MISCALCULATING ONE’S ENEMIES:  
RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE PREPARES FOR WAR*  

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Military intelligence constitutes one of the “blank spots” in modern Russian history to which historians have devoted increasing attention since the collapse of the Soviet Union. After 1991, a thirst for “the truth” about lesser-known aspects of Russian preparation for war benefited from accessibility to once forbidden materials, spawning a number of studies on Russian and Soviet military intelligence. They have ranged from Mikhail Alekseev’s multi-volume work to a semi-official outline history of Russian external intelligence.1 The genre has recently (and fashionably) embraced the larger concerns of spets-sluzhby, that is, not only intelligence, but also counter-intelligence.2

With the centenary of 1904–05 now upon us, intelligence preparation for the Russo-Japanese War has increasingly figured in various studies.3 And, indeed the Russo-Japanese War presents special

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1 Mikhail Alekseev, *Voennaia razvedka Rossii ot Riurika do Nikolaia II*, 4 vols. in 3 bks. (Moscow, 1998–2001), and E. M. Primakov, *et al*., eds., *Ocherki istorii rossiiskoi vneshnei razvedki*, 5 vols. incomplete (Moscow, 1996–2003). See also, E. Iu. Sergeev and Ar. A. Ulumian, *Ne podlezhit oglaseniiu* (Moscow, 1999). All dates that appear in the main text of this article are rendered according to the Julian calendar, in use by the Russians at the beginning of the twentieth century, and at the time lagging the Gregorian by 13 days.


problems for students of military intelligence. These problems include
the subject of war imminence, or more precisely, the closely-related
issue of surprise, the difficulty of strategic net assessments, especially
as they related to the combat readiness and potential strength of a
fully mobilized Japanese army, and the vagaries associated with gaug-
ing likely enemy intentions. Although histories in the immediate post-
1905 period treated these and related problems, coverage often
suffered from proximity to the events themselves, from the familiar
politics of cover-up, and from a genuine lack of reliable sources.4
For other reasons, the Soviet period did not lend itself to extensive
elicitation of the intelligence picture.5
The purpose of the following remarks is to provide fresh insight
into the above-mentioned fundamental problems on the basis of
archival-based research and a mixture of traditional and new mate-
rials. The thesis holds that the overall quality of Russian military
and naval intelligence about the Japanese was uneven, but probably
better than might have been expected, especially with regard to the
Japanese navy. However, important situational and structural con-

Iaponiei (1904–1905 gg.),” Otechestvennaia istoriia, no. 3 (March 2004), 78–92; Devid
Skhimmel’pennink van der Oie, “Shakpam ne zakidali,” Rodina, no. 1 (January
2004), 34–37; E. V. Dobychina, “Russkaia agenturnaia razvedka na Dal’nom Vostoke
v 1895–1897 godakh,” Otechestvennaia istoriia, no. 4 (August–September 2000), 61–70;
David H. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, “Russian Military Intelligence on the
Manchurian Front, 1904–05,” Intelligence and National Security, XI, no. 1 (January
kerskogo agenta v Iaponii A. I. Rusina (1902–1904 gg.),” Russkoe proshloie, bk. 6
Mezdunarodnaia telegrafnaia svi’az’ i perekhvat korrespondentsii protivnika,”
Otechestvennaia istoriia, nos. 4–5 (1994), 222–27; I. V. Derevianko, comp., “Russkaia
razvedka i kontrrazvedka v voine 1904–1905 gg. Dokumenty,” in Tainy russko-iapons-
skoi voiny (Moscow, 1993); and I. V. Derevianko, “Russkaia agenturnaia razvedka v
4 See, for example, Asiaticus, Reconnaissance in the Russo-Japanese War, tr. J. Mont-
gomery (London, 1908), P. I. Izmest’ev, O nashei tainoi razvedke v minuvshiuu kampaniiu
(Warsaw, 1910), and V. N. Klembovskii, Tainye razvedki, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg,
1911). Several sections within the official military and naval histories of the Russo-
Japanese War treat intelligence aspects of the conflict. See, Voennno-istoricheskaia
komissiia po opisaniiu russko-iaponskoi voiny [hereafter VIK], Russko-iaponskaiia voina
1904–1905 g.g., 9 vols. in 16 bks. (St. Petersburg, 1910–13), I, 154–59, 409–53,
and 752; and Istoriicheskaia komissiia pri Morskom General’nom Shtabe [hereafter
IKpriMGSh], Russko-iaponskaiia voina 1904–1905 g.g., 7 bks. incomplete (St. Petersburg
5 Pioneering, but incomplete studies include K. K. Zvonarev [Zvaigzne], Agenturnaia
razvedka, reprint ed., 2 bks. (Moscow, 2003), and P. F. Ribakov, Razvedivatel’naia
sluzhba v mirnoe i voennoe vremia (Tomsk, 1919).