

TSARIST RUSSIA

1682 TO 1917

PETER THE GREAT TO RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

ERA SUMMARY – TSARIST RUSSIA

Russia was a large and populous country, but its rise as a European power did not begin until the rule of [Peter the Great](#) in the early 1700s. Being mostly landlocked, it was physically isolated from much of the rest of Europe, and its association with the Orthodox, rather than the Catholic Church, separated it religiously as well. During the late Middle Ages Russia was under the influence of the Mongol Khanates and never experienced either the Reformation or Renaissance that influenced Western Europe. When Peter the Great came to power Russia was a potentially powerful but backward country and he made it his mission to modernize the great state, often against enormous resistance.

Peter the Great—From his youth, Peter was influenced by the inventiveness and sophistication of Western Europe and dedicated his life to the project of forcibly modernizing Russia. He was tyrannical in his determination to remake his backward country into modern nation because he saw clearly that if Russia did not modernize she would be defenseless against foreign enemies. He believed that opening the door to western ways was the key to Russia's survival and he relied heavily on foreigners in his administration.

Peter's primary military objective during his reign was to expand his territory to include warm water ports on both the Baltic and the Black Sea, but he needed to update almost everything from armaments, to uniforms, to fighting tactics in order to resist the modern armies of the west. In the north he fought [Charles XII](#) of Sweden and built his capital of St. Petersburg at the mouth of the Neva River. In the south he fought the Ottomans along the Don River and conquered the port of Azov on the Black Sea.



PETER THE GREAT AS A SHIPWRIGHT IN HOLLAND

The two most important long-term effects of Peter's reign were opening up Russian academies and organizations to western influence and reorganizing the Russian army and civil service under a bureaucracy based on rank. Both of these measures reduced the influence of the noble classes by opening government offices to men based on merit and education. There was

resistance to Peter's modernization program and many setbacks over the following century but the doors to western influences stayed open and the Russia's ties to Western Europe only increased.

Empresses of the 18th century—From the death of Peter the Great, the throne of Russia passed through an irregular succession, and was in the hands of Empresses all but four of the next seventy years. Of the four great Russian Empresses of the 18th century, [Catherine I](#) (1725-27), Anne (1730-40), [Elizabeth of Russia](#) (1741-62), and [Catherine the Great](#) (1762-96), only one, Elizabeth, was a direct decedent of Peter. Anne was a niece rather than a daughter and both Catherines were Empress Consorts without any Romanov blood. All of the Russian Empresses gained their thrones with the support of the army and Palace guards, rather than by regular succession.



CATHERINE II OF RUSSIA (THE GREAT)

During the eighteenth century, Russia continued to modernize. Anne appointed Germans to high offices while Elizabeth favored Austrian influences and made an alliance with Maria Theresa to oppose [Frederick the Great](#) in the [Silesian Wars](#). Both Empresses established extravagant courts at St. Petersburg, patronized the arts, and welcomed western architects, scientists, and writers. Elizabeth was also a patron of the Orthodox Church and granted the Church freedoms it had not enjoyed since Peter the Great. She made her nephew Peter III her heir, and selected a German princess, later known as [Catherine the Great](#), as his wife.

Peter III was greatly influenced by his German upbringing and admired Frederick the Great, so when Elizabeth died, he recalled Russian troops from their alliance with Austria. This so infuriated the rest of the court that he was overthrown in a *coup d'etat* and his wife Catherine, who was popular with the army and imperial guard, given the throne. She ruled for over thirty years, during which time Russia greatly increased in influence and prosperity.

During the reign of Catherine II, Russia increased her territory to the west at the expense of Poland and to the south at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. Russia had been gaining territory against the Ottoman Turks since the age of Peter the Great but during Catherine II's reign Russia annexed the Ukraine and the Crimea and positioned itself to help drive the Ottomans out of the Balkan Peninsula.

Alexander I and the Napoleonic Wars—Catherine's son Paul I only ruled for a short time before he was assassinated by his enemies. His son [Alexander I](#) came to the throne just as Napoleon

assumed power in France and was a resolute enemy of the French Empire. He fought with Austria at Austerlitz and opposed the French in Prussia, but made peace after the devastating battle of Friedland. It was only a temporary peace, however, and a few years later Napoleon invaded Russia. Alexander supported the scorched earth policy of retreat promoted by [Barclay de Tolly](#) even though it was deeply unpopular with many Russian, and after Napoleon's disastrous retreat, led a Russian army to pursue him all the way to Paris.

