

RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

AND

ISVOLSKY'S ROLE

by

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PREFACE

My first important contact with Alexander Isvolsky occurred during the summer of 1964 in Dr. John Mahar's graduate course on Nineteenth Century Imperialism. The course carried imperialistic activities down to the outbreak of World War I. Knowing that I was very interested in Slavic history, Dr. Mahar suggested that I do my paper for the course on Alexander Isvolsky, the man whom he considered most representative of Russian imperialism.

I wrote my paper on Isvolsky and became very interested in and fascinated by him. Dr. Roman Saal-Stocki, from whom I took several courses on Slavic Europe, encouraged me, as did Dr. Mahar, to pursue a further study of Isvolsky. I chose Isvolsky as my thesis topic, and under the unlimited patience of my thesis adviser, Dr. Alfred Low, I have written the following paper.

This work does not claim to be a definitive and exhaustive study of Isvolsky. The paper spans the last twenty years of Russian foreign policy before World War I, but its heaviest concentration covers the last four years prior to the war, the years during which Isvolsky was Russian ambassador to France. While Isvolsky had been Russian foreign minister, 1906-1910, he had carried on an adventurous and aggressive foreign policy which led Russia to an estrangement with Austria. Isvolsky did not forget the humiliation that he had suffered during the Bosnian Crisis of 1908. He carried that resentment to Paris, where that resentment gradually assumed an anti-German flavor. Isvolsky would never forgive Germany for backing Austria to the hilt during the Bosnian Crisis. In that respect, Germany, even more so than Austria,

was responsible for his humiliating defeat.

Upon Isvolsky's transfer to Paris in the fall of 1910, Isvolsky still continued to influence Russian foreign policy by dominating his weak-willed successor in the foreign ministry, Serge Sazonov. He gradually won Sazonov over to the belief that the only way that Russia could realize her "historic mission" of conquering the Straits would be through "European complications." Russia would accomplish this goal in complicity with France, who, through a war with Germany, hoped to regain her lost provinces. Isvolsky would slowly turn the defensive Franco-Russian Alliance of 1892 into an offensive weapon, and would be, to a great degree, one of the individuals most responsible for the outbreak of World War I. Rene Marchand's work, Un Livre Noir, which is a French translation of Russian documents, contains Isvolsky's diplomatic correspondence while he was ambassador at Paris and is the main incriminating evidence in the case against him.

From Livre Noir one can detect only four letters written by Isvolsky during June, 1914. As for the month of July, Isvolsky wrote a short letter on July 1. After that, he has no recorded correspondence until July 27. Why is there such a large gap in Isvolsky's correspondence? Certainly this seems rather unusual for a writer as prolific as Isvolsky. Perhaps much of the correspondence of these months contained incriminating evidence against him. Would this gap be the result of a prudent holocaust? Stieve maintains that there is no definite knowledge on this point, but that the sudden stoppage of Isvolsky's correspondence justifies the question.¹

Isvolsky has had some rather harsh critics throughout the years. His critics have had many unkind words for him. For example, Boghichevich, the Serbian minister to Paris and Berlin, had the following charge against Isvolsky:

¹Stieve, Friedrich, Isvolsky and the World War, trans. by E.W. Dickes, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, p. 209.

"His hypocritical declarations succeeded in making him appear before the European cabinets as an adversary of Russian Pan-Slavism, of which he was on the contrary -- the course of the war of 1914 demonstrated it -- the damned soul."² The French statesman, Ernest Judet, was highly critical of Isvolsky in a letter to Paris Humanite, January 17, 1924:

He (Isvolsky) appeared to me at once in his true colors, which were only revealed to the world later -- burning to transform the Franco-Russian alliance and to debase its original character, turning it from a purely defensive treaty into a weapon of offense. M. Isvolsky had come here as his country's representative to make soundings in France and to play as ambassador the part on which his heart was set.³

Even Raymond Poincare, Isvolsky's close friend and collaborator, could not absolve Isvolsky of the charges against him. This Poincare set out to do in his Memoirs, but he was unsuccessful. As Professor Harry Barnes notes: "He (Poincare) has proved Isvolsky to be wrong in regard to certain details, but nowhere in real essentials."⁴ Barnes further states that if Poincare failed to clear Isvolsky, he doubted that anyone else could clear him.

Whatever Isvolsky's degree of guilt for responsibility for World War I, he is nonetheless one of the principal figures in the events that led to the outbreak of the war. As individuals go, Isvolsky deserves a great amount of blame for war responsibility. He did not apply the brakes to Russian foreign policy when it would have been expedient for him to do so. Rather, he chose the path of adventure. Thus, one could perhaps best judge him in the light of Montesquieu's words on war guilt: "The true author of war is not he who declares it, but he who makes it necessary."

²Owen, Robert, The Russian Imperial Conspiracy, 1892-1914, New York: A.&C. Boni, 1927, pp. 88-89.

³Stieva, p. 17.

⁴Harry Barnes, "A Revised Verdict on Guilt of Nations for the World War," Current History, XVI(August, 1927), 681-682.

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"I. RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY UNDER NICHOLAS II UP TO 1906"

With the lapse of the Reinsurance Treaty with Germany in 1890, Russia had to look elsewhere for a partner in foreign affairs. Of the four other major European powers besides Russia, only England and France appeared as likely alliance partners. Russia could no longer count on Germany, since Germany had failed to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. Neither could she look to Austria-Hungary for a partner, since that empire was Germany's junior partner in the Triple Alliance. Moreover, over the years, Russia and Austria-Hungary began to come to odds with each other, since their interests met head-on and clashed in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary had a large Slavic element within her empire, while Russia had designs of her own for the Slavs in the Balkans. Thus, Austria-Hungary did not seem a suitable alliance partner for Russia. Rather, Russia had to look to western Europe, to England or to France. Alliance with England would not seem so secure, since Russo-English interests clashed on the fringes of the Russian Empire -- Persia, Afghanistan, India, and the Far East. These common points of friction would not make for a strong alliance between the two countries. Moreover, Russia was soon to launch a strong economic penetration of the Far East. Thus Russia had to look to France for alliance. Although Russia and France had radically different forms of government -- absolute monarchy vs. republicanism, they had no common points of conflict. Germany had been France's enemy ever since her defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, and since Germany had recently allowed ties to lapse between herself and Russia, Russia hoped to come to terms with France, before France would come to terms

with Germany, and thereby isolate Russia.

The hoped-for Franco-Russian alliance was not long in coming. Russia made advances to France in 1891, and the two countries signed an agreement on August 27 of that year. The following year the two countries extended that agreement into a formal military convention. The terms of this secret alliance seem somewhat startling:

In case the forces of the Triple Alliance, or one of the powers which are a party to it, should be mobilized, France and Russia, at the first indication of the event, and without a previous agreement being necessary, shall mobilize all of their forces immediately and simultaneously, and shall transport them as near to their frontiers as possible... These forces shall begin complete action with the greatest dispatch, so that Germany will have to fight at the same time in the East and in the West.¹

Russia officially confirmed this alliance on December 30, 1893, and France did likewise on January 4, 1894.

Thus, by the year 1894, Russia again had a definite orientation in foreign policy. The Triple Alliance in general and Germany in particular became the target of Franco-Russian foreign policy; it was the focal point at which the recent military convention aimed. In that very year Nicholas II became emperor of Russia. Although a man of mediocre ability, he was to suffer a disruption of continuity in foreign policy, since he would lack capable men in the foreign office to advise him. In the preceding century before Nicholas II, three men -- Messelrode, Gorchakov, and Giers had served four tsars faithfully in the field of foreign affairs. Although these men made inevitable mistakes in the realm of foreign policy, they helped keep Russian foreign policy on an even keel. Under Nicholas, however, Russia would lose her continuity of policy, for her foreign policy would fall into the hands of mediocre men, many of whom were adventurers. In contrast to

¹Owen, p. 22.

only the three men who had guided Russian foreign policy during the past century, six men would serve Nicholas during the first twenty years of his reign. "It is extremely unfortunate that the tsar with the least capabilities of real leadership should also have been backed by the weakest of foreign ministries in a century."²

Nicholas retained the capable M. K. Giers as his foreign minister when he became tsar. Giers, however, died the next year, in 1895. His successor in the foreign ministry was Count A. B. Lobanov, an experienced and able statesman. As Isvolsky says: "He was a grand seigneur by birth, and also distinguished as a historian and a man of great learning. He was a career diplomat."³ For family reasons Lobanov remained out of the diplomatic service for a good part of his life. He was ambassador at Constantinople before becoming foreign minister in 1895. He, however, died in 1897, while accompanying Nicholas on a trip abroad. It was to Count Lobanov that Isvolsky owed many of his good breaks in his early diplomatic career, for Lobanov was like a father to Isvolsky during Isvolsky's early career.

It was in April, 1897, that the Austrian emperor, Franz Joseph, visited St. Petersburg. While there, he and his foreign minister, Count Goluchowski, concluded an agreement with Russia, which put the Balkans "on ice" for a decade. "Both powers agreed to co-operate to preserve as far as possible the status quo in the area and to maintain the closure of the Straits."⁴ This agreement was most important for it allowed the next Russian foreign minister, Muraviev, to pursue an adventurous policy in the Far East.

Count M. N. Muraviev, who became foreign minister in 1897, was a man of most mediocre capacities. By pursuing an adventurous policy, Muraviev

²Jelavich, Barbara, A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814-1914, New York: J.P. Lippincott Co., 1964, p. 224.

³Isvolsky, Alexander, Recollections of a Foreign Minister, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1921, p. 166.

⁴Jelavich, p. 231.

wished to extend Russian economic influence in the Far East. Since he did not want Japan to have entire control over China, he, in November, 1897, proposed that Russia seize control of Port Arthur. In this scheme, Muraviev won the support of Nicholas. Perhaps one reason for the tsar's agreeing to Muraviev's plan lay in Nicholas' visit to the Far East in 1891. While in Japan during that year, Nicholas had an attempt on his life. This incident gave rise to a feeling of antipathy and hatred on the part of Nicholas for Japan.⁵ This episode greatly influenced Nicholas' Far Eastern policy.

William II of Germany encouraged the tsar in his policy of adventure in the Far East. In his letters to the tsar, he repeatedly pressed his cousin to take up the sword of Europe against the "Yellow Peril." "It was certainly in the interest of Germany to encourage Russia to involve herself in China, for there she would inevitably run into British opposition."⁶ Moreover, at the same time, William was encouraging an Anglo-Japanese alliance; such an alliance would strengthen Japan and would increase the chances of a conflict with Russia.⁷

With all this encouragement for a strong Far Eastern policy, it was easy for Russia, in 1898, to extract from China a 25 year lease to the Liaotung peninsula and the right to build a naval base at Port Arthur and a commercial port at Dalny.⁸ For this strong policy, Isvolsky chided Muraviev. He says that Muraviev, "who was as destitute of forethought as he was ignorant of the affairs of the Far East in particular, was fascinated by a scheme which promised to increase his personal prestige."⁹ Isvolsky also criticized Muraviev for flattering Nicholas and for giving Nicholas an exaggerated notion of his power and administrative talents. In the direction of sycophancy, none surpassed Count Muraviev.¹⁰

⁵Isvolsky, pp. 261-262.
⁸Jelavich, pp. 239-240.

⁶Jelavich, p. 234.
⁹Isvolsky, p. 119.

⁷Isvolsky, p. 31.
¹⁰Ibid., p. 278.

