, SWF wanted

⁷⁹ Geoffrey Jukes, *The First World War: The Eastern Front, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Osprey, 2002), p. 23.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸¹ A. S. Beloi, *Galitsiiskaya Bitva* (Moscow & Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1929), pp. 62-67, analyses and describes the Russian strategic and operational plan in Galicia. A. A. Brusilov, *Moi Vospimaniya* (Moscow, 2003), p. 67, describes Ivanov as 'narrow, indecisive and incoherent'. Alekseev as 'quite intelligent but indecisive and lacking in character': cited in Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 52.

⁸² Beloi, *Galitsiiskaya Bitva*, pp. 56.

4th Army on the extreme right wing of the northern group to be the strongest formation but *Stavka* wanted it to be Brusilov's 8th Army in the south.⁸³

The entire Russian debate was based on a complacent set of assumptions about Austrian intentions. In the period 1909-12, intelligence from the Austrian traitor, Colonel Redl, had enabled the Russians to develop a clear understanding of Austrian strategy.⁸⁴ The Russians were convinced the main Austrian forces would be deployed east of the River San in eastern Galicia. In fact, in August 1914, the Austrians actually deployed their main armies, Dankl's 1st, Auffenberg's 4th and Bruderman's 3rd Army, west of the San. The northern flank was held by Army Group Kummer with Corps Woyrsch, a German reserve grouping guarding the Silesian axis. The southern flank was secured by the Kovess Group as Bohn-Ermolli's 2nd Army did not return from the Serbian Front until 25 August 1914.⁸⁵

In these circumstances, *Stavka's* decision, on 6 August 1914, to improvise a third operation and strip 4th Army of its 20th Corps had a major impact on the Galician Operation.⁸⁶ The SWF was already spread over 400 kilometres but *Stavka* exacerbated the problem. The 4th Army, on the right wing of the northern group, was arguably the most important Russian formation on the entire Russian front representing the physical and conceptual link between East Prussia, Galicia and the third operation. However, *Stavka's* intervention made it the weakest Russian army, despite its key role in SWF's original operational plan. Furthermore, the Austrians' western deployment would also expose 4th Army, now denied a corps by *Stavka*, to a flank attack by the 1st and 4th Austrian Armies. Yet the Russians remained unaware of the actual Austrian deployment until 22 August 1914, just twenty four hours before the northern group began operations.

Geoffrey Wawro's account of the Austrians' strategic, operational and tactical conduct of the war in Galicia has brought this aspect of the war in the east to a wider audience.⁸⁷ However, from a Russian perspective, the Galician Operation of August-September 1914 is often overshadowed by the East Prussian Operation.⁸⁸ If noticed at all, attention is invariably focused on the southern group's capture of

⁸³ Strachan, *The First World War*, pp. 351-352; Stone, *The Eastern Front*, pp. 82-84.

⁸⁴ Danilov, *Rossiia v Mirovoi Voine*, pp. 158-59. Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, pp. 115-117, gives details of Col. Alfred Redl, a senior Austrian officer who spied for the Russians.

⁸⁵ N. Golovine, 'The Great Battle of Galicia', *The Slavonic Review*, vol. 1, no. 5 (1926-27), pp. 25-27 & pp. 26-27.

⁸⁶ Golovine, *The Russian Campaign of 1914*, p. 97.

⁸⁷ Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

⁸⁸ David R. Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War*, p. 81.

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Lemberg on 3rd September 1914.⁸⁹ In fact, the key events in the Galician Operation, indeed the entire Eastern Front, involved a series of swirling battles in the northern sector during the period 23 August to 3 September 1914.⁹⁰ Indeed, the early stages of the Galician Operation were dominated by frontal collisions, unplanned encounter battles for the strategic, operational and tactical initiative in the northern sector as the Austrians and Russians sought to out-think, out-manoeuvre and out-fight each other.