Alexander I was a prominent figure during the Congress of Vienna and afterward made an alliance with Prussia and Austria dedicated to putting down liberal rebellions throughout Europe. He permitted the resurrection of Poland as a client-state of Russia and appointed his brother Constantine as King of Poland, leaving the Russian Empire to his youngest brother [Nicholas I](#).

Russian Emperors of the 19th Century—The Russian Czars of the later 19th century included [Nicholas I](#) (1825-55), [Alexander II](#) (1855-81), [Alexander III](#) (1881-94), and [Nicholas II](#) (1894-1917). Nicholas I reigned during a turbulent period in Europe and proved to be a conservative defender of autocracy. He supported [Greek Independence](#) during a war with the Turks in the 1820's, but a few years later sent an army to put down a rebellion in Poland. He continued to war with the Turks, but as Russia gained territory the other powers of Europe began to fear its influence. The [Crimean War](#) saw the unlikely alliance between England, France, and Turkey united to limit Russian influence in the Black Sea region. After a monumental struggle, the Russians were defeated and Nicholas I died soon after.

Alexander II reigned for 25 years and is remembered for his attempt to emancipate the serfs and his untimely assassination by a group of anarchists. Emancipation of the serfs was a difficult issue because most serfs had no desire to be separated from the land they had worked for generations. Alexander's decrees were only partially successful and the creation of a class of landless, idle peasants complicated an already difficult political situation. Liberal ideas of government, some bordering on radical, entered Russia from Europe and found favor with students and the intelligentsia. Alexander was more liberal-minded than his father but uprisings and sedition a far greater problem in the late 19th century than they had been earlier. It is said Alexander II had recognized the legitimate concerns of the protesters and developed a constitution for Russia that he intended to put into effect at the time he was assassinated. His death set the cause of reform in Russia back at least a generation.



THE ARREST OF A NIHILIST REVOLUTIONARY

In order to oppose the outrages of the anarchist "Nihilists" and other politically radical groups, Alexander III ruled as a conservative autocrat who championed Orthodoxy and Russian nationalism. He passed laws that persecuted Jews and forcibly "Russianized" minorities in his realms but these measures only fueled the rebellious factions. He avoided war, however, in spite of provocations by Germany and Bulgaria. By the 1890s he began to regard Germany as a threat and made a mutual-defense treaty with France, but he kept Russia at peace for his reign of fourteen years.

Conflicts over Constantinople and the Balkans—It had been the object of all of the Czars since they began fighting the Ottoman Empire, to reconquer Constantinople for Christendom. During Alexander II's reign, Russia fought two successful wars against Turkey, helped to liberate the Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria from the Ottoman Yoke and marched to the walls of Constantinople (Czargrad). But Russia's hopes were again frustrated by a fleet of British warships and behind-the-scenes politicking by Austria and Germany. Once it became clear that the western allies feared a powerful Russia too much to permit the conquest of Turkey and would be willing to go to war to prevent Russian expansion, Russia made an uneasy peace with the Ottomans.

Unfortunately, the outward peace between Russia and Turkey masked a complicated power struggle in the Balkans. Serbia wanted to annex parts of Austria inhabited by Serbs, Russia wanted hegemony over the Balkan Slavs, and Germany wanted to increased influence in the Balkans and the opportunity to establish a port on the Persian Gulf. Britain had complicated entanglements in both Turkey and Egypt, and wanted to keep other powers from dominating former Ottoman territory. To complicate things further there was great ethnic strife in the region and a bitter history of atrocities and forced evacuations. The Balkans were a powder-keg, and in the late 19th century a German statesman accurately predicted "If there is ever another war in Europe, it will come out of some damned silly thing in the Balkans".

Nicholas II and the Russian Revolution—Nicholas II was young and inexperienced when he came to the throne, after the unexpected death of his father. Alexander III had remained an old-fashioned autocrat as modern technology and liberal ideas of government advanced all around him, but Nicholas was unable to hold back the storm. In 1905 a group of demonstrators was gunned down by Russian guards at the Winter Palace, and this scandal was used by anti-government agitators to further inflame rebellions. In the same year Japan dealt Russia a humiliating defeat at Port Arthur that showed how unprepared Russian military technology was for modern warfare.