During Muraviev's foreign ministry the First Hague Conference took place in 1899. This conference, called by Russia, did not accomplish too much, since most of the major European powers were deeply involved in the Far East. Although the governments reached no disarmament agreement, they did attempt to regulate the conditions of warfare, and they did establish an international court of arbitration. Russia most likely called this conference to take the focus off the tension in the Far East. Yet, "Russia in the Far East could not be isolated from Russia in the Near East and Balkans.... In a word the China question was but a phase of European politics."¹¹

In fact, the Far Eastern question became a matter of world importance. The United States tried to maintain an "Open Door" policy with respect to China, and urged Russia to relax her aggressive economic penetration of that country. In a similar manner, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan were also guilty of dismembering China. While viewing the situation from the American point of view in 1900, John Hay, America's roving ambassador, wrote: "France is Russia's harlot -- to her own grievous damage."¹² In other words, Hay could not figure out why France supported Russian penetration in the Far East. Perhaps he did not know of the secret Franco-Russian agreement.

In 1900, Count V. N. Lamsdorf became foreign minister. He was sober, hard-working, and a good administrator, but he lacked experience in service abroad.¹³ He, more than most people in the Russian foreign office, was very pro-French.¹⁴ Lamsdorf continued Russia's aggressive policy in the Far East. This led to a gradual deterioration of Russian relations with Japan. Each further Russian move in China and Korea brought Russia closer to the brink of war with Japan. The United States was still very much interested in try-

¹¹Dennett, Tyler, John Hay: From Poetry to Politics, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1963, p. 333.

¹² Hay to Foster, June 23, 1900, in Dennett, p. 333. ¹³Jelavich, p. 225.

¹⁴Seton-Watson, Hugh, The Decline of Imperial Russia, 1855-1914, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956, p. 315.

ing to clear up the situation in the Orient. However, John Hay's letter to President Roosevelt in 1903 seemed to be one of despair and indifference:

"Dealing with a government with whom mendacity is a science is an extremely difficult and delicate matter....We are not charged with the cure of the Russian soul and we may let them go to the devil at their own sweet will."¹⁵

Lamsdorf, on the other hand, also wished to pursue a more active policy in the Balkans; he wished to avoid any entanglements in the Far East which would hinder Russia's freedom of action in Europe.¹⁶ Yet he did not resign from the foreign ministry, even though he opposed Russian policy in Korea. Rather he offered the following theory as the reason for remaining at his post: In Russia the minister of foreign affairs could not resign his post until dismissed by his sovereign. His sole function was to study the questions pertaining to the emperor's foreign relations and present his conclusions to the emperor. In his quality as autocrat, the emperor would decide for or against, and his decision would then be obligatory upon the foreign minister.¹⁷ Thus Lamsdorf continued at his post, even when he ceased to exercise his functions, and he seemed to improve upon the sycophancy and self-effacement made popular by Muraviev, his predecessor. In the meantime, Russian relations with Japan began to deteriorate rapidly, and the foreign ministry did nothing to oppose this sad state of affairs. Negotiations between Russia and Japan took place, but it became apparent that the two countries could not reach an agreement. As Isvolsky says: "The Korean adventure was the immediate cause of the war."¹⁸ The forest concessions on the Yalu River became a stumbling block for both countries. Thus, both countries prepared for war. The Japanese, faced with the constantly increasing build-up of Russian military power, opened the war with a surprise attack on Port Arthur, in February, 1904. The war proved to be a humiliating catastrophe

¹⁵Hay to Roosevelt, May 12, 1903, in Dennett, p. 405. ¹⁶Seton-Watson, p. 210.

¹⁷Isvolsky, p. 123. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 122.

for Russia: she not only lost her navy, but also suffered a loss of prestige at the expense of an upstart power, Japan. President Roosevelt continued to work for a satisfactory peace between the two countries, and he arranged for a peace conference at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in the fall of 1905. Despite her disastrous defeat in the war, Russia did not fare too badly at the conference table. According to the terms of the Treaty of Portsmouth, Russia paid no war indemnity; she was allowed to retain her fleet; she lost no national territory; however, she had to cede the southern half of Sakhalin Island to Japan.¹⁹ Such a treaty was very mild in comparison to the defeat that Russia had suffered.

In that same year, 1905, William II and Nicholas II met in the Finnish waters at Bjorkoe, where they concluded a defensive alliance. After the treaty was concluded, Russia could inform France of the treaty, and ask her to become part of it. According to Isvolsky, the treaty was aimed at England since it was a continental alliance.²⁰ Isvolsky also admits that Count Lamsdorf was appalled when the tsar told him of the treaty. Certainly Lamsdorf did not want to come to grips with England. Moreover, he did not wish to alienate his ally, France.

Isvolsky, however, is quite critical of Lamsdorf as foreign minister. He thought that Lamsdorf did not have a definite plan of general foreign policy; moreover, he thought that Lamsdorf did not grasp the international position of Russia. Isvolsky goes on to state that since Lamsdorf was of German origin, he was naturally inclined toward Germany and its autocratic regime, and that he felt very ill at ease with "democratic" France and "constitutional" England.²¹

Isvolsky somewhat boldly states in his memoirs, that, according to a noted contemporary, namely, a Doctor Millan, he, rather than Lamsdorf,

¹⁹Ibid., p. 125. ²⁰Ibid., p. 49. ²¹Ibid., pp. 138-139.

would have been a better choice for foreign minister after Count Muraviev's death in 1900. Such is Dr. Dillon's thesis, in his book, The Eclipse of Russia. Dillon maintains that Isvolsky, because of his independence, would have been a better foreign minister than the obsequious Lamsdorf.²²

The Moroccan Crisis of 1905, which happened near the end of Lamsdorf's ministry, affected Russia in so far as France, Russia's main ally, was the principal party in the affair. When France decided to penetrate Morocco economically in 1904 by a loan of 62 million francs to the Sultan, she incurred Germany's wrath. This precipitated an international crisis. The kaiser went to Tangiers, where, on March 31, he made a speech demanding reforms and also called for an international conference, since he considered Morocco to be a free country. Delcasse, the French foreign minister, wanted to go to war over the matter, but he was forced out of office when his country would not do so. The next French foreign minister, Rouvier, succeeded in calling a conference, which met at Algeciras, Spain, from January to April, 1906. As a result of this conference, France gained preponderance in Morocco, dutifully controlling Moroccan government finances. France could now pursue a policy of peaceful penetration of Morocco.

After this conference, Isvolsky, knowing that Germany got the short end at the conference, still found unkind words for Emperor William. Isvolsky said that William criticized Nicholas in very uncomplimentary terms for the tsar's supposed black ingratitude to Germany. In fact, according to Isvolsky, William "straightway conceived for Emperor Nicholas a hatred that he managed to conceal for some years, but which burst all bounds when he finally decided to throw off his mask in the month of August, 1914."²³

Shortly after the Algeciras Conference, Isvolsky assumed the reins of
²²Ibid., p. 135. ²³Ibid., pp. 24-25.

the Russian foreign ministry. He appeared on the scene at a time of much internal disorder and chaos in his country. Against this background, Isvoľsky was shortly to assume an ambitious policy in foreign affairs, a policy which Russia could ill afford, due to her recent military, economic, and social reverses. Now it is time to place Isvoľsky and his term as foreign minister on the stand for scrutiny and close inspection. Before advancing to his years as foreign minister, it would be best to give some biographical information about him.

and was brought up in the atmosphere of the Russian Court at St. Petersburg. He notes that the French language was in current use, not only in the Imperial Court, in the elegant society, and in Russian diplomacy, but also among the Russian provincial nobility. Isvolsky furthers this line of thought by saying that he only used French when writing to his parents.⁴

Isvolsky attended the Imperial Lyceum at St. Petersburg, from which he graduated in 1875, the youngest member in his class. For his work, he received the gold medal, the highest award attainable at the school. Isvolsky wrote his thesis on the Brussels Conference of 1874, which dealt with the laws and customs of war. His particular aspect of the problem was the commercial aspect of the Balkan problem. While Isvolsky was attending the Lyceum, Russo-Turkish relations were deteriorating and slowly leading toward war. That time also saw the resurgence of Slavophile theories in Russian intellectual circles. When war broke out between Serbia and Turkey, Isvolsky wanted to join the Serbian army as his older brother had done, in order to partake of the Balkan Wars, but because of his age, he decided against it. Rather, he joined the diplomatic service. "In order not to lose my chance of taking part in the events that were ensuing in the Balkans and in which I was passionately interested, I entered the diplomatic service, and made my debut some months later as an attache at Constantinople."⁵ Before continuing on with Isvolsky's diplomatic roles, it would be best at this time to discuss some of Isvolsky's thoughts and feelings about the Slavophiles and Slavophile theories.

According to Isvolsky, Slavophile theories had their birth in Moscow during the first half of the nineteenth century. The men who were responsible for these theories were the poet Khomiakov, the brothers Kireyevsky,

⁴Ibid., pp. 160-161. ⁵Ibid., pp. 165-166.

the brothers Aksakov, and also Samarin, Lemansky, and Hilferding.⁶ Indeed, it was Ivan Aksakov who wrote in December, 1876, that Bulgaria was much more important for the future of Slavdom than Serbia.⁷ The Slavophiles did much to draw the attention and sympathy of all classes of Russian society to the unhappy plight of the Slavic populations which were subjugated and suppressed under the Turkish yoke. They were interested in all of the Slavs in the Balkans, but were particularly interested in the road that led to Constantinople. "Only the Balkans, with the Byzantine imperial city, greatly stirred Russian enthusiasm."⁸ The Slavophiles viewed the capture of these prizes as the "historic mission" of Russia. For them, Constantinople was known affectionately as Tsarigrad, --Emperor City, and it was to be the capital of Russia in the future.⁹

Slavophile theory condemned European civilization in toto, as being corrupted by atheism and an excess of individualism. It attributed to the Russian nation the providential mission of creating a superior culture. It maintained that only the Russian Orthodox Church remained faithful to the precepts of Christ. It further denounced the political reforms of Peter the Great, who had borrowed from Western Europe, and demanded a return to the commune or mir, which Slavophilism said was an original invention of Russian genius.¹⁰ (The mir was a system of collective agriculture and living.) With the last statement, however, Isvolsky takes exception. He maintains that a certain Baron Haxthausen, a Prussian Junker commissioned by the tsar to present a report on the agrarian situation in Russia, advocated the nebulous conception of the

⁶Ibid., p. 162. ⁷Seton-Watson, p. 100. ⁸Jelavich, p. 236.
⁹De Siebert, Baron, Entente Diplomacy and the World, New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1921, pp. 142-143.
¹⁰Isvolsky, p. 91.

mir as a reform measure. So it was, according to Isvolsky, to German science that Russia was indebted for having preserved a remnant of ancient barbarism.¹¹ The tsar's reason for supporting this doctrine was supposedly to help carry out the most advanced ideas of social science. Still, Isvolsky suggests that in the last analysis, Slavophilism's roots are of Germanic origin. He claims that Slavophilism stems from Schelling's and from Hegel's philosophy and from German romanticism.¹²

Whatever the roots of Slavophilism, it is nonetheless true that the Slavophile theories were crystallized into a doctrine by a Russian writer, a certain M. Danilevsky, in his book entitled Russia and Europe. He published this book in 1867, but it gained little attention and acceptance at the time. However, the events of the following decade so embroiled Russia in Balkan affairs that almost overnight the book became a bestseller. In his book, Danilevsky proclaimed in inflammatory terms the profound antagonism between Russia and the occidental world, and the inferiority of European culture to that of Russia. This was most heartwarming to the Slavophiles. In the field of foreign relations, Danilevsky claimed that Russia should unite all the Slavs, if not under her sceptre, at least under her hegemony. He further felt that Constantinople should become the capital of the Russian Empire and at the same time be the capital of the future Slavonic federation. He maintained that this result could only be attained by an armed conflict of the Orient with the Occident. In such a conflict, Russia would lead the Greco-Slav peoples to a victory over the Germano-Roman peoples. Such a victory would establish the triumph of Russian civilization over that of decadent western Europe.¹³

¹¹Isvolsky, p. 176. ¹²Ibid., p. 162. ¹³Ibid., pp. 163-164.