On 23 August 1914, as it moved south, the Russian northern group clashed with the 1st and 4th Austrian Armies, west of Krasnik. The 4th Russian Army suffered heavy casualties and fell back north-east towards Lublin.⁹¹ The battle of Krasnik was a significant tactical defeat for the Russians but it was also loaded with operational and strategic implications.⁹² Krasnik was a key rail junction and critical to Russian operation mobility in northern Galicia. If the Austrians overwhelmed 4th Army they could sever Russian communications with the Warsaw Military District, disconnect the East Prussian and Galician Operations and jeopardise *Stavka's* third operation. Furthermore, 4th Army's withdrawal north-east towards Lublin left its southern neighbour, Plehve's 5th Army, with two open flanks, north and south.⁹³ The rapid defeat of 4th and 5th Russian Armies, the northern group, would wreck the Russian

⁸⁹ Holger Afflerbach, 'The Eastern Front', in J. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, volume 1 Global War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 234-265, barely mentions the Galician Operations. Ian F.W. Beckett, *The Great War 1914-1918* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001) has just one paragraph on the Galician Operation (pp. 57-58). On the other hand, Stevenson, *1914-1918, The History of the First World War*, p. 69, acknowledges that 'arguably it had greater consequences than East Prussia'.

⁹⁰ Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, pp.169-194, has an entire chapter on Krasnik. It is primarily from the Austrian perspective and seeks to put the battle into an Austrian strategic and operational context. The actual account of the battle of Krasnik is mainly confined to pp. 191-193. Winston S. Churchill, *The Great War, Volume 1* (London: George Newnes Limited, 1933), pp. 201-209, also has a very readable account of the battles of Krasnik and Komarow and is cited by Wawro.

⁹¹ Beloi, *Galitsiiskaya Bitva*, covers the battles of 4th Russian Army and 5th Russian Army in the last week of August 1914 in immense detail, but see also Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, p. 200; Stone, *The Eastern Front*, p. 85; Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 54; Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War*, p. 87.

⁹² Beloi, *Galitsiiskaya Bitva*, pp. 105-106, specifically on the battle of Krasnik. See also I.I. Rostunov, *Russkiy Front Pervoi Mirovoi Voiny* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo, Nauka, 1976), pp. 131-140, which also covers the 5th Russian Army's defensive operations west of Lublin in detail.

⁹³ Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, p. 204.

strategic plan and free the Austrians to attack the Russian southern group. In short, in the last week of August 1914, the entire Russian strategy, the 1914 campaign plan and its operational conduct revolved around the fate of 4th Army and 5th Army, the Russian northern group in Galicia.⁹⁴

South-Western Front understood the strategic, operational and tactical implications of 4th Army's defeat at Krasnik, as well as the relative importance of the northern and southern sectors in Galicia.⁹⁵ On 24 August 1914, Alekseev, SWF's Chief of Staff, ordered 5th Army's left wing to relieve 4th Army by attacking the right of Auffenberg's 4th Army.⁹⁶ Alekseev also ordered Ruzskiy's 3rd Army north to secure 5th Army's exposed southern flank. Yet, despite repeated orders, Ruzskiy did not; fear of 3rd Austrian Army induced an 'almost psychotic prudence', but others believed he wanted Lemberg and personal glory.⁹⁷ On 28 August 1914, four days after the initial orders, Ivanov instructed Ruzskiy to:

transfer the Army to the right; this is dictated by the situation of the 4th and 5th Armies.⁹⁸

As late as 2 September 1914, a livid Alekseev reminded Ruzskiy that:

the outcome of the first period of the campaign does not depend on your operations against Lvov (Lemberg) and the Dniester... even the taking of Lvov would not compensate us for the loss of the battle in the north.⁹⁹

Chronic incompetence as well as insubordinate strategic, operational and tactical command bedevilled the Russian campaign in 1914.¹⁰⁰ *Stavka* was a disorganised conglomerate of the personalities and factions whose cabalistic politics had infected Russian military thinking since the Bosnian crisis. *Stavka* was nominally headed by Grand Duke Nicholas, the Tsar's uncle, absent from high command since 1908, a victim of political battles with the War Minister, General Sukhomlinov. Sukhomlinov was both loathed and admired, but he influenced *Stavka* through Danilov, *Stavka*'s Chief of Operations. Danilov was a more influential figure than the Tsar's choice for

⁹⁴ N. Golovine, *The Great Battle of Galicia*, p. 30.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁹⁶ Stone, *The Eastern Front*, p.87-88, examines the battle of Zamosc-Komarow. See also Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, pp. 202-211, mainly from an Austrian perspective.

⁹⁷ N. Golovine, *The Great Battle of Galicia*, p. 33. Quoted in Stone, *The Eastern Front*, p. 88; Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, pp. 54-55.