A RUSSIAN MOB ADVANCING ON THE DUMA, 1917

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Under pressure to create a legislative body, Nicholas II permitted the creation of a "Duma" as an advisory body. Unfortunately the early Dumas were dominated by radicals who could not work effectively with the Emperor, and they had little influence in the government until the outbreak of the Great War. When Nicholas II was deposed during the 1917 Revolution, the Duma was the body by which the Mensheviks, and later the Bolsheviks came to power.

Since the age of Napoleon, Russia had been considered one of the Great powers of Europe and even Britain feared her military strength. But military technology and tactics had changed so much in the late 19th century that Russia's long period of peace in Europe left her utterly unprepared for the conflict thrust upon her in 1914. The Russian army was enormous, but mere numbers could not oppose Germany's efficient and up-to-date war machine. Russia suffered horrendous losses, privations, and loss of territory during the Great War, and with Nicholas II away at the Front, the government at home fell into chaos. After months of protests and near anarchy the Duma appointed a "provisional government" and forced Nicholas II to resign on March 15, 1917. The Russian Revolution was underway.

CHARACTERS – TSARIST RUSSIA

TSARS AND REGENTS

Tsarevna Sophia	1657–1704	Regent of Russia during the youth of Peter the Great. Resisted her brothers reforms.
Peter the Great	1672–1725	Modernized Russia in spite of great resistance. Improved the army. Won coastal territory.
Catherine I	1684–1727	Wife of Peter the Great who rose from a low station to help Peter govern Russia, and succeeded him on his death.
Elizabeth of Russia	1709–1762	Daughter of Peter the Great, who as empress was patron of the arts and the Orthodox Church and opposed Frederick the Great in Prussia.
Catherine the Great	1729–1796	German Princess who was proclaimed Empress after the murder of her husband Peter III. Favored modernization and progressive policies.
Alexander I	1777–1825	Leader of Russia during the Napoleonic Wars.
Nicholas I	1796–1855	Russian czar who ruled Russia as an Autocracy after nearly being overthrown early in his reign.
Alexander II	1818–1881	Nineteenth century Russian Czar who instituted many reforms, but was assassinated by Nihilists.
Alexander III	1845–1894	Ascended to the throne of Russia after the assassination of his father, and rescinded reforms in progress.
Nicholas II	1868–1918	Last Czar of Russia. Forced to resign during the Russian revolution, and eventually executed with his family.

STATESMEN AND GENERALS

John III Sobieski	1629–1696	King of Poland who rescued Vienna from the Ottoman Turks during the <i>Siege of Vienna</i> .
Alexander Menzikoff	1673–1729	Advisor of Peter the Great who rose from a low station to unofficial regent of all of Russia under Peter's successor.
Charles XII	1682–1718	Arch-rival of Peter the Great. Defeated the Russians in several battles before falling at the <i>Battle of Pultowa</i> .
Alexander Suvorov	1729–1800	Renowned general who won victories for Russia against Turks, Napoleon, and Polish rebels.
Gregory Potemkin	1739–1791	Leading minister of Catherine the Great who was influenced by 'enlightenment' ideas. Famous for building 'Potemkin villages' along Dneiper river.
Barclay de Tolly	1761–1818	Leading Russian General during the Napoleonic Wars. Mastermind of the 'scorched earth' policy.

SCIENTISTS, EXPLORERS, AUTHORS

Vitus Bering	1681–1741	Russian explorer who had boats built in Siberia, explored the North Seas, and discovered Alaska.
Carolus Linnaeus	1707–1778	Great Taxonomist, who initiated naming conventions and classification of plants and animals.
Gustav Kirchhoff	1824–1887	Known for his work in electrical circuit and spectroscopy. Discovered black body radiation.
Leo Tolstoy	1828–1910	19th century Russian novelist, author of <i>War and Peace</i> , known for his dedication to social reform, asceticism, and pacifism.
Gregory Rasputin	1869–1916	Controversial faith-healers and advisor to the Tsarina, wife of Nicholas II, during the Great War.

