

Changes in the Ottoman and Russian Empires
AP World History
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The Ottoman and Russian Empires began to decline in the nineteenth century for similar reasons. Both were behind in technology and industry, both had reform programs that had only limited success, and both were involved in wars that drained their treasuries. While they were similar in the reasons for decline, the two empires differed in that Russian leadership was relatively competent and stable during this period, the Ottoman Empire struggled with cultural diversity, and Russia continued to have resistance to change while the Ottoman Empire did not.

Both the Ottoman and Russian Empires were behind the Western world in technology and industry during the nineteenth century. In the Ottoman Empire the janissaries did not want change because they were in control of the old system. Westernizing the country might mean that ideas like freedom and democracy might also come with industrialization and they did not want to bring in any ideas that might jeopardize their power. Russia did not want to industrialize because the Russians favored agriculture, lacked middle class, and a movement called the *Slavophile* movement rejected any Westernization. Russians preferred agriculture to be the emphasis because they worried about food shortages. A middle class is often needed for industrialization because a skilled and educated middle class is typically needed as managers of factories and helps finance industry through their taxes. Russia had money to build factories and lower class workers, but not managers. The *Slavophiles* advocated against western influences and values at the expense of what they considered to be the unique cultural heritage of Russia. Other Russians felt that Russia was lagging desperately behind the west in terms of advancement and industrialization; they felt that Russia had to industrialize and accept western cultural values in order to move itself closer to Europe and secure its footing on the global stage.

The Ottoman Empire's first reform effort was a modernization of the army by Selim III (1789-1807). Selim was overthrown by the janissaries and executed in 1807. In 1826 another leader, Mahmud II, tried similar reforms but eliminated the janissaries before the attempt. The janissaries revolted against Mahmud II in 1826 when he tried to eliminate their positions, and nearly all were killed during the revolt. Without the janissaries, Western ideas of equality, secularization, and modernization were embraced in the Ottoman Empire. These reforms, passed in 1839, were called the Tanzimat Reforms. University education was reorganized and based on Western education standards, training in the European sciences and mathematics was introduced, state-run postal and telegraph systems were established, railroads were built, newspapers were established in major towns, and legal reforms were enacted that eventually led to a constitution based on European models.

The main reforms in Russia were emancipation of the serfs and state support for industrialization. Emancipation of the serfs in Russia came in 1861 under Alexander II. His hope was that by freeing the serfs they would become an industrial labor force instead of being subsistence farmers. State support of industrialization was necessary for Russia because they lacked a middle class and did not have enough wealth to support industry, making it necessary for the government to assist. Not only did Russia sponsor industry by freeing the serfs, they also began to create an extensive railroad network in the 1870s. The Trans-Siberian Railway is an example of one of these new rail networks. The Trans-Siberian Railway allowed goods to be

transported from Russia's European portion all the way to their Pacific territories.

Unfortunately for Russia and the Ottomans, these reform programs had limited success. Competent, trustworthy Ottoman officials in short supply after the elimination of the janissaries. Government became hereditary and incompetence was often the result. Leaders in both countries feared drastic change due to the execution of the Ottoman leader Selim III in 1807 and the Russian leader Alexander II who was assassinated by Slavophiles in 1881. Alexander II's son, Alexander III tightened control and was unwilling to Westernize any further after the death of his father.

One difference between the two empires was that nationalism in Ottoman Empire led to expensive revolts. Cultural and religious differences were just too hard to overcome. The Ottoman Empire contained people from dozens of different ethnic backgrounds, and those people never found anything in common. Eventually Arabs, Serbs, and Greeks all fought for and gained independence from the empire. All these revolutions happened because these people thought that they knew what was best for their country rather than Ottoman Turks.

War with other countries drained the treasuries of both the Ottoman Empire. The most significant war was the Crimean War (1853-1856), fought between the two empires. Russia tried to take over the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea in order to have access to warm water ports. The Ottoman Empire controlled the Crimea and enlisted the help of France and Britain to stop Russia from taking it over. France and Britain helped the Ottoman Empire because they were concerned with the expansion of Russia. The Crimean War is significant because it was one of the reasons why both the Russian and Ottoman Empires declined. It was also the last of the "old fashioned" wars fought with Napoleonic tactics of cavalry charges and cannon. The next major war, World War I, was fought with modern advanced weaponry.

A final difference in the declines of the Ottoman and Russian empires involved leadership. While Ottoman leadership was hurt by the loss of competent government officials, Russian leadership was relatively competent and the monarchy was stable throughout this time period. Most of the tsars in the late 1800's were good leaders from the same family without interruption. The Ottoman sultans barely ruled, relying mainly on the janissaries to help them. The loss of the janissaries interrupted the leadership structure.