⁹⁸ N. Golovine, *The Great Battle of Galicia*, p. 33.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ Stone, *The Eastern Front*, pp. 51-53.

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Chief of the General Staff, Ianushkevich.¹⁰¹ Danilov had played a key role in Plan 1910 and Plan 1912 and had clashed repeatedly with Alekseev over East Prussia and Galicia.¹⁰²

Zhilinskiy was regarded as a living corpse, a court soldier, not an operational commander.¹⁰³ Ivanov was steady but argued incessantly with Alekseev and Brusilov thought him mediocre.¹⁰⁴ Ruzskiy ignored orders and pursued personal glory, yet on 16 September 1914, was promoted to command NWF.¹⁰⁵ Rennenkampf's leadership was almost satirical in its obstinate, blind stupidity; Samsonov was in command of 2nd Army but never really in control. Tactical commanders in East Prussia, such as 6th Corps Blagoveshchenski and 1st Corps Artamanov, were dismally ineffective, while others such as 15th Corps' Martos did their best in exceptionally trying circumstances.

The strategic, operational and tactical dilemmas confronted by Russian commanders in 1914 were formidable but incompetent command created problems and made unavoidable difficulties worse. *Stavka* established unrealistic goals, failed to establish a hierarchy of strategic and operational objectives, a coherent correlation between ends and means or to properly co-ordinate the actions of fronts, armies and corps. *Stavka*'s strategic schemes were intellectually brilliant but beyond the Russian Army's actual capabilities. *Stavka* struggled to impose its will on front commanders; front commanders wrangled with army commanders; army commanders could not rely on corps commanders; some were capable and brave, others incompetent. In short, army politics, insubordination, personal antagonism, incompetence and poor communications challenged the army's chain of command and undermined its ability to engage in the organised application of force, perhaps the defining hallmark of an army.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 314, points out that the Tsar insisted on Ianushkevitch becoming the Chief of *Stavka* in August 1914 even though he seemed unqualified for the position.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 314. Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive*, p.165, suggests that in the period 1910-1914 the debate over Russian military strategy was essentially a personal contest between Danilov and Alekseev.

¹⁰³ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 45. Ironside described him as unpopular and 'more of an officer soldier than a leader in the field': Ironside, *Tannenberg*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁴ Stone, *The Eastern Front*, p. 85. In general, Stone is scathing about the character and competence of the Russian high command in the 1914 campaign.

¹⁰⁵ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ See the discussion in David R. Jones, 'Imperial Russia's Forces at War', in Millet and Murray (eds.) *Military Effectiveness, volume 1, The First World War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 301-305.

In Galicia, resilient, competent commanders such as Alekseev, Plehve and Brusilov were the difference between victory and disaster. Plehve was a:

wizened-up little rat, but his intelligence was keen and he had an indomitable will.¹⁰⁷

He was hard, competent: after three days fighting Plehve's 5th Army's right linked up with 4th Army to fend off Dankl's 1st Austrian. The 5th Army's centre and left fought a rolling engagement with Auffenberg's 4th Austrian Army but on 26 August 1914, with 5th Army virtually encircled, Plehve ordered his left wing to hold, not manoeuvre west as ordered by Alekseev. Three corps 19th, 5th and 17th Corps formed a defensive semi-circle west of Komarov and, fighting on the tactical defensive, engaged 4th Austrian Army. On 30 August 1914, Plehve assured Ivanov that 5th Army 'shall fight to the end' but 'it is desirable that the 3rd Army should draw closer as soon as possible.'¹⁰⁸ On 31 August 1914, after six days fighting, 5th Army established a defensive line on the Vistula, west of Lublin. It suffered 30,000 casualties but saved the northern group.¹⁰⁹

This was a key strategic, operational and tactical moment in the 1914 campaign. The 5th Army was driven back, but stabilised the Russian position just as news emerged of 2nd Army's catastrophe in East Prussia. A second disaster risked defeat in Galicia as well as East Prussia, the collapse of the entire Russian front and the loss of Poland. Furthermore, the Russian defeats in Galicia and East Prussia led *Stavka* to revise Russian strategy and buried any notion of an imminent third operation. On 30 August 1914, *Stavka* informed SWF that the Guard Corps, a reinforced 4th Army, and 9th Army were now under its command.¹¹⁰ In addition, 10th Army was moved from Warsaw to support 1st Army on the East Prussian border. All had initially been deployed to conduct a third operation, an invasion of eastern Germany.