PRE-REVOLUTIONARY REBEL LEADERS

Mazeppa	1644–1709	Polish exile who became the leader of the Cossacks, under Peter the Great.
Yemelyan Pugachev	1740–1775	Leader of a wide spread Cossack rebellion against Catherine the Great.
Thaddeus Kosciusko	1746–1817	Polish national who fought in the American Revolution, and later led a Polish uprising against Russia.
Schamyl	1797–1871	Leader of the Muslim tribes of the Caucuses. Led a series of Rebellions against the early 19th century Tsars.
Sophia Perovskya	1853–1881	Leading member of a Nihilist conspiracy which succeeded in assassinating Alexander II.

REVOLUTIONARY LEADERS

Vladimer Lenin	1870–1924	Communist revolutionary and leader of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Organized October Revolution and established Soviet Union.
Leon Trotsky	1879–1940	Prominent Bolshevik organizer, author, leader of the Red army and politburo member. Eventually split with Stalin and was assassinated.
Nikolai Bukharin	1888–1938	Bolshevik author and organizer. Powerful member of politburo and editor of "Pravda" communist party newsletter. Prominent victim of Stalin's purges in the 1930s.
Alexander Kerensky	1881–1970	Prominent leader of the February Revolution of 1917 that overthrew the Czar and established a moderate socialist government. Overthrown by Bolsheviks in October Revolution.
Joseph Stalin	1878–1953	Leader of the Soviet Union from the death of Lenin to the 1950s. Ruthless dictator who established slave-labor camps and purged all opposition.

TIMELINE – TSARIST RUSSIA

18TH CENTURY RUSSIA

- 1682** [Peter the Great](#) assumes the throne of Russia
- 1689** [Peter](#) stages a rebellion to take power from his [regent older sister](#).
- 1695-96** [Russo Turkish Wars](#): Azov Campaign, Russia captures Azov, gains access to Black Sea.
- 1697** [Peter's](#) expedition to Western Europe cut short by a rebellion against him in Russia.
- 1700-1709** [Great Northern War](#): [Peter the Great](#) vs. [Charles XII](#)
- 1704** Second Battle of Narva: Russians acquire a Baltic port, four years after disastrous first attempt.
- 1709** Battle of Poltava: Russians win decisive victory in Ukraine, Charles XII flees to the Ottoman Empire.
- 1703** City of St. Petersburg is established on the marshy banks of the Neva River.
- 1710-11** [Russo Turkish Wars](#): Pruth River Campaign, Ottoman victory over Russia, loss of Azov
- 1714** [Peter I](#) issues decree requiring modern compulsory education for all children of nobility.
- 1718** [Alexei](#), son of [Peter](#) and heir to the throne, tried for treason and executed.
- 1722** [Peter](#) overhauls Russian civil service administration, implements many modernizing reforms.
- 1733** [Vitus Bering](#) leads the "Great Northern Expedition" to map Russian territory in Siberia.
- 1741-62** Reign of [Elizabeth of Russia](#), daughter of Peter the Great.
- 1753** Elizabeth orders expansion and remodel of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg.
- 1759** Russian forces inflict devastating defeat on [Frederick the Great](#) at the Battle of Kunersdorf.
- 1762** [Peter III](#) ascends throne but is overthrown by a palace coup, led by his wife [Catherine the Great](#).
- 1768-74** [Russo Turkish Wars](#): Russians win control of Ukraine, Crimea, northern Caucasus.
- 1764** [Catherine](#) confiscates church property, closes monasteries, exiles 20,000 "Old Believers" who object to reforms to Siberia.
- 1772** First Partition of Poland, Russia annexes White Russia (Belarus), and Livonia (Latvia).
- 1795** [Thaddeus Kosciusko's](#) rebellion leads to Third Partition of Poland. Russia absorbs Lithuania and makes Poland a client-state.
- 1796** [Paul I](#) ascends to the throne on the death of [Catherine the Great](#).
- 1798** [French Revolution](#): Russian general [Alexander Suvorov](#) drives the French out of Northern Italy.

19TH CENTURY

- 1801** [Alexander I](#) ascends to the throne after the assassination of his father [Paul I](#).
- 1809** Duchy of Finland is annexed to Russia after Finnish War with Sweden .
- 1807** [Alexander I](#) signs Treaty of Tilsit, making peace with France, after costly Friedland campaign.
- 1811** [Russo Turkish Wars](#): Russia annexes Moldavia from Ottoman Empire.
- 1812** [Napoleon's](#) retreat from Moscow: Russia's scorched earth campaign devastates French army.