Isvolsky's feeling and attitude toward Slavophile doctrines, however, took on a different color. He claims that the influence of western Europe had changed his way of thinking: "Thanks to my study of the social and economic life of Western Europe, I had long ago given up the Slavophile doctrines, and among them the harmful theory of the mir."¹⁴ On the surface it would seem quite improbable to give much credence to the preceding. Perhaps Isvolsky's future political activities will help to confirm or deny that statement.

After his appointment at Constantinople, Isvolsky had two other minor political posts in the Balkans, namely Sofia and Bucharest. After that, he was transferred to the Russian embassy at Washington, D. C., where he had a chance to acquaint himself with the American way of life and also to make many friends in political and social circles. In the late 1880's the Russian government sent Isvolsky to Rome in order to try to re-establish relations with the Vatican. By the year 1890 he had his first great opportunity to distinguish himself in diplomacy. He presented his case so tactfully that he won the interest and regard of Pope Leo XIII. Shortly after the renewal of diplomatic relations between Russia and the Vatican, Isvolsky was appointed to Serbian capital of Belgrade, where he had an excellent opportunity to study Serbian nationalistic feeling as well as to find out her grievances against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His final political appointment of that decade was to Munich, where he had a chance to study the German, or more accurately, the Bavarian way of life. After this post, Isvolsky would be transferred to the Far East.

¹⁴ Isvolsky, p. 242.

In the year 1900 Isvolsky was transferred from Munich to Tokyo. From his Memoirs, it appears that Isvolsky liked his new post very well. However, Russian penetration into the Far East caused Isvolsky much anxiety. He opposed the strong policy that Russia adopted toward Japan, and constantly urged in his correspondence that Russia adopt a conciliatory attitude toward Japan. He, moreover, recommended that Russia come to some agreement with Japan over the delicate matters of Manchuria and Korea. Isvolsky soon realized that Russo-Japanese relations continued to worsen rather than to ameliorate. Realizing that such a condition would lead inevitably to war, and not wishing to be brought into the center of that conflict, Isvolsky asked to be relieved of his post in Tokyo.¹⁵ He wished, rather, to return to a diplomatic post in Europe, an area much dearer to his heart.

In 1903, Isvolsky returned to Europe and was named Russian Minister to Copenhagen. The Tsar always consulted his mother, Maria Fedorovna, before appointing a minister to Copenhagen. It was in conformity with her wishes that Isvolsky received the post. Copenhagen, according to Isvolsky, was void of any political importance.¹⁶ This statement has a degree of truth to it. It is true that Copenhagen was not one of the major European capitals, but it was a gathering place for the royalty of Europe, since most of the European royalty was related to a greater or lesser extent to the Danish royal house. In this respect, Copenhagen offered the diplomats stationed there an excellent opportunity to learn the latest developments in the political and social events of the time. Moreover, Copenhagen was a seat of bitter anti-German feeling and resentment, for the Danes had never forgiven the Germans for the loss of Schleswig-Holstein.

—¹⁵Isvolsky, p. 5.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 6.

Several other facts about the man come to light while Isvolsky is Russian Minister at Copenhagen. From Nicholas' correspondence to his mother, one can gather that Isvolsky has the ability to converse easily and to relate things well. As Nicholas relates in a letter to his mother in the fall of 1905: "I profit from Isvolsky' to come to you with an open heart...I hope that Isvolsky will know how to explain to you and tell you all that he has seen and heard, better than I myself could do."¹⁷ Evidently he did his task of relating information quite well, since Empress Maria seemed satisfied and informed when she answered her son: "At least by Isvolsky I have had all the details of all those terrible days of Revolution and one can hardly believe that it is in Russia that that has happened."¹⁸ The preceding letters would seem to indicate that Isvolsky was quite a capable conversationalist.

It was also in 1905, during the time that Emperor William visited Copenhagen, that Isvolsky had the honor and privilege of having an interview with him. From this interview comes a clearer picture of Isvolsky's anti-German, if not strongly pro-French, attitude. The interview took place after the Franco-German clash in the First Moroccan Crisis. France did not carry out her threat to go to war over the crisis. Thus, Isvolsky states that William reverted several times in the course of their conversation to the idea that, from the time "that France had bowed to the German threat at the time of the dispute, France had no right to invoke her long-time grievances as a ground for refusing friendship with Germany."¹⁹ To this point, Isvolsky answered that France was divided from Germany by a deep abyss, due to the

¹⁷Lazarevski, Vladimir, Archives Secretes de l'Empereur Nicholas II, Paris: Fayot, 1928, p. 25.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹Isvolsky, p. 68.

loss of Alsace-Lorraine, and that until the abyss was filled up, the French would never be friends of the Germans.²⁰ Certainly these were rather strong words to use to the German Emperor, but due to his strong pro-French conviction, Isvolsky could not answer the Emperor more discreetly and tactfully. It was shortly after this that the tsar would recall Isvolsky from Copenhagen to assume the head role of the Russian Foreign Ministry. In that capacity, Isvolsky would be more free to express his feelings as well as to orientate Russian foreign policy according to his way of thinking.

In May of 1906 Isvolsky assumed the reins of the Russian Foreign Ministry. According to Taylor, Isvolsky was an abler man than his immediate predecessors and was vaguely liberal in outlook. He was also not bemused by Slav sentiment or the principles of monarchical solidarity.²¹

It is true that Isvolsky was more in tune with the times, and that he was shrewd enough to make concessions, but he made these concessions with a long-range view in mind. Isvolsky realized that in order to be successful, he would have to accommodate himself to the new order of things, and would have to consider the feelings of the Duma. On this point Seton-Watson says that Isvolsky favored co-operation with the Duma, as this would create a good impression in France and Britain and would assist his foreign policy.²² It was after all on these two countries that Isvolsky wished to make an excellent impression, for he hoped to work in close association with them while he would be foreign minister. Isvolsky had to impress his future allies; he had just come from Copenhagen's anti-German atmosphere. Moreover, Russia had just passed through revolution.

²⁰ Isvolsky, p. 67.

²¹ Taylor, A. J. P., The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1960, p. 442.

²² Seton-Watson, p. 255.

Considering the policy that he would pursue while being Foreign Minister, Isvolsky speculates on the situation in Europe and around the world; moreover, he tries to place Russia's position into proper perspective. Thus he could say that he was always a strong partisan of a European policy for Russia, and that he never wished to have Russian action take place so far from that area of traditional Russian interest. He considered Siberia and the Far East as a reserve area for Russian expansion. Russia should only penetrate that area when European Russia would be satiated and overpopulated. But, to Isvolsky, that day was in the future, and thus Russia, for the present, was only to play a secondary role in that part of the world.²³ Thus Isvolsky would concentrate on Europe and European affairs while he would be foreign minister. He maintained that the position of Russia in Europe was determined by the fact that for the past fifteen years she had been bound by a formal alliance treaty to France. In order to derive permanent and economic advantages from this alliance, it would also be necessary for Russia to draw closer to England. Such a policy would not only fortify Russia's position as France's ally, but would also give a more solid foundation to the Dual Alliance. As Isvolsky speculated: "If Russia turned her back on France and England and engaged in a contest for preponderance in Asia, she would not only renounce her historic role in Europe, but also all economic and moral independence regarding Germany."²⁴ Isvolsky could and would concentrate then, on alliance with France and England in pursuing his foreign policy. His attitude toward Germany regarding this matter seems to be based on actual fear of German military might. He also feared of German economic penetration in the Near East, especially in Turkey and Persia.

²³Isvolsky, pp. 118-119.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 71-73.

It was only natural that Isvolsky should find favor with the Tsar. Isvolsky was one of the few leading Russian diplomats who had never approved of the Russo-Japanese war. The war's catastrophic effect on Russia only served to catapult Isvolsky into the limelight. Before assuming the reins of the Foreign Ministry, however, Isvolsky went to Paris to have a conference with the Russian ambassadors to Paris and to London. At that meeting they arrived at the unanimous conclusion that Russia's foreign policy must continue to rest on the unchangeable base of her alliance with France, but that the alliance itself must be fortified by agreements with England and Japan. This was the program that Isvolsky determined to submit to the Tsar before assuming his duties as Foreign Minister. Thus, Isvolsky would assume his post only on condition that the Tsar would approve of his program.²⁵ The Tsar complied with Isvolsky's recommendations, and the ambitious Isvolsky became Nicholas' fifth foreign minister in twelve years.

After becoming Foreign Minister, Isvolsky again went to Paris, but this time it was for another reason. On the way to Paris, he went through Bavaria; thus, Isvolsky avoided going through Berlin. Isvolsky's express reason for going to Paris was to meet with the high French government officials. As Isvolsky maintains; "It was the custom for a newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, whether Russian or French, to take the first opportunity that offered to visit the capital of the allied country in order to get in touch with the men in power."²⁶ Evidently this "required" visit of a new foreign minister was most urgent, for Isvolsky left immediately for Paris after assuming his post. On his return trip to St. Petersburg, however, Isvolsky made the necessary stop at Berlin to see German officials and Emperor William.

²⁵ Isvolsky, p. 73. ²⁶ Ibid., p. 280

Shortly after one year in the foreign ministry, Isvolsky and Russian officials had a meeting with German officials at Swinemunde. There, the tsar charged Isvolsky to tell the German Chancellor, Buelow, that the Treaty of Bjorkoe must be considered abrogated. That treaty was not compatible with the Dual Alliance since it aimed at France. In August, 1907, Isvolsky suggested to Buelow that Germany and Russia sign a secret protocol, guaranteeing the status quo in the Baltic and ending the demilitarization of the Aland Islands.²⁷ The two countries did sign the agreement in October of that year, but word of it leaked out. This immediately aroused the suspicion of the other Baltic powers, Denmark and Sweden. A public agreement signed by the four powers in April, 1908, alleviated the tension caused by Isvolsky's secret diplomacy. Isvolsky was thwarted in his attempt to fortify the Aland Islands. Yet, he maintained that he was instrumental in maintaining the status quo in the Baltic, which signified for him, the inviolability of Denmark's territory and respect for her rights as a neutral power.²⁸

Isvolsky always sought to improve Russo-Japanese relations. He was instrumental in bringing about an agreement with Japan in 1907, which established a joint monopoly of Manchuria. Three years later, Russia and Japan signed another agreement, which brought the countries back to friendly relations. Concerning the agreement of 1907, Isvolsky said: "I brought about an understanding with Japan, which, in its development, bore results so beneficial to Russia and to the Triple Entente."²⁹

Always conscious of trying to maintain the best relations with England, Isvolsky had to subdue his political opponents who favored a continental league against England. One such person was Count Witte, who coveted the

²⁷Seton-Watson, pp. 330-331. ²⁸Isvolsky, p. 70. ²⁹Ibid., p. 126.

French embassy at Paris. This appointment Isvolsky had to oppose because he feared that his appointment would weaken relations with France and England.³⁰ Besides, Isvolsky could ill afford a man like Count Witte at the Russian embassy in Paris at a time when he would shortly try to improve Russo-English relations. The rapprochement with England was to be one of the first major programs in foreign policy for Isvolsky.

While Isvolsky was yet at Copenhagen, he had the opportunity to have many discussions and interviews with King Edward of England. He claimed that these interviews served to establish the bases of the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907. This agreement further exerted a great influence on the future events in Europe.³¹ In the summer of 1907 Isvolsky opened negotiations with Great Britain over the points of friction along the borders of the Tsarist Empire. Isvolsky took pains to secure German approval before concluding the agreement. Main points of friction were Persia, Afghanistan, and India. On August 31 of that year the two countries signed an economic and colonial agreement. The most important point of that agreement was the tripartite division of Persia; Russia's sphere of influence was the northern part of the country, Britain's sphere was the southern part, while both countries could penetrate the middle part of the country. Besides that, Britain was to control Afghanistan.³² Isvolsky realized that such an agreement would enable him to improve his relations with Japan. With tension subsided in the Far East, Russia could use her power and energy most effectively against Germany, by attempting to thwart German penetration in the Near East.³³ Isvolsky wanted at this time to include a provision concerning the Straits, but Britain would have no mention made of the

³⁰Isvolsky, pp. 59-60.

