

Topic 7.1

Shifting Power After 1900

You Will Learn To:

- Identify declining land-based and maritime empires in the early 1900s.
- Explain how internal and external pressures contributed to the collapse of land-based and maritime empires in the early 1900s.
- Identify declining empires that gave way to new states by the start of the 1900s.
- Describe how a political crisis in Mexico led to its political and social order being challenged by a revolution.

In the mid-1800s, the Qing, Ottoman, and Russian empires began undergoing political and social changes that intensified internal and external pressures put upon them. These pressures included:

- governmental corruption and inefficiencies.
- social and economic pressures.
- political and military pressures.

These and other factors contributed to the collapse of these land-based empires in the early 1900s.

Elsewhere, such as in Mexico, people challenged the political and social order, leading to attempted governmental reforms. In addition, a new political and social order emerged in former Soviet states as the USSR collapsed at the end of the 20th century.

The fall of the Qing Dynasty

Internal and external pressures

In the mid-1800s, western powers seeking to expand their trade and colonial empires targeted China. Western powers pressured the Qing Dynasty through:

- military maneuvers, including British actions during the Opium Wars.
- economic demands from unequal treaties that opened China to international trade.
- foreign political pressures from the use of Chinese ports and rivers.

After the Opium War, unequal treaties between China and European countries destabilized the Chinese economy. By the late 19th century, external forces had significantly impacted the Qing government's control over political groups that increasingly opposed foreign influences.

By 1895, Japan had increased its influence over Korea after defeating China in the First Sino-Japanese War.



Chinese surrender of Pyongyang, Korea to Japanese forces, 1895

In 1896, China permitted Russia's military to occupy the Liaodong Peninsula as a result of a secret and unequal treaty. Following this, Russia's influence in the traditionally Qing territory of Manchuria grew.



Russian and Japanese influence in Asia, 1900

Russia's troop mobilization in Manchuria secured Russian control over the city of Mukden, which enabled them to complete construction of the South Manchuria Railway. After this, the Qing Dynasty continued to face challenges due to similar external pressures.

Impact of the Boxer Rebellion

Between 1899 and 1901, a surge of Chinese nationalism during the Boxer Rebellion interrupted imperial ambitions in China. Qing leadership supported the Boxers, who aimed to eliminate foreign influence and restore the dynasty's power. However, the Qing Dynasty—weakened by corruption and economic struggles—could not control the Boxer Rebellion or its resulting chaos.

Outraged by Boxer actions, foreign powers within China allied during the rebellion to retain control of Chinese markets and resources.



During the rebellion, Russia utilized its Trans-Siberian Railway to mobilize troops to defend eastern territories. By 1900, the coalition of foreign powers had suppressed the rebellion, leaving the Qing struggling to maintain control of the dying empire, which collapsed in 1911.