- 1815 [Alexander I](#) plays a key role in the defeat of [Napoleon](#) and the **Congress of Vienna**.
- 1821-32 **Greco-Turkish Wars**: Russian, England, and France help Greece win independence from Ottomans.
- 1825 Decembrist revolt, seeking to overthrow the Tsar, alienates [Nicholas I](#) from modernist reforms.
- 1829 Treaty with the Ottomans gives Russia access to the Black Sea and the Danube, and makes Russia the protector of Balkan Slavs.
- 1853-56 **Crimean War**: France and England help Ottoman Empire resist further expansion of Russia.
- 1855-1881 Reign of [Alexander II](#), reformer and liberator.
- 1859 Chechnya and Dagestan surrender to Russia, after long war in the Caucasus led by [Imam Shamil](#).
- 1861 [Alexander II](#) abolishes serfdom, reducing the power of the landed gentry.
- 1862 Nihilist movement, advocating anarchy, communism, and radical remaking of society gains popularity among Russian intellectuals.
- 1863 Uprisings in Poland put down with great brutality. Poland becomes a province of Russia.
- 1863 Separatist movements crushed in Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland. Native languages banned.
- 1869 [Leo Tolstoy](#) publishes "War and Peace"; begins pacifist political movement.
- 1878 **Russo Turkish Wars**: Bulgaria is freed from Ottoman control. the independence of Serbia and Romania are recognized.
- 1866-80 [Alexander III](#) survives 5 assassination attempts between 1866 and 1880.
- 1881 Assassination of [Alexander III](#) by anarchist group set back reforms in Russia for a generation.
- 1892 Russia makes military alliance with France in order to oppose Germany.

20TH CENTURY

- 1894 [Nicholas II](#) ascends to the throne of Russia
- 1902 [Vladimir Lenin](#) publishes "What is To Be Done", the manifesto of the Bolshevik party.
- 1904 Russian navy is humiliated and annihilated in the **Russo Japanese War**.
- 1905 Political and social unrest throughout Russia organized by political activists.
- 1906 Russian constitution enacted and legislative body convened as a response to revolutions of 1905.
- 1906 Worker's councils, called "Soviets" are organized throughout Russia by political activists.
- 1912-13 **Servo-Bulgarian Wars**: Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria drive the Ottomans out of Thrace and Albania.
- 1914 Russia declares war on Austria on behalf of its ally Serbia. Poor organization of war effort leads to domestic crises throughout Russia.
- 1917 **February Revolution**: [Nicholas II](#) abdicates the throne after a rebellion breaks out in St. Petersburg.
- 1917 **October Revolution**: Bolsheviks seize control of the government and exile moderate political opponents.
- 1918 Lenin makes peace with Germany. **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** cedes control of much eastern territory.
- 1917-22 **Russian Civil War**: Bolsheviks prevail over pro-imperial and anti-communist "white" Russian forces.

RECOMMENDED READING – TSARIST RUSSIA

CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS *

Haaren - <u>Famous Men of Modern Times</u>	<u>Peter the Great</u> to <u>Charles XII of Sweden</u> (2)
Van Bergen - <u>The Story of Russia</u>	<u>Peter the Great</u> to <u>Russia Loses Her Prestige</u> (14)
Morris - <u>Historical Tales - Russian</u>	<u>Boyhood of Peter the Great</u> to <u>The Sea Fight with Japan</u> (25)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

De Bogory - <u>When I was a Boy in Russia</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Birkhead - <u>Heroes of Modern Europe</u>	<u>Peter the Great</u> (1)
Syngé - <u>Growth of the British Empire</u>	<u>Russia</u> (1)
Wood - <u>Boy's Book of Battles</u>	<u>Balaclava</u> to <u>Tsushima</u> (2)
Dole - <u>History of Russia</u>	<u>Peter the Great and the Sea</u> to <u>The Reign of Alexander III</u> (15)
Morris - <u>Historical Tales - Russian</u>	<u>Boyhood of Peter the Great</u> to <u>The Sea Fight with Japan</u> (25)
Morris - <u>Nations of Europe and the Great War</u>	<u>Russia and the Crimean War</u> to <u>Turkey and the Balkan States</u> (2)
Abbott - <u>Peter the Great</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Tchernavin - <u>I Speak for the Silent</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Tchernavin - <u>Escape from the Soviets</u>	<i>entire book</i>

* Level I and II Study Questions are based on **Core** Reading Assignments.