³¹Ibid., p. 4.

³²Jelavich, pp. 254-255.

³³Potienkine, Vladimir, Histoire de la Diplomatie, 3 vols. Paris: Librairie de Medicis, 1946, V. 2, p. 193.

Straits in the treaty; she refused to consider the Straits' question. Isvolsky obtained Germany's consent to the Anglo-Russian agreement, yet he was worried about German penetration into the Middle East, especially Persia. He was so worried that he pressed the British government to grant a loan to the Persian government in order to forestall possible German loans.³⁴ During Anglo-Russian discussions on other problems, on Macedonia, for example, Isvolsky let it be known that he feared German military supremacy.³⁵

It was in the year 1906 that Isvolsky was to launch upon the focal point of his career as foreign minister. That was to be the year of his encounter with Baron Aehrenthal, the Austrian foreign minister. Neither Russia nor Austria-Hungary could well afford a strong foreign policy. But, both states acquired foreign ministers in 1906, namely Isvolsky and Aehrenthal, who favored such a course of action. Count Alois von Aehrenthal wanted to commence his period in office with real accomplishments. In 1908 he wished to build a railroad in the Balkans, but this did not arouse as much ire and anxiety from Isvolsky as his attempt to annex the Slavic provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, provinces which Austria had administered since the Congress of Berlin, 1878. Isvolsky, on the other hand, was anxious to come to a settlement of the Straits problem. He wished to let Russia have free egress or movement in and out of the Black Sea via the Dardanelles. Such a situation would give Russia preponderance in the Mediterranean area, especially in time of war, while it would drastically discriminate against the other nations which bordered on the Black Sea. Isvolsky, however, wanted to control the Straits; this objective was Russia's centuries-old historic mission.

³⁴ Seton-Watson, p. 326. ³⁵ Potiemkin, p. 201.

Considering Russian foreign policy, one must say that Russia had nothing to fear from foreign pressure, if she avoided adventures. For her, the danger area remained the eastern question. What complicated the situation was the fact of the grouping of the powers as well as the heightened importance that maintenance of the Hapsburg Empire would have for the German Empire.³⁶ It was precisely to discuss the situation in the Balkans that Isvolsky accepted Aerenthal's invitation to meet and discuss the issues at Aerenthal's retreat at Duchlan, Moravia. The famous interview took place on September 15, 1908, and the two ministers verbally agreed that Austria would not oppose the opening of the Straits to Russian warships, while Russia would support Austria in the annexation of Bosnia and Hercegovina.³⁷ At this point Isvolsky left Aerenthal in order to proceed to the other European capitals, where he hoped to obtain consent for the action that Russia and Austria contemplated. In the meantime, however, troubles were to occur in the Balkans which were to greatly alter the proposed plan. On October 5, Bulgaria proclaimed her independence, and Aerenthal, fearing that trouble, incited by Serbia, might erupt in Bosnia and Hercegovina, urged Emperor Franz Joseph to annex the provinces, which he did the very next day. "This Austrian action precipitated an immediate international crisis. The status of the provinces had been set by the Congress of Berlin; in theory only another conference could alter it."³⁸ Isvolsky urged the calling of an international conference, but Austria would agree to it only if the conference would accept the fait accompli. From this day Isvolsky and Aerenthal became bitter enemies, and their relations were to deteriorate in succeeding months.

Concerning the meeting between the two ministers, Potemkin has some interesting observations. He maintains that according to Aerenthal's notes

³⁶Jelavich, p. 255. ³⁷Potemkine, p. 204. ³⁸Jelavich, pp. 265-266.

it is clear that Isvolsky had demanded compensations for Serbia and Montenegro at the expense of Austria-Hungary. Aerenthal refused to submit to this demand.³⁹ Perhaps Isvolsky demanded these conditions prior to his consent to Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to see just how much he could wring from Count von Aerenthal. On October 6, when Austria published its note proclaiming the annexation of the provinces, Aerenthal decided to put Isvolsky and the world before the fait accompli. Isvolsky thought that Aerenthal had played a joke on him. It is true that Aerenthal had promised to Russia free passage of the Straits. That was worth more than the transformation of an unlimited occupation of two Turkish provinces into definitive annexation.⁴⁰ Yet Isvolsky had many visits and requests to make before receiving his part of the Austro-Russian accord, while Aerenthal held in hand the Austrian part of the booty. Isvolsky would see that Aerenthal would pay dearly for his very treacherous act.

The rift between Aerenthal and Isvolsky was to have very terrible repercussions in international diplomacy. Although Isvolsky went to London and Paris, after Austria's fait accompli he was not able to obtain any satisfactory results. He complained that Aerenthal had stolen a march on him. Isvolsky was now irreconcilable. The opportunity of a solution of the Dardanelles question had been thwarted and Russia had been left empty-handed. It would not be long before Isvolsky's revenge would start to take form. Note Isvolsky's letter to Nelidov, Russian ambassador at Paris, of November 5, 1908:

Under the influence of political, one might even say historical and inevitable, necessities the Powers have divided themselves into two different groups: on the one side we find Germany and Austria-Hungary-- on the other side Russia, France, and England; Italy, bound by the Triple Alliance but nevertheless feeling herself drawn towards France and ourselves, appears to hesitate; Turkey will place herself on the side of those who shall know how to support her new regime and show her a disinterested friendship.⁴¹

³⁹Potlenkine, p. 205 ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 206.

⁴¹Isvolsky to Nelidov, November 5, 1908, in Siebert, p. 229.

Later in the same letter Isvolsky goes on to mention the anxiety of Emperor William over the new state of affairs: Emperor William, alarmed by the feeling of isolation, or as he is accustomed to say, of "encirclement," is growing more and more impatient and nervous.⁴² It is true that aside from Austria, Germany had no other dependable allies. But why did Isvolsky wish to isolate Germany? It was, as he readily admitted, Baron Aehrenthal and his adventurous policy which were responsible for the recent cleavage of powers. Then why did Isvolsky wish to strike at Germany and alarm Emperor William? Did Isvolsky feel that Russia could not realize her historic aims against Austria alone, that she would also have to fight the might of Germany in order to attain her aims in the Balkans, namely the Straits and Constantinople? Or, would German involvement in such a conflict help France to regain her lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine? As Isvolsky wrote to Rome, on December 3, 1908: "The exact terms of our alliance with France are known to none; it is of course known that these agreements are above all of a defensive character, but the casus foederis can merely be guessed at."⁴³ He goes on further to state that Berlin ought to know that the agreements between Russia and France have not changed and that they form an unchangeable basis of policy.

The following spring Isvolsky wrote to the Russian ambassador at London telling him that the Austro-Hungarian ambassador at St. Petersburg wanted Russia to recognize the annexation as a fait accompli which could not be further called into question. Germany also was backing Austria in this matter. But Isvolsky felt that such a demand on the part of Vienna left little hope for a friendly understanding between the powers concerned, because he doubted whether any Serbian government would recognize the

⁴² Ibid., p. 230.

⁴³ Isvolsky to Rome, December 3, 1908, in Siebert, p. 483.

Austrian annexation as final.⁴⁴ On March 21, Germany handed Russia an ultimatum to recognize the Austrian annexation without any questions whatsoever. On March 23, Isvolsky surrendered to Germany's demand; however he was a very embittered man.⁴⁵ It was true that most of the major European powers felt that Serbia should have received some sort of compensation for Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but Germany did not want it at Austria's expense and Britain did not want it at Turkey's expense. Under such conditions it seemed impossible to reach a solution. Taylor believes that the Bosnian crisis was Isvolsky's private venture, and claims that the more sensible Russians attributed Germany's reaction to it because of Isvolsky's bungling of the affair.⁴⁶ Whatever the case, it was nonetheless true that the estrangement between Russia and Austria was now complete, and that a perilous path lay ahead for the peace of Europe. Now that international agreements had failed to solve the Straits question, would Isvolsky try some other method? There were three obstacles that lay in the path of a grand-scale solution -- Turkey, Austria-Hungary, and the friend of both countries, Germany. Isvolsky could have tried to detach Austria from Germany, and this would have made the attainment of his solution quite simple. But it seems that Isvolsky thought Germany to be the principal obstruction in his path; Germany would back Austria in a crisis, as Austria was her only ally, therefore, he gradually came to apply the lever for the execution of his plan against Germany.⁴⁷

Whatever Isvolsky blamed Aerenthal for animosity that might have existed that might have existed between Russia and Germany. He also mentions the idea of a general war, a thought that seems to assume greater importance since his rupture with Aerenthal. In his letter to Berlin on July 2, 1909, he remarked: "If Europe were on the eve of a general war,

⁴⁴ Isvolsky to London, March 11, 1909, in Siebert, p. 249.

⁴⁵ Seton-Watson, p. 316.

⁴⁶ Taylor, p. 462. ⁴⁷ Stieve, p. 16.

and if our traditional relations with Germany were temporarily clouded, the responsibility rests wholly upon Aerenthal... Aerenthal took it into his head to take advantage of the temporary difficulties of Russia to carry on an ambitious policy."⁴⁸ He goes on to say further that every further penetration of Austria in the Balkans might call forth a sharper conflict than that of 1908, and if Germany should once more support Austria, then it would be difficult to maintain the peace of Europe. Despite his warning, Isvolsky had other things in mind. "He would soon try to wean Italy away from the Triple Alliance.

In October, 1909, Tsar Nicholas met King Victor Emmanuel III for an interview at Racconigi. At that time, the two foreign ministers, Isvolsky and Tittoni came to an agreement whereby Russia and Italy sought to preserve the status quo in the Balkans and to prevent further Austrian expansion in that area.⁴⁹ The purpose of this agreement was to make Italy more than a mere "dead weight" in the Triple Alliance. It was the aftermath of the Bosnian crisis, and its purpose was to tighten the "iron ring" about the Triple Alliance, especially Germany. The Italian government was primarily interested in the Albanian territories, but it received no support from Austria for these claims. That being the case, Italy thought she would fare better if she supported the Triple Entente. Moreover, Italy coveted Turkish lands in North Africa, and Russia would support these Italian claims, if Italy would support Russia in the Straits question.⁵⁰ In 1911, Italy would use this support as a pretext for going to war with Turkey, and eventually annex Tripoli.

At the same time that Isvolsky was trying to pull Italy away from

⁴⁸ Isvolsky to Berlin, July 2, 1909, in Siebert, p. 496.

⁴⁹ Potiemkine, p. 213.

⁵⁰ Jelavich, p. 268.

the Triple Alliance, he was also trying to promote a Slavic League in the Balkans. Note some of Isvolsky's correspondence to the Balkan capitals with regard to this matter. In a letter to Belgrade in April, 1909:

"We have always been in sympathy with the idea of a rapprochement between Bulgaria and Serbia, and desired a common plan of action on the part of these two powers to prevent misunderstandings which might prove dangerous to the common Slav interests."⁵¹ Isvolsky's express purpose for trying to promote better relations between Bulgaria and Serbia was to be able to present a common Slav front toward the Austrian Empire. It seems unlikely that Russia was deeply and sincerely interested in the Slavic peoples in the Balkans for their own sake. If there were any Russian interest in the Balkans, it was only for the purpose of Russian prestige and predominance there. However, Isvolsky would have one believe that Russia's interest in the Balkans and the Slavic peoples of the Balkans was simply that of the benevolent big brother Slav: "As the protector of all Slav interests in the Balkans, Russia has constantly striven to arouse in the Balkan peoples the consciousness that they must unite as closely as possible for the sake of the common good. This will be our endeavor in the future, which, however can be fully achieved only if the Balkan States themselves assist us in that endeavor."⁵² Of course it pleased Isvolsky to see some proof of growing accord among the Balkan states. It would be possible after some time to present a common Slavic front against Austria. The Balkan for the Balkan States! -- that was Russia's policy in the Near East.