¹⁰⁷ Major-General Sir Alfred Knox, *With The Russian Army, 1914-1917 volume 1*, (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1921), p. 229.

¹⁰⁸ N. Golovine, *The Great Battle of Galicia*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 54; Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War*, p. 88-90, describes the bitter fight that Plehve's 150,000 strong 5th Army engaged in late August 1914 but the account is mainly descriptive. Wawro, *The Mad Catastrophe*, p. 211, points out that for a virtually encircled force 5th Army fought fiercely.

¹¹⁰ N. Golovine, *The Great Battle of Galicia*, p. 36, regards this as the critical strategic decision of the 1914 campaign.

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South-Western Front's southern group began operations on 18 August 1914.¹¹¹ Its aim was to capture Lemberg, cross the San, take Krakow in south-eastern Poland and drive the Austrians out of Galicia. A slow, deliberate advance as well as relatively robust logistics and inferior opposition generated a degree of operational momentum missing in northern Galicia and East Prussia. In a series of encounters, east of Lemberg, the Russians gradually moved west. At the River Zolotaya Lipa (26-27 August 1914), 3rd Army's firepower broke 3rd Austrian Army.¹¹² In the following days Brusilov's 8th Army fought its way over the Gnila Lipa (28-31 August 1914).¹¹³ These battles broke the Austrian operational position in eastern Galicia¹¹⁴ and on 3 September 1914, 3rd Russian Army occupied Lemberg.

The Russian flirtation with disaster in northern Galicia inadvertently created the conditions for success in the south. The early Austrian's victories persuaded Conrad, on 30 August 1914, to order 3rd Austrian Army's left wing north to support 4th Austrian Army's attempt to encircle Plehve's 5th Army. However, once 5th Army stabilised the Russian position Conrad changed his mind and chased victories in the south.¹¹⁵ Dankl's 1st Army was ordered to contain 9th and 4th Russian while 4th Austrian Army's left wing fixed 5th Russian Army.¹¹⁶ The rest of Auffenberg's 4th Army was sent south to strike 3rd Russian Army. This was grotesquely unrealistic.¹¹⁷ The 4th Austrian Army had been in action for ten days but the Austrians sacrificed their position in the north to pursue illusions in the south.¹¹⁸ On 4 September 1914, as 4th Austrian Army moved south its left flank was attacked by 5th Army moving west: the Russian counteroffensive had begun.¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ Beloi, *Galitsiiskaya Bitva*, pp. 151-210, covers the battles in eastern Galicia in comprehensive detail.

¹¹² Beloi, *Galitsiiskaya Bitva*, pp. 151-154, covers the battle of the Zlota Lipa.

¹¹³ A.A. Brusilov, *A Soldier's Notebook* (London: MacMillan & Co, 1930), pp. 47-54 gives a readable account of the battle of the Gnila Lipa. See also N. Golovine, *The Great Battle of Galicia*, p. 37-38; Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 55; Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War*, pp. 92-93.

¹¹⁴ Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, pp. 220-225; provides a vivid account of these battles from the Austrian perspective. See also Churchill, *The Great War, volume 1*, pp. 210-212.

¹¹⁵ Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, pp. 233-236.

¹¹⁶ N. Golovine, *The Great Battle of Galicia*, p. 38.

¹¹⁷ Stone, *The Eastern Front*, p.84, considers Conrad's decision as 'almost lunatic'.

¹¹⁸ Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, p. 233.

¹¹⁹ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War*, p. 56. Harrison also considers Conrad's decision 'foolhardy'.

The Russian Counteroffensive: 4-15 September 1914

The influx of Russian reserves into Galicia once *Stavka* abandoned the third operation on 30 August 1914 played a critical role in the Russian counter-offensive. The counter-offensive began in the northern sector.¹²⁰ SWF ordered Plehve's 5th Army to conduct a deep operational manoeuvre deep into the Austrian rear in order to link up with 3rd Army, moving north from Lemberg, at Rawa-Russka. Simultaneously, 9th and 4th Russian Armies were to force Dankl's 1st Austrian west. The 5th Russian Army turned the Galician Operation from a grinding attritional encounter into manoeuvre warfare. By 9 September 1914, 5th Russian Army's right wing had turned 1st Austrian Army, while the left wing had also 'spilled into the yawning gap between Dankl and Auffenberg'.¹²¹ It moved south-west into the rear of 4th Austrian Army at Rawa Russka and in conjunction with 3rd Army drove the Austrians west.¹²² The cumulative impact of casualties, incessant operations, Russian reserves and the SWF's relentless combination of attrition and manoeuvre broke the Austrian position. On 11 September 1914, Conrad ordered a withdrawal that became a rout. By 15 September 1914, the Russians were over the San, but as rain turned the roads into a morass Russian logistics collapsed. By early October 1914 the Austrians had stabilised their position.