With Isvolsky's intense interest in the formation of a Balkan League, it is worthwhile to note the ultimate aim of this league. This is best

⁵¹Isvolsky to Belgrade, April 18, 1909, in Siebert, p. 274.

⁵²Isvolsky to Balkan Representatives, November, 4, 1909, in Siebert, p. 153.

expressed in the Russo-Bulgarian military convention of December, 1909:

"The realisation of the high ideals of the Slav peoples in the Balkan peninsula, which are so close to Russia's heart, is only possible after a fortunate issue of the struggle of Russia with Germany and Austria-Hungary."⁵³
Such was the way that Balkans were to develop and gain their independence.

Isvolsky also tried to limit Turkey's power. Certainly he did not want the power which controlled the Straits, the target that Russia so coveted, to be a very strong military power. Note his letter to Paris, of June 15, 1910: "We are of the opinion that it would be to our and France's interest, should we, in conformity with the Paris Cabinet, profit by the lack of money in Constantinople to secure from Turkey obligations restricting Turkey's future military growth."⁵⁴ In other words, Isvolsky wanted Turkey to remain in such poor military condition, that she would not be able to resist foreign intervention, especially Russian intervention, should Russia intend to carry out her historic mission.

Isvolsky's role as Foreign Minister is rapidly drawing to an end. Shortly he will be Russia's ambassador to France. Before leaving his position as Foreign Minister, it would be well to review some of Isvolsky's comments about Germany and Emperor William. Isvolsky maintains that from the correspondence between the two sovereigns, Nicholas and William, one can follow William's attempt to win the Tsar over to the idea of a continental league.⁵⁵ Isvolsky also feared the idea of an alliance with Germany: "I knew too well the overbearing spirit that governed Germany's foreign policy, the constantly increasing power of the Pan-Germanists, and the determination of the Kaiser to impose German hegemony on the world

⁵³Stieve, p. 16.

⁵⁴Isvolsky to Paris, June 15, 1910, in Siebert, p. 299.

⁵⁵Isvolsky, p. 36.

to have any faith in the possibility of the alliance in which Germany would consent to enter on an equal footing with Russia and France.⁵⁶ There was only one way to combat this growing power of Germany. By fortifying the Triple Entente, the powers could then wait for the day when Germany would unleash war. Isvolsky further states that it was imperative to be ready for the day when Emperor William, impelled by his war party, would let loose the aggression that had been prepared so long in advance; in short, the only way to avert that danger was to fortify by every possible means the political, military, and economic power of the Triple Entente. In case a war would break out, Isvolsky was sure that Russia could count upon the loyalty of France. France, at that moment, would regain her patriotic elan and would demonstrate its traditional valor.⁵⁷ Even though he left the Foreign Office in 1910 in order to assume the position of Russian ambassador to France, he did not forget the defeats and humiliations that he had suffered at the hands of Austria and Germany. As Jelavich says: "In his position as Ambassador he retained his resentment against the central powers and he worked for the strengthening of the Triple Entente. At the end of the Bosnian Crisis Russian anger, and more precisely Isvolsky's anger and wrath, was directed primarily not against Britain, who had prevented the Russian acquisition of gaining control of the Straits, or even at Austria-Hungary, who had undoubtedly played a clever trick upon Russia, but at Germany, who had backed up the stand of Vienna with a stern warning to St. Petersburg."⁵⁸

It was not without planning that Isvolsky had directed his anger against Germany. He realized that by concentrating on Germany, he could sooner obtain France's sympathy and support if a conflict were to arise.

⁵⁶Isvolsky, pp. 129-130.

⁵⁷Isvolsky, p. 130.

⁵⁸Jelavich, p. 267.

Isvolsky further realized that he could best carry out his plans and intrigues at a prestigious embassy, preferably Paris. After all, France was Russia's partner in the Dual Alliance. What better place could there be to work for closer union of the alliance and also to work for a rupture in European affairs? Isvolsky was waiting for a rich embassy, and in September, 1910, Paris at last fell vacant.⁵⁹ The death of Nelidov made it possible for Isvolsky to become Russian ambassador to Paris. From his new vantage point, Isvolsky could direct Russian foreign policy according to his clandestine and questionable methods.

⁵⁹Taylor, p. 463.

"III. ISVOLSKY AS RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR TO FRANCE, 1910-1914"

Isvolsky resigned as Russian foreign minister on September 28, 1910. He was replaced in the foreign office by Serge Sazonov, who was personally a very weak leader. At the time of his appointment, Sazonov had no desire to precipitate another eastern crisis, for he knew that his country was ill-prepared to meet such a disturbance. Nevertheless, Sazonov did not have a clear policy of his own nor was he able to exercise control over the activities of his subordinates, especially those in the Balkans.¹ Examples of these subordinates were A. Nekliudov in Sofia, N. Hartwig in Belgrade, and A. Isvolsky in Paris. They, by implementing programs of their own were able to sway the Russian foreign office and Sazonov to their way of thinking. In fact, some of their policies were to pave the way for the First World War.

Returning once again to Isvolsky, one can see that he would prove to be a very active diplomat. As Count Muraviev said, Isvolsky had come to Paris for a purpose: "To bring the healing crisis, to direct European politics to a breach, can be more effectively achieved in Paris than St. Petersburg."² Isvolsky had come to Paris with a mission in mind, and he soon began to work toward its accomplishment. He would soon plan the parts of a political intrigue, an intrigue that would lead to a general European conflict. He would work closely with the French government and with high French officials in this complicated and labyrinth-like intrigue.

Shortly after his arrival in Paris in 1910, Isvolsky noticed that

¹Jelavich, pp. 268-269. ²Stieve, p. 17.

France, in the wake of the Second Moroccan Crisis, resisted the brutality of German foreign policy. He was convinced that France still possessed the principles of justice, liberty, and progress that had made her the beacon-light of the world. Isvolsky also noted that France, if unjustifiably provoked by Germany, would willingly take up arms on the side of Russia and England, in order to defend her territory and also to secure the return of her patrimony, namely the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.³

Rene Marchand's work, Livre Noir, furnishes us with Isvolsky's correspondence while he was ambassador at Paris. Selected passages from his correspondence during that period will help to reveal the sinister, shrewd, and sly character of this man. For the most part the presentation will follow a chronological order. Only fragmentary evidence will be presented, but it is evidence which bears directly on Isvolsky's role as ambassador and his position of influencing the Russian foreign minister, Sazonov.

Even though Isvolsky found praise for the French way of life and for its intellectual pursuits, Isvolsky noticed, shortly after his arrival in Paris, that the French were greatly ignorant of Russia. As he wrote to Sazonov in February of 1911: "You would never believe to what degree the people, even the most serious, are all ill informed on Russia and Russian affairs."⁴ Thus Isvolsky would attempt to correct this attitude and give the French people a better conception of Russian life. He believed he could best achieve this through bribing and influencing the French press. To do this effectively, however, he needed money. It was difficult to deal with the press when one did not have the means for effective operation. Therefore, "it would be very important to have a permanent and reliable means of

³Isvolsky, p. 129.

⁴Isvolsky to Sazonov, February 15, 1911, in Marchand, Rene, Un Livre Noir, 2 vols., Paris: Librairie du Travail, 1922-1923, I, p. 35.

orientating the most important organs here, which are nearly all accessible only to 'clinking' arguments."⁵ And if Russia would want to raise the question of the Straits, it would be "very important to have 'a good press' in France."⁶ Thus, in due time, Isvolsky would condition the French people into thinking that the path that Russia wanted was also the path for France.

In 1911 Isvolsky has some enlightening comments on the course of the Second Moroccan Crisis. Isvolsky felt that the Entente should side with Spain and give her satisfaction. Not to do so would throw her into the arms of Germany, and Germany had been very cool toward Spain since the Algeciras Conference, 1906. Thus Isvolsky says: "It would be very regrettable if the matter now at issue were to lead Spain to begin to seek the support and protection of Germany."⁷ The Entente satisfied Spain's request when Tangiers was internationalized and Spain was given 18,000 square miles of Morocco in November, 1911. Since Russia did not want to get involved in a war for purely French interests, Isvolsky urged France to take a moderate attitude with regard to Germany. According to Stieve, Isvolsky's ultimate ground of his dissatisfaction was his fear of a collision between Germany and France, a conflict which would run counter to Russia's aspirations and aims of expansion, and would have robbed St. Petersburg of working for them.⁸ A Franco-German conflict would not enable Russia to gain control of the Straits. This idea is more clearly brought out in Isvolsky's letter to St. Petersburg, in November, 1911: "Just as France has declared to us this summer that she could not permit the establishment of any foreign power in Morocco, so, too, must we inform France that Russia can not allow the Straits to pass into hands other than Russian."⁹

⁵Isvolsky to Neratov, August 19, 1911, in Marchand, I, 130.

⁶Isvolsky to Neratov, October 12, 1911, in Marchand, I, 148.

⁷Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, March 28, 1911, in Marchand, I, 64.

⁸Stieve, p. 33.

⁹Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, November 23, 1911, in Marchand, I, 167.

The thought of war occupies Isvolsky's thinking at various times during 1911. In early March he writes to Sazonov about the possibility of a Balkan crisis in the next spring. He tells Sazonov that he must take a hard line in case he would have to deal with a Balkan crisis; he maintains that such a crisis, if not inevitable, was at least possible.¹⁰ In December of that year Isvolsky confides to Neratov: "Any local collision between the powers is bound to lead to a general European conflict, in which Russia, like every other European power, will have to participate. With God's help the conflict may be postponed for a while, but that it may come at any moment we must bear in mind...and we must also arm against it."¹¹

With the beginning of the new year, 1912, Isvolsky's thought seems to be concerned with the new French prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, Raymond Poincaré. Poincaré had been appointed on January 14, 1912, yet the very next day Isvolsky received a visit from him. This would indicate a very close degree of intimacy. Says Isvolsky of the visit: "He has given me the assurance of his firm intention to maintain the closest relations with us and to direct the foreign policy of France in closest relations with us and to direct the foreign policy of France in complete accord with its ally."¹² Poincaré also declared in a later meeting that the alliance with Russia and the Entente Cordiale with Great Britain were inviolate first principles of France's political program, and that "if ever a government were so blinded as to depart from them, it would be bound to collapse at once under the indignation of French public opinion."¹³

¹⁰ Stieve, p. 93. ¹¹ Isvolsky to Neratov, December 20, 1911, in Siebert, p. 612.
¹² Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, January 15, 1912, in Marchand, I, 180.
¹³ Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, February 15, 1912, in Marchand, I, 193.

Despite Isvolsky's closeness to Poincaré, he still found it necessary to criticize his shortcomings: Poincaré, "who possesses robust qualities, is at the same time excessively proud, and takes to heart very strongly what, to his view, constitutes indifference as regards his action or his opinion."¹⁴ Yet Isvolsky states that Poincaré showed great consideration toward him, and discussed matters with him as frequently and as thoroughly as possible. So much does Isvolsky think of Poincaré that he tells Sazonov that it would be important for Russia to have him on her side if a crisis broke out.¹⁵ This is the beginning of the influence which Isvolsky hopes that Poincaré will have on Sazonov.

Once again, Isvolsky brings up the question of a conflict. In a letter to St. Petersburg, in February, 1912, Isvolsky states that the French war ministry expected new international complications in the spring, and thus actively continued to prepare for military operations.¹⁶ About that same time, Lord Haldane went to Berlin in order to try to come to terms with Germany over the naval issue. Isvolsky, however, hoped that Great Britain and Germany would not come to an understanding. If that were to happen, then Germany would pursue the strengthening of its army with redoubled energy, and this would make it necessary for France and Russia, likewise, to increase their military strength.¹⁷ And if that were to happen, the two partners would find it very difficult to keep up with Germany in the armaments race. "either the French nor the Russian economy was on a par with the German economy, so neither country could ever under such circumstances, gain preponderance over Germany in military matters.

¹⁴Isvolsky to Sazonov, February 29, 1912, in Marchand, I, 204.

¹⁵Isvolsky to Sazonov, June 20, 1912, in Marchand, I, 282.

¹⁶Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, February 15, 1912, in Marchand, I, 194.

¹⁷Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, February 29, 1912, in Marchand, I, 201.

Now that Isvolsky had come to grips with the possibility of having Poincare influence Sazonov, he decided to tackle another problem of great importance, that of turning Sazonov against the French ambassador at St. Petersburg, Georges Louis. The first seeds of this plan Isvolsky planted in early 1912 in a letter to Sazonov: "Since M. Georges Louis does not always convey very exactly what is said to him in St. Petersburg, I do not understand why you prefer to converse with Paris on this question through his intermediary rather than through me."¹⁸ In March Isvolsky goes a little further with his plan to detach Sazonov from Louis. He reminds Sazonov: "Do not forget that I have the entirely undeserved reputation of being a Germanophobe...while you are regarded as a Germanophile and as indifferent and cool towards France and the Triple Alliance."¹⁹ It seemed that Isvolsky's plan was beginning to bear fruit. Note Isvolsky's letter to Sazonov in April: "I see that you are more and more dissatisfied with M. Georges Louis and with his manner of conveying here communications given to him. It seems to me that your dissatisfaction is entirely justified....I shall impress on Poincare that it would be desirable to replace him with a more suitable personality."²⁰ Evidently Louis' one fault was that he had always advocated a moderate and peaceful policy.²¹ Moreover, he did not word his reports in a pro-Russian manner. In May, 1912, Isvolsky says that it is good that the split finally came, for in the end the reports of Louis could cause irreparable wrong to Russo-French relations.²² In another letter of that same month, Isvolsky says that he indicated to Poincare that, in the interest

¹⁸Isvolsky to Sazonov, February 29, 1912, in Marchand, I, 204.

¹⁹Isvolsky to Sazonov, March 14, 1912, in Marchand, I, 217.

²⁰Isvolsky to Sazonov, April 11, 1912, in Marchand, I, 231.

²¹Stieve, p. 62.

²²Isvolsky to Sazonov, May 23, 1912, in Marchand, I, 258.

of Franco-Russian relations, it would be desirable to replace Louis, sooner or later, by another person, a diplomat.²³ Isvolsky did not consider Louis a diplomat because he was not pro-Russian and would not partake of intrigues.

In June, 1912, Isvolsky speaks of Italy and her relationship to the Triple Entente. He feels that Italy should not formally withdraw from the Triple Alliance, since that could lead to complications. He thinks it best that Italy remain in the Alliance, because she is the repressive element in the Triple Alliance.²⁴ Isvolsky speculates on the Italo-Turkish War. According to him, Todorov, the Bulgarian minister of finance, is convinced that a rapid conclusion of the war would not be in the interest of Bulgaria. "In the end the present struggle should weaken both States extremely, and both are among the powers which are, in principle, hostile to Slavdom and the Slavic Balkan States."²⁵ Moreover, this struggle would enable the Balkan States to rise against Turkey more easily. One can see by Sazonov's report to the tsar that he understands the value of Italy to the Triple Entente.

Once again Isvolsky returns to the idea of having Poincare visit St. Petersburg. This would enable Poincare to hear of Sazonov. As Isvolsky says: "As much as the trip to St. Petersburg of ministers like Cruppi or de Selves appeared to me superfluous, so much so the visit of Poincare appears to me useful and desirable."²⁶ Poincare did visit St. Petersburg in the summer of 1912, and evidently made a favorable impression on Sazonov. As Sazonov relates in his report to the tsar in August of that year:

²³Isvolsky to Sazonov, May 17, 1912, in Marchand, I, 251.

²⁴Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, June 6, 1912, in Marchand, I, 266.

²⁵Ibid., I, 267.

²⁶Isvolsky to Sazonov, March 28, 1912, in Marchand, I, 221.

"I was very happy to have had the occasion to make the acquaintance of M. Poincare and to enter into personal relations with him...the exchange of views that I had with him left me with the impression that in him Russia possessed a true and faithful friend, gifted with unusual political intelligence and with an inflexible will." Sazonov concludes his report with some rather astonishing words:²⁷ In case of a crisis in international relations, it would be very desirable that at the head of our ally's government should stand, if not M. Poincare himself, at all events a personality as resolute and as entirely unafraid of responsibility as the present French premier."²⁷ From the preceding, it would seem obvious that Isvolsky had accomplished his mission with regard to Poincare and Sazonov. Poincare's influence was brought to bear on Sazonov, and now Sazonov was an ardent admirer of the French foreign minister.

Turning to military matters for a moment, one will be able to see that the Franco-Russian military convention of 1892 was now strengthened in 1912 by a naval convention. The signing took place on July 16, and Article 4 of the treaty stated: "For the duration, elaboration, and secrecy, the present convention is similar to the military convention of August 17, 1892, and to subsequent accords."²⁸ In his report to the tsar, Sazonov stated that the continued exchange of ideas between the French and the English governments has had for a result a verbal convention whereby England had declared herself ready to loan help to France by its land as well as by its sea forces, in case of an attack on Germany's part. On land, England promised to assist France through the sending of a detachment of 100,000 men to the Belgian frontier, to repress the eruption of the German army

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²⁸Sazonov's Report to the Tsar, August 4, 1912, in Marchand, II, 345.
Isvolsky to Neratov, July 18, 1912, in Marchand, I, 299.

through Belgium, an eruption for which the French general staff waited. Thus France did not have to worry about the lack of troops and materials if Germany were to provoke war; England would come to her rescue.²⁹

In September, 1912, Izvolsky wrote to St. Petersburg, telling the foreign ministry about Poincaré's feelings about a general war. Poincaré felt that there were two distinct possibilities for war: either Turkey might attack Bulgaria or Austro-Hungary might attack Serbia. In either case Russia would be drawn into the conflict and France would come to her aid. This would be even more so were the conflict to result in the armed intervention by Germany. Then the French government would recognize this as a casus foederis, and would not hesitate for a minute to fulfill its military obligations toward Russia. "From all the angles that can be considered, Poincaré as well as other informed and responsible persons in the French government believe that France and Russia have an excellent chance of success in case of a general conflict."³⁰

The events in the Balkans about this time are very unsettled. Not only do the Slavic States have eyes on conflicts with Turkey and with Austria-Hungary, but their greed and grand designs they have formulated, have led them into unfriendly terms with each other. In general, the Balkan situation is very unstable. This prompts Izvolsky to consider the possibilities of a war which might come to pass: A decisive victory of the Balkan states, a similar victory of the Turks, and a dragging out of the war. On each of these possibilities Izvolsky offers some interesting ideas. As a decisive victory of the Balkan States: this possibility seemed least likely to him. For him, it would be most dangerous in its

²⁹Sazonov's Report to the Tsar, August 4, 1912, in Marchand, II, 339.

³⁰Izvolsky to St. Petersburg, September 12, 1912, in Marchand, I, 326.

consequences for general peace. That outcome would push into the foreground in all its historical significance, the question of the struggle of the Slavs not only against Islamism but also against Germanism. In such a case, it would hardly be possible to put one's faith in any palliative measures, and it would become necessary then to prepare for a great and decisive general European war. This was the thought most dear to Isvolsky's heart; it burned with the desire to have the Slavs have their day of reckoning with not only the Teutons but also with the Turks. In such a case, Isvolsky was confident that the superior Slavic forces, under the leadership of big brother Russia, would gain a tremendous victory over the other forces. Then Russia would have gained her historic mission, the control of the Straits. As to the second possibility: A decisive victory by Turkey would be a little less dangerous from the general European standpoint, but it would be extremely painful for Russia. Such a victory would produce an enormous excitement of public opinion in Russia, and it would impose upon Russia a moral duty of coming to the aid of the Slavic States. Under such circumstances, Russia would enter the Balkan situation not so much out of personal and brotherly love for the South Slavs, but rather out of the driving force for national prestige and territorial expansion. Ever since the fifteenth century, Russia has been vitally interested in the Balkans. Even though she may have claimed to be the champion for the independence of the Slavic states, in practice she was actually the oppressor of their freedom. The Tsarist Empire had always tried to rusify smaller ethnic groups under its control, whether they were of Slavic origin or not. At times it seemed that other Slavic nationalities under Russian leadership suffered more brutal atrocities and hardships than their non-Slavic nationalities within the confines of the Russian Empire.

As to the third possibility - a stalemate: the dragging out of military operations without the decisive success on either side would probably call forth the collective mediation of the powers.³¹

In case of an outbreak of hostilities in Europe, especially in the Balkans, Isvolsky wondered just how much aid France would offer her ally. Yet Isvolsky was working not only to win over the French government but also to orientate the French public to Russia's way of thinking. Note how effectively his plan is working. In a letter to Sazonov, on November 7, 1912, Isvolsky says: "Whereas to the present, France had declared to us that local events, that is to say, purely Balkan, could provoke on her part only diplomatic acts and no active intervention, she now appears to recognize that an Austrian territorial conquest would disturb the general European equilibrium, and also France's own interests."³² At this point, Poincare and the French officials are wavering on their official position. Shortly they will come over to Isvolsky's way of thinking, as evidenced by Poincare's blank check to Russia. In a letter on November 17, 1912, Isvolsky writes: "It is for Russia, Poincare told me, to take the initiative in a question in which she appears the principal interested party; while it will be France's role to lend Russia her most emphatic and active support; in taking the initiative upon itself the French Government would risk placing itself in a position of forestalling the intentions of its Ally."³³ In summary to this letter, Poincare added that if Russia declares war, so will France, since it is known that in this question, behind Austria will be Germany.

³¹Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, October 23, 1912, in Marchand, I, 335.

³²Isvolsky to Sazonov, November 7, 1912, in Marchand, I, 342.

³³Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, November 17, 1912, in Marchand, I, 346.

Concerning Poincare's blank check to Russia, Stieve offers an interesting comment. He claims that this document was of the greatest importance in the history of the process that led to the world war. Germany has been blamed for allowing Austria a free hand after the Sarajevo assassination in her dealings with Serbia, a free hand, that is, in a war which Berlin hoped would be localized. More than eighteen months before this, the French prime minister, in saying that 'if Russia goes to war, France will do the same,' allowed the Tsarist Empire just as wide a measure of unquestioned plenary power.³⁴

Isvolsky continues to inform St. Petersburg of France's pledge of support in case of a conflict. On November 20, 1912, he wrote: Poincare said to Tittoni that if the Austro-Serbian conflict led to a general war, Russia could count on the armed support of France.³⁵ Isvolsky was also very thankful that Poincare, rather than others was directing French foreign policy. In a letter of November 21, he says: "I think then with fear to what it would have been if, in his place in the critical times that we live, the French government had had at its head Caillaux or Clemenceau."³⁶ (Isvolsky speculated on French intervention.) Note his letter to Sazonov in early December: "The casus foederis occurs, in accordance with the existing Franco-Russian military convention, at the moment when German military intervention appears; up to that time it will be France's part to accord us the most active and energetic diplomatic support; however, the possibility of non purely diplomatic actions..is

³⁴ Stieve, p. 114.

³⁵ Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, November 20, 1912, in Marchand, I, 347-348.