The Galician Operation has been overlooked but it had considerable strategic implications for the 1914 Russian campaign. The Russians lost 250,000 men in Galicia. The Austrians fought well but suffered 350,000 casualties, casualties that could not be easily or effectively replaced.¹²³ The Austrian Army could still fight but required German support to survive. This proved to be a decisive strategic event that persuaded the Germans to abandon a proposed strategic encirclement of the Polish salient, ironically, the cherished dream of Conrad.¹²⁴ A new 9th German Army was sent to protect Silesia and prop up the Austrians.

The Invasion of Germany and the Lodz Operation

By autumn 1914, the relative stalemate in East Prussia and Galicia led the Germans and Russians to focus on Poland. In southern Galicia, *Stavka* placed 3rd, 8th and 11th Russian Armies under Brusilov's command while in late September 1914,

¹²⁰ See Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, pp. 238-244, for a powerful account of the Russian counteroffensive from the point of view of shattered Austrian soldiers. Churchill, *The Great War, volume 1*, pp. 216-219, also provides a clear narrative of a confusing period of operations.

¹²¹ Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, p. 240.

¹²² Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War*, pp. 97.

¹²³ Strachan, *The First World War*, p.356. Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, p. 247, puts Austrian losses at 440,000.

¹²⁴ Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 358.

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Mackensen's 9th German Army drove north-east on Warsaw but met stiff resistance from Ivanov's 2nd, 4th and 5th Armies.¹²⁵ On 20 October 1914, 9th German Army withdrew from Warsaw just three days after *Stavka* resurrected its plan to invade eastern Germany.¹²⁶ Indeed, *Stavka* had renewed its commitment to a deep strike into Germany in late September 1914.¹²⁷ It believed the invasion of Germany would be a decisive strategic encounter and by early November 1914, 2 million Russian troops, nine Russian armies, were in Poland.¹²⁸

The Russian strike force of Scheidemann's 2nd Army, Plehve's 5th Army, Evert's 4th Army and Lechitskiy's 9th Army was guarded on its right by Rennenkampf's 1st Russian Army and Pflug's 10th Russian. The South-Western Front would fix the Austrians in the south while the main Russian attack struck north-west on the Warsaw-Berlin axis. The German destruction of the Warsaw regional road and rail network in October 1914 disrupted Russian preparations, but more ominously German radio interceptions enabled them to discern Russian intentions. In response, in early November 1914, the Germans redeployed the entire 9th German Army by train from central southern Poland to Thorn on the northern flank of the Russian strike force.¹²⁹

Stavka received information about these German movements but underestimated the scale and significance of enemy activity; indeed, the intelligence was used to justify an immediate operation to disrupt 9th Army's redeployment and clear the way in to Germany.¹³⁰ However, the Russian operation, scheduled for 14 November 1914, was itself pre-empted on 11 November 1914. The 9th German Army smashed through the boundary of 2nd Army's right wing and 1st Army's left wing and swept south, deep into the operational rear of Scheidemann's 2nd Army and Plehve's 5th Army. The Germans left just one corps to fend off Rennenkampf's 1st Army and moved south-east of Lodz, a major Russian supply centre.

The 2nd Army fought bitterly to avoid encirclement and fixed the Germans north, west and east of Lodz. A series of incredible forced marches brought Plehve's 5th Army from the west of Lodz, to the south-east of the city where it joined 2nd Army

¹²⁵ Sbornik Dokumentov, *Varshavsko-Ivangorodskaia Operatsiia*, pp. 205-341.

¹²⁶ Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War*, p. 110; *Varshavsko-Ivangorodskaia Operatsiia*, p. 257.