³⁶ Isvolsky to Sazonov, November 21, 1912, in Marchand, I, 351.

not excluded."³⁷ Isvolsky also reminded Sazonov that Poincare had to battle influential elements in his own party, who were very hostile to Russia and were opposed to France's becoming involved in a Balkan war.³⁸ Yet Isvolsky seemed pleased with having to deal with Poincare, and not with any other officials in the French government that might be hostile to Russia. Isvolsky also told Sazonov about England's position in case of a conflict. As he says in his letter of December 5, 1912: The London Cabinet wishes to guard its neutrality in a case where Germany is found engaged in a war not provoked by the German side. It was true that Sir Edward Grey, British foreign minister, was very pacifistic. He did not wish to draw England into any sort of conflict. Yet Isvolsky reminded Sazonov that the Anglo-French military convention had a strong and complete character like the Franco-Russian Convention.³⁹ Therefore, in time of extreme need, it might be possible for France to persuade England to give her active support to a conflict. Isvolsky might also try to bring about a military and naval convention between Russia and England. Such a situation would necessarily bring England into a conflict, if it would arise. Therefore, Isvolsky would now begin to press the French government officials, especially Poincare and Delcasse to make overtures to the English government, and encourage England to make a military and naval agreement with Russia. This would help to fortify the Triple Entente, making it ever ready against the powerful forces of the Triple Alliance.

In November of 1912 Isvolsky informed Sazonov of a couple of interesting facts. On November 23, he commented upon the supposed underhanded activities of the Russian ministers in the Balkans. To Poincare's remark

³⁷Isvolsky to Sazonov, December 5, 1912, in Marchand, I, 362.

³⁸Isvolsky to Sazonov, November 21, 1912, in Stieve, p. 132.

³⁹Isvolsky to Sazonov, December 5, 1912, in Marchand, I, 365.

that it was alleged from several sides that M. Hartwig, the Russian minister in Belgrade, continued to incite the Serbians against the Austrians, Isvolsky replied: "From my experience in 1908, I was all too well aware how easily unjust charges were made against Russia and Russian diplomats."⁴⁰

Thus, while Isvolsky knew firsthand of the activities of the Russian diplomats in the Balkans, he wished to assure the weak Sazonov, that matters were under control. He tried to persuade him not to give any credence to those charges. In another letter, a few days later, Isvolsky told Sazonov that he had told Poincare that there had never been any question of neutralizing the Straits. Isvolsky maintained that the solution proposed by him in 1908 was of a different nature. That solution would have given Russia preponderance in the Black Sea area. However, Isvolsky felt reassured when Poincare informed him that if Russia had any intention of raising the Straits question again, France would of course give her most energetic support to such a plan. The only thing France would expect would be to apprise her in due time of Russia's plans and intentions.⁴¹ This would enable Poincare and the French government to orientate the French public to support Russia in her quest to obtain control of the Straits by the time that question would come up. By influencing the press and other means of communication, Poincare hoped to win over the French public to the "proper" way of thinking.

In December, 1912, an important domestic event was reaching a peak in French life. Within a month the French people would elect a president, a man who would guide the French nation for the next seven years. Among those in the running was Poincare, Isvolsky's friend. Now it was Isvolsky's job to see that Poincare was elected president of France. This would

⁴⁰Isvolsky to Sazonov, November 23, 1912, in Siebert, p. 408.

⁴¹Isvolsky to Sazonov, November 26, 1912, in Siebert, p. 414.

insure a continuity in the closeness of Franco-Russian relations. Thus, Isvolsky would have to use every means at his disposal to influence the outcome of the election. Bribing the press would be a very important matter for him. Note his letter to Sazonov about a month before the election: "I am trying to maintain dispositions that are desirable to us among the members of government and the political world. I am presently doing everything possible to influence the Press. Under this rapport, thanks to clever measures taken in time, substantial results have been attained. As you know, I take no direct part in the distribution of subsidies."⁴²

Isvolsky went on to state that the French ministers of foreign affairs and finance were entrusted with making the distribution to the press. As Isvolsky stated, this means appeared effective and attained its goal. Along with the same idea of influencing the press, Isvolsky has another aim in mind. He must raise the image of the Triple Entente. As he writes to Sazonov in mid-December: "It is no longer the idea that France would go to war for foreign interests that I would have to combat, but rather the fear that we are too passive in the question concerning the situation and the prestige of the entire Entente."⁴³

As the date of the election approaches, Isvolsky grows more anxious and concerned about the outcome of it. He has spent much time and energy trying to influence the French press. His campaign has cost him over six million francs.⁴⁴ That is how much the Russian government paid in order to have the friend of Russia elected president of France.

⁴²Isvolsky to Sazonov, December 18, 1912, in Marchand, I, 371.

⁴³Ibid., I, 372.

⁴⁴Berstein, H., Celebrities of Our Time, London, 1925, p. 165.

On the eve of the election, Isvolsky was still very much excited: "Tomorrow is the presidential election. If, God forbid, Poincare is beaten, that will be a catastrophe for us, for that will be the beginning of an era of Combism."⁴⁵ Combes was a radical Republican and was very anti-Russian.

Fortunately for Isvolsky, Poincare won the election. Not long after the election, Isvolsky had an interview with Poincare, who assured Isvolsky that he would retain the closest ties with Russia. As Isvolsky said: "Poincare has told me that in his capacity as president of the republic, he would have complete possibility of directly influencing French foreign policy, and he would not fail to profit from it in order to assure, in the course of his septennate, the intangibility of politics founded on the close alliance with Russia."⁴⁶ Poincare went on to say further that it was of the greatest importance to the French government to be able in advance to prepare French public opinion to take part in the war which could break out relative to the Balkan question. Isvolsky again confirmed this point in another letter to Sazonov the very next day: "The moment when France will have to draw the sword is exactly determined by the Franco-Russian military convention, and, under this rapport, the French ministers do not feel the least doubt nor the least hesitation."⁴⁷ With Poincare's election, continued Franco-Russian closeness seemed assured.

Now that Poincare had been elected, Isvolsky could once again concentrate on influencing the French press, but this time for other purposes. As Isvolsky wrote to Raffalovitch in February, 1913: "In point of fact the moment for working on the French press, could not, it seemed to me, have

⁴⁵Isvolsky to Sazonov, January 16, 1913, in Marchand, II, 9.

⁴⁶Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, January 29, 1913, in Marchand, II, 14-15.

⁴⁷Isvolsky to Sazonov, January 30, 1913, in Marchand, II, 20.

been more favorable. Since the beginning of the Balkan Crisis I have taken the greatest pains to secure the support of the most influential of the French papers for our point of view. You must admit that I have had considerable success along those lines."⁴⁸ The French press was pro-Balkan. As a sidelight comment along these lines it is interesting to note Benckendorf's letter to St. Petersburg, of February 25, 1913: "In recapitulating all Cambon's (French ambassador to London) conversations with me, the words exchanged, and adding to it the attitude of M. Poincare, the idea comes to me which resembles a conviction, that of all the powers it is France alone which, not to say that she wants war, would see it without great regret. In any case, nothing has indicated to me that she contributes actively to work for a compromise. But compromise is peace; outside of compromise, there is war."⁴⁹ Truly these are prophetic words. If Benckendorf is really telling the truth, then it must be that he is ignorant of Isvolsky's activities. It could easily appear to the foreigner that Poincare was actually the ring leader of these bellicose activities. As Sir Edward Grey said: "A political triumph cannot be entirely complete without war. The one that is obtained resembles it-- to obtain more, war is necessary."⁵⁰ Yet, Isvolsky wrote to Sazonov in the latter part of February, 1913, that the character of the assurances which the London cabinet gives, permits the French government to count, in case of a conflict with Germany, from actual political conjunctures, on the armed support of England.⁵¹ Thus from his correspondence it appears that Isvolsky is playing a game, a sort of diplomatic game with Sazonov.

⁴⁸Isvolsky to Raffalovitch, February 14, 1913, in Marchand, II, 129.

⁴⁹Benckendorf to St. Petersburg, February 25, 1913, in Marchand, II, 303-304.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, II, 304.

⁵¹Isvolsky to Sazonov, February 27, 1913, in Marchand, II, 32-33.

The scene of Isvolsky's concern now switches to Russia, more precisely to Delcasse, the new French ambassador to Russia. Isvolsky, through his clever scheme, was successful in having Georges Louis, the moderate Frenchman, removed as French ambassador to Russia. This is the time of the Balkan wars. Thus Isvolsky writes in the following vein about Delcasse: "The French government has been moved to make this choice by the circumstances of French public opinion. Since the present situation may call for the application of the Franco-Russian Alliance, and since M. Delcasse is a personification of that Alliance, it is fortunate to have him serve in that capacity."⁵² M. Delcasse is entirely devoted to the idea of the very closest association between France and Russia, and will do all in his power to persuade the French government to come to the aid of Russia in case of a conflict. In another letter to Sazonov, Isvolsky gives us more information about Delcasse; He is especially competent not only in questions of foreign politics but in all that concerns military and especially naval matters. He is especially commissioned to persuade our military administration of the necessity of increasing its number of strategic railway lines, in order to accelerate the concentration of our army to the western frontier. He is empowered to offer Russia all the financial assistance required, in the form of railway loans.⁵³ Certainly Russia did not have to build such railroads in haste, unless she were planning to go to war or expecting attack from Germany. Or was Russia trying to play a diplomatic game with Germany by trying to intimidate her? Did Russia hope that by these manoeuvres Germany would decide to declare war on Russia? Russia was not ready for a conflict just yet, however;

⁵² Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, February 17, 1913, in Stieve, p. 137.

⁵³ Isvolsky to Sazonov, March 13, 1913, in Marchand, II, 49.

she would need time to bolster her military forces. (As Stieve says: "The character of the railway loans impressed on Russia the impulse towards collision with Germany and Austria, especially the former."⁵⁴) But in a report of V. K. Kokovstov, Russia's finance minister, on November 19, 1913, that France would lend Russia up to 200 million rubles worth of loans for the building of railways, if Russia would augment her total strength of the army and if she would commence immediately the construction of certain strategic lines.⁵⁵ Thus each further loan seemed to tie the countries and their destinations along the same path.

Isvolsky also makes some interesting comments about the situation of the financiers and the banks. In April of 1911 he had told Sazonov that the French government was far from being powerful with regard to the French banks. As Isvolsky said: "It is not the banks which are in government hands, but very often, the Government which, by reason of political conditions here, that is submissive to the financiers."⁵⁶ But as Siebert - 1st. Secretary at the Russian embassy in London - adds: "The fact that no foreign loan could be floated in France without the consent of the government, made every advance of capital a purely political matter."⁵⁷ Yet Isvolsky had two reasons in particular for having the French government approve many of the French loans to foreign countries. By having France grant other countries loans it would help to bring the political future of those countries under the dominance of France directly and or Russia indirectly. This was especially true of the Balkan countries, where Russia could ill afford to have Teutonic influence spread. If these countries did not get loans from France, then they would turn to the banking houses

⁵⁴ Stieve, p. 175.

⁵⁵ Report of V. K. Kokovstov, November 19, 1913, in Marchand, II, 403.

⁵⁶ Isvolsky to Sazonov, April 11, 1912, in Marchand, I, 233.

⁵⁷ Isvolsky to Sazonov, April 9, 1913, in Marchand, II, 68.

of Germany and Austria. And Isvolsky was shrewd and cunning enough to know that once Germany or Austria would grant a country a loan, she could also seek to extend her political influence in that country. Therefore, Isvolsky thought it imperative that the French government approve most of the loans on the Paris Bourse.

Perhaps it would be advisable to say a few words about the Balkan Wars. As Isvolsky has stated, he has been very successful in winning over the French press to Russia's Balkan aims. Yet he had to convince the French press as well as the French ministers that Russia could not allow Adrianople to fall into Bulgarian hands. That city was too close to Constantinople, to be in Bulgarian hands. Isvolsky maintained that this question touched the dignity and the historic traditions of Russia, and that it was most necessary for the strength of the Dual Alliance that France support Russia in this matter.⁵⁸ An enlightening note about the site of the peace conference of the First Balkan War comes to light in Taylor: Paris was proposed as the site for the conference, but it was transferred to London in order to keep Isvolsky from complicating matters.⁵⁹ They therefore decided to shift the site of the conference from Paris to London. Even though there he could not involve himself in matters, Isvolsky, nonetheless, was quite pleased with the results of the treaty. He wrote to Sazonov that he did not think that the Bucharest Treaty needed to be revised. By the treaty, Turkey lost all of her European territory beyond the Enos-Media line. She retained only a small strip north of Constantinople. The rest of the territory was divided up among the victors. As Isvolsky says of the treaty: "The treaty did not injure the interests of Russia,

⁵⁸Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, August 12, 1913, in Marchand, II, 125.