¹²⁷ *Varshavsko-Ivangorodskaia Operatsiia*, pp. 33-34.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹²⁹ Asprey, *The German High Command*, p. 126; Jukes, *The Eastern Front*, p. 23; Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War*, p. 117.

¹³⁰ Sbornik Dokumentov, *Lodzinskaia Operatsiia*, pp. 71-73; Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 369.

to fight it out.¹³¹ By 20 November 1914, four German corps had surrounded Lodz, but on 21 November 1914 a Russian counter-manoeuve trapped German forces south-east of the Lodz. The Germans had been temporarily out-thought and out-manoeuved but Scherer's 25th Corps escaped the pocket during the night of 23-24 November 1914, taking 2,000 German wounded and thousands of Russian prisoners with them, unmolested by 1st Army troops, who, in the winter darkness, mistook them for Russians.

The Lodz Operation did not achieve the German operational goal but as in East Prussia superior mobility, tactical agility and poor Russian security enabled the Germans to achieve a remarkable strategic success. The Lodz Operation pre-empted the invasion of eastern Germany at a time when Germany was hard pressed on the Western Front and facing up to the implications of a protracted two-front war. A Russian drive on Berlin in November 1914 would have confronted Germany with a strategic nightmare, a strategic earthquake that would have rippled over both the Eastern and Western Front, across the opening months of the First World War. The Russians missed their opportunity, but fought hard at Lodz. *Stavka* contemplated further operations in late November 1914, but an influx of German troops into Poland meant caution prevailed. Indeed, on 6 December 1914, the Russians actually conceded Lodz and withdrew to shorter defensive lines west of Warsaw.¹³² In the south, during November 1914, Radko-Dmitriev's 3rd Army and Brusilov's 8th Army drove 3rd Austrian Army into the Carpathians. However, in early December 1914, an Austrian counter-offensive recaptured the Carpathians, the prelude to a ghastly winter of mountain warfare which cost thousands of Austrian and Russian casualties for little gain.¹³³

Conclusion

The main strategic objectives of the Russian Army in August 1914 were to divert German forces from the west and defeat the Austrians in Galicia. *Stavka* and the French Army believed an invasion of eastern Germany would draw substantial German forces on to the Russians, thereby relieving the French and increasing the Triple Entente's chances of defeating the Schlieffen Plan. In order to achieve this *Stavka* tried to manufacture a third operation in August 1914, even though the Russian Army was already committed to the East Prussian and Galician Operations. The East Prussian Operation was an operational means to a strategic end dominated by the compass needle of the French alliance. The Day 15 deadline committed the Russian 'steamroller' to a sprint but robbed it of the means to create the strategic

¹³¹ Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War*, p. 120.

¹³² Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 371.

¹³³ Brusilov, *A Soldier's Notebook*, pp. 78-114, gives a detailed, account of the fighting between the Austrians and 3rd, 11th and 8th Russian Armies.

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and operational momentum that was its greatest asset. It was this chronic failure of strategic and operational thinking that lay at the heart of the failure of the East Prussia Operation in August 1914.

In Galicia, the Russians teetered on the edge of strategic and operational disaster before securing a decisive victory over the Austrians. The northern sector of the Galician Operation, not East Prussia, was the Russian centre of gravity, the essential point, around which the Russian strategic plan revolved. It was the brush with catastrophe in northern Galicia, not 2nd Army's defeat in East Prussia, that rescued Russian strategy from its more fanciful aspirations and resolved, albeit temporarily, the dilemmas that plagued Russian strategy. In November 1914, the invasion of eastern Germany, the operation that distorted, influenced and undermined Russian strategy, flattered to deceive, but fizzled out against fierce German resistance. It was a strategic gamble to capitalise on an opportunity that never presented itself again and, in December 1914, the Russians conceded western Poland.

In August 1914, the Russian Army, whatever Russia's political aims, confronted strategic objectives that were too ambitious, with insufficient forces to achieve them, but too many troops to supply. The story of the Russian campaign in 1914 is one of a strategic failure to correlate ends and means: rapid victories were necessary to gain strategic and operational success but the Russian Army did not have the means to sustain such operations. The 'vast bloody campaigns of 1914 took a terrible toll on Russia, inflicting 1.2 million casualties'¹³⁴ and began the war, fought to maintain Tsarist Russia's status as a great power, which eventually destroyed it.

¹³⁴ David R. Stone, *A Military History of Russia* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), p. 175.