⁵⁹Taylor, p. 493, footnote.

but rather of Austria, who had done everything to weaken Serbia. Now a Serb state reinforced and strengthened morally and physically emerged from that war."⁶⁰ This particularly pleased Isvolsky. For Isvolsky, to insist on a revision of the treaty would give Austria the occasion and the means of working to upset that result, and to regain all that she had lost. He claimed that Austria was isolated both morally and physically, and that even Germany did not approve of her foreign policy. At this time Isvolsky asks: "Are we to help her, and so destroy all the results obtained by us? Common action with Austria in the Balkans has never succeeded for us; this I know from my own bitter experience."⁶⁰ Isvolsky had never forgotten the march that Aerenthal had stolen on him while he was foreign minister in 1908. Therefore, he would see to it that Austria would get no concessions in the Balkans. He would work to have her Slav minorities rise against the Austrian empire.

Much comes to light from Sazonov's report to the tsar, October 24, 1913. By that time Sazonov has been swayed over completely to Isvolsky's way of thinking, and to his plan to attain the coveted Straits through a war, a general European war, if necessary. One of the first things that Sazonov notes in his report is that he believes that France wished for a strong Serbia, for, in the event, of a grave international conflict, Serbia would find herself on France's side, being that she was the natural enemy of Germany's principal ally.⁶¹ The wording has already assumed the Isvolsky method, with the force or threat expressed in terms of Germany's relation to the event. Germany now has become the principal target of Russia's calculations.

⁶⁰Isvolsky to Sazonov, August 14, 1913, in Marchand, II, 134.

⁶¹Sazonov's Report to the Tsar, October 24, 1913, in Marchand, II, 361.

In another aspect of the report, Sazonov brings up the situation in the Turkish Empire as well as Russia's desire to obtain the Straits. He doubts Turkey's stability and longevity, and thus is forced to ponder on the historic question of the Straits and of the political and economic importance of them to Russia. Thus Sazonov asks the following question: Can we permit another country to obtain control of the passage through the Straits? To ask the question is to answer it negatively. For Sazonov, the Straits in the possession of a powerful state would mean the entire subjugation of the economic development of southern Russia to that state.⁶² Sazonov goes on to state that Russia in the previous year actually considered a land attack of the Straits, but called it off, because she thought it too impracticable. As he himself says: "The numerical strength of the expeditionary force would have been disproportionate to the tasks that it would have to accomplish."⁶³ It is true that that was one angle to the problem. Another factor was the fact that a Russian march on the Straits would have left France in the cold. Under such a conflict France would have no way of obtaining any gains, namely the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. Thus it was that France too vetoed that Russian project. Rather, a way would have to be found which would also involve the German Empire, if Russia were to vie for the Straits. Thus Sazonov speculates: "The question of the Straits can hardly be advanced a step except through European complications. These complications, to judge from present conditions, would find us in alliance with France, and possibly, but not quite certainly, with England, or at least with the latter as a benevolent neutral."⁶⁴ Sazonov went on to say that in case of complications, Russia could count on the support of Serbia and Rumania.

⁶²Sazonov's Report, II, 365.

⁶³Sazonov's report to the tsar, October 24, 1913, in Marchand, II, 368.

⁶⁴Ibid., II, 371

To Sazonov, there were two main factors of trouble in the Balkans: First, there was the unrest among the nationalities of Austria-Hungary. Secondly, Bulgaria would never accept the painful consequences of the Treaty of Bucharest. Despite these probable points of friction in the Balkans, Sazonov felt that for either of these hypotheses to come true, Russia would also have to strive for the realization of her historic aims, and act in common with these countries. "Alone, the Balkan States are inevitably doomed to conflicts among themselves, which can be avoided only by Russia's presence and active guidance."⁶⁵ Russian presence would prevent petty Balkan quarrels, but could also produce a European conflict there. By the end of 1913 Sazonov had completed the completed the fateful change of mind to a European war as the means for the attainment of Russia's aims.

That the Straits were the focal point for the attainment of Russia's aims there can be no doubt. Note Isvolsky's letter to St. Petersburg, on November 6, 1913: "The Bulgarians are too intelligent and practical not to understand that it would be a folly on their part to dream of Constantinople and the Straits; they know that it is the future domain of Russia and that if Bulgaria tried to put herself across our path that could only lead her to a catastrophe."⁶⁶ Isvolsky went on to say that a new crisis could break out in a few years, and that would mean the definitive downfall of the Ottoman Empire and the division of Asiatic Turkey. Concerning a loan to Serbia, Isvolsky urged Sazonov to back a French loan to Serbia, so that Russia would not have to maintain the responsibility for Serbia's financial troubles.⁶⁷

In the last part of 1913 Isvolsky concerned himself with orientating the French press according to his view of things. He states that France would like to have a conference with Germany, but would definitely not renounce

⁶⁵Ibid., II, 372.

⁶⁶Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, November 6, 1913, in Marchand, II, 169.

⁶⁷Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, November 18, 1913, in Marchand, II, 174.

the provinces that she had lost in 1870. The two countries had many points to discuss concerning the future of Turkey, but the problem of the lost provinces remained the stumbling block between the two countries. Germany wanted France to make a definitive renouncement, but France's highly chauvinistic leaders would not let their pride fall before the obnoxious and voluble Emperor William. In this matter, even the press criticized any attempts for France to try to seek a rapprochement with Germany. Only the Triple Entente mattered.⁶⁸

The dawn of the year 1914 brought both satisfaction and anxiety to Isvolsky. For him this was to be the year of reckoning. This year Europe would reach an acute crisis, which would be aided by Isvolsky's carefully calculated plan of spying and intriguing. He appeared jubilant when, at the beginning of the year, the Russian embassy broke the key to the Italian cypher. As a result of this, it was possible not only to decipher the telegrams sent to the Italian ambassador in Paris, but also to decipher those sent from Rome to the embassies in Berlin and Vienna.⁶⁹

This discovery enabled the calculating Isvolsky to be more accurately informed of activities in the two German capitals. It would also enable him to plan his diplomatic schemes more effectively. He was also quite satisfied that Poincare still supported him in his schemes by constantly reassuring Isvolsky that France would support Russia in case of an allout conflict.⁷⁰

In February Isvolsky heard news that deeply disturbed him. He had heard that Kokovstov, the minister of finance, would replace him at Paris, and that Isvolsky would be sent to London or Rome. Isvolsky wrote to Sazonov, pleading with him not to remove him. Saying that he

⁶⁸Isvolsky to Sazonov, December 18, 1913, in Marchand, II, 212.

⁶⁹Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, January 1, 1914, in Marchand, II, 220.

⁷⁰Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, January 15, 1914, in Marchand, II, 230.

was indigent, Isvolsky vowed that he would retire from the diplomatic life before he would accept another position. He thought such treatment of a career diplomat was uncalled for.⁷¹ Isvolsky rejoiced when he received his answer from Sazonov. He thanked Sazonov for allowing him to continue his duties at Paris. Moreover, he tried to butterup Sazonov by telling him that he was glad to learn that Sazonov was not leaving the foreign ministry.⁷²

As the spring of 1914 came, Isvolsky concentrated on securing a Anglo-Russian naval and military convention. England had reached an understanding with France on this matter, but had never extended the agreement to include Russia. Isvolsky therefore urged Doumergue, the French prime minister, to contact the English on this matter. Doumergue got in touch with Grey, the British foreign minister, and informed him that such an agreement would be highly desirable. Since France had special military and naval understandings with Russia and England, it seemed possible that these systems could be co-ordinated and complemented by corresponding understandings between Russia and England. After this, there could be technical consultations between the chiefs of staff of the three countries concerned. Isvolsky was successful in this venture, for in May, 1914, agreements were signed between the two countries. Poincare also had a part in this matter, for he urged King George V to adopt better relations with Russia during the king's visit to Paris in April of that year. As Isvolsky said, now that the three powers had concluded their agreements: "The three powers have for their goal, not only the maintaining of "peace", but also the stability of "equilibrium."⁷³

⁷¹Isvolsky to Sazonov, February 12, 1914, in Marchand, II, 238-239.

⁷²Isvolsky to Sazonov, February 25, 1914, in Marchand, II, 240.

⁷³Isvolsky to Sazonov, April 29, 1914, in Marchand, II, 260.

Evidently, the peace and equilibrium were not to last too long, as Isvolsky urged France to grant Bulgaria a loan, so that she would not come under the political influence of either Germany or Austria.⁷⁴ He did these things for his own end; he wanted the Balkan countries to picture Austria and Germany in the worst possible light. As Siebert contends; Isvolsky succeeded in making the people of the Balkan and the world believe that Austria-Hungary had made the incorporation of all the Slavs in the peninsula the major part of her foreign program. He ignored the fact that in Vienna and Budapest, some officials feared that the further incorporation of Slavs would upset the fine balance that had to be maintained to avoid reaching the point of friction which even then threatened to split the monarchy into at least two parts -- the Austrian and the Hungarian. So grave and pressing was this situation that Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir presumptive, devised a political program which would make a triumph of the dual monarchy, with the Slavs forming the third entity. As Siebert says: "Isvolsky was not ignorant of these facts and feared them, but it served his purpose to ignore them. The thing of which he feared was that autonomy for the Austro-Hungarian Slavs would remove them from reach of the Russians, and would strengthen the Danube state."⁷⁵

Soon an occasion presented itself in which the Russians could create trouble in the Balkans. When it was announced that Franz Ferdinand would review troops in Bosnia on June 28, Russian plans seemed to work out very well. Not only was the place, Bosnia, ill-chosen for the review, but also the day, June 28, the Serbian national holiday. As he was riding in a parade, Franz Ferdinand was fatally shot by a fanatic Serb, Gavrilo Princep. This act greatly shook European equilibrium.

⁷⁴Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, May 18, 1914, in Marchand, II, 266.

⁷⁵Siebert, p. 217.

In the month of tension following the Archduke's assassination, there does not seem to be much activity on Isvolsky's part. Nor is there much correspondence from him. In the middle of July, Sazonov sent a note to the Russian ambassadors at London, Paris, and Berlin. Its message was quite blunt: If it was a matter of any moderating action at St. Petersburg, Russia would decline. Sazonov claimed that Russia had gone as far as she could to meet the acceptable Austrian demands. Now Russia would no longer change her position.⁷⁶

At the end of the month, Benckendorf writes to Sazonov that England fears German hegemony in the world more than Austrian hegemony in the Balkans.⁷⁷ And so it was that even though Austria was the principal power concerned in the crisis, Germany became the guilty power in the eyes of the Entente. Germany was the power to be feared, not Austria. Thus, Isvolsky would write St. Petersburg on August 1, 1914. "For political reasons, concerning Italy and principally England, it is very important for France that its mobilization does not precede German mobilization, but be the response to it."⁷⁸ Later, in the same letter, he thought that it would be preferable that the declaration of war came not from France, but from Germany.⁷⁹

By August 6, 1914, all the major European powers were involved in the throes of a violent war. It was the war for which Isvolsky had worked and hoped. It would plunge the entire continent into an abyss. Russia would emerge from this war without having realized her Pan-Slavic aims; rather she would emerge from it in an internal condition of strife and chaos. The war for which Isvolsky had so labored would bring catastrophe, and not glory, to the Russian nation.

⁷⁶ Sazonov to London, Paris, and Berlin, July 14, 1914, in Marchand, II, 280.

⁷⁷ Benckendorf to Sazonov, July 26, 1914, in Marchand, II, 330.

⁷⁸ Isvolsky to St. Petersburg, August 1, 1914, in Marchand, II, 295-296.

⁷⁹ Ibid., II, 297-298.

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