Foreign multinational force attacks the Boxers in Beijing, 1900

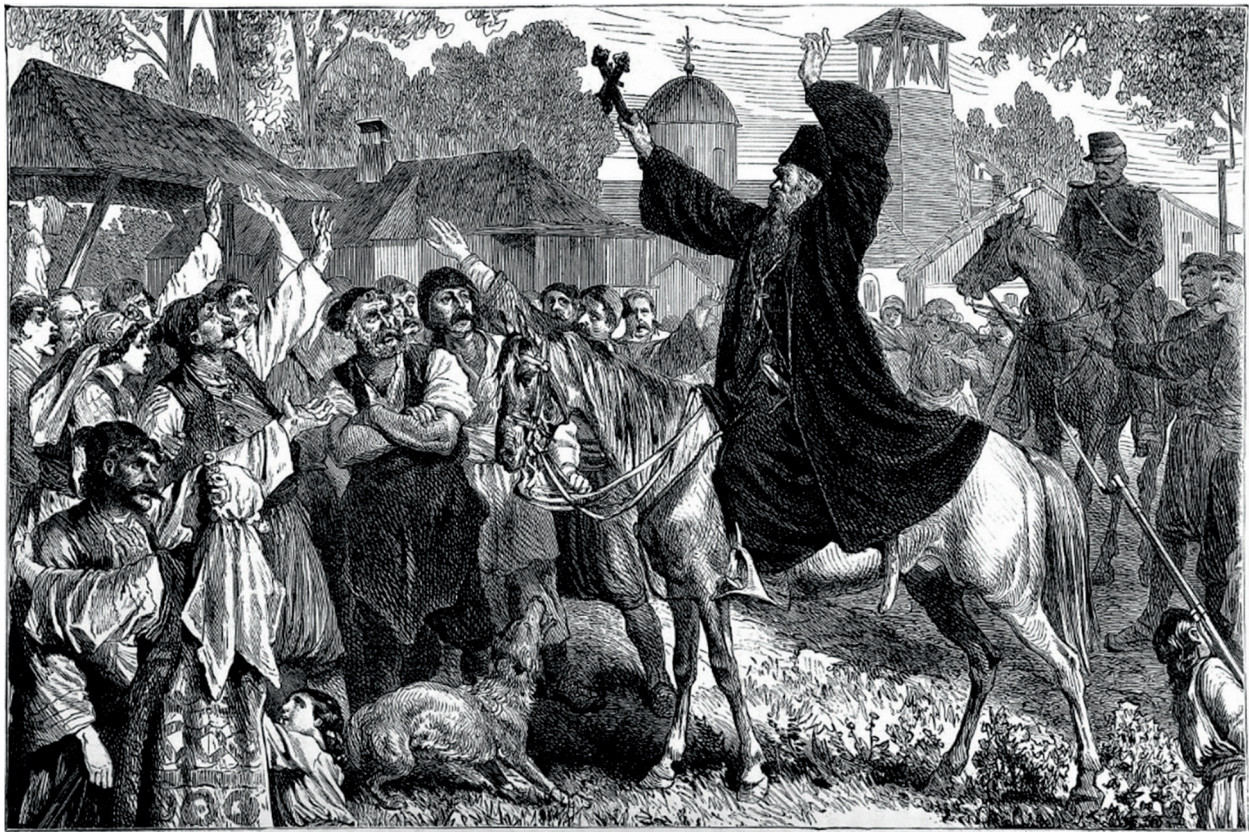
The fall of the Ottoman Empire

Internal and external causes

Like the Qing, the Ottoman Empire's troubles stemmed from internal rebellions and external enemies, primarily Russia. By the mid-19th century, the Ottoman Empire was significantly declining, earning it the title "sick man of Europe."

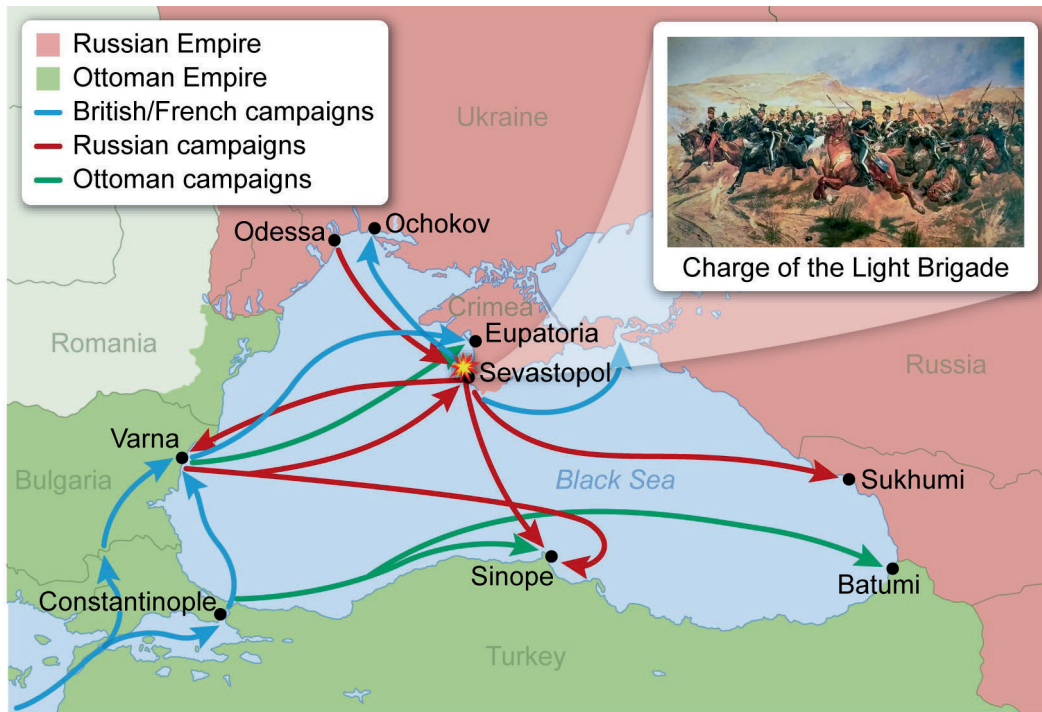
The combination of pressures led the Ottoman Empire to a century of near-constant warfare against its subjects and foreign powers, weakening the empire. Nationalist and separatist movements were sources of most conflicts in surrounding areas, including:

- Egypt, Palestine, and Libya in the Islamic world.
- Serbia, Greece, Hungary, Bosnia, Albania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Macedonia in the Balkans.



Bulgarian priest preaching insurrection against the Ottomans

The Ottomans became so financially and militarily weak that they were exposed as a second-rate power, despite being on the winning side of the Crimean War.



Crimean War, 1853–1856

The Ottomans' loss in the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) further dissolved the empire, as Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Montenegro gained independence via the Treaty of San Stefano.



Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, 1807–1920

The gradual weakening of the Ottoman Empire contributed to the Annexation Crisis of 1908, during which Austria-Hungary took control of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
by Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph

By the early 1900s, social disorder was inspiring political groups—like the Young Turks—to challenge traditional Ottoman authority in Turkey. In 1908, the Young Turk Revolution succeeded in abolishing the authoritarian monarchy and replacing it with a constitutional government.

In 1912, the Ottoman disintegration continued after the empire lost the First Balkan War, which was largely driven by feelings of nationalism throughout the Balkans.



Armed ethnic Albanians from Mirdita participating in the Albanian Revolt of 1912

The combination of nationalist revolts, external wars, and financial stress left leaders incapable of addressing social, economic, and political issues that contributed to the Ottoman Empire's decline.

Impact of the German-Ottoman Alliance and WWII

On the eve of WWI, European statesmen scrambled to secure alliances to bolster their chances of victory. In 1914, Germany entered into a political and military alliance with the Ottoman Empire, despite its obvious weaknesses, including its failure to modernize its military.

Ottoman leaders initially viewed the treaty with the Central Powers favorably, but it led to the Empire's collapse after the defeat of the Axis Powers in 1918. Ottoman authorities were forced to accept the Treaty of Sèvres in 1922, completing the breakup of the Empire. Most of its Middle Eastern territories became mandates of European powers.



European Middle Eastern Mandates, 1923–1932

The fall of the Russian Empire

Internal and external challenges to Czarist rule

Like the Qing and Ottoman Empires, Russia also faced pressures that led to its collapse. As Russia industrialized in the late 1800s, factory workers and peasants remained politically and economically repressed. In response, revolutionary parties emerged at the turn of the 20th century, including:

- the Social Democrats, who supported the struggle of industrial laborers against Russian elites.
- the Populists, who established a tradition of political violence.
- the Social Revolutionaries, who became the dominant terrorist faction.

Considered extreme by conservative Russians, these parties promoted Marxist ideology and were encouraged by lower class discontent with czarist rule.

Additionally, Japan pressured the Czar over the territory of Manchuria. Russia occupied Mukden and the Liaodong Peninsula, but Japan's growing influence over Korea in 1896 threatened the Czar's plans for imperial expansion.



Russian and Japanese influence in Asia, 1900

With Russia mobilizing troops within Manchuria via the Trans-Siberian Railway, the stage was set for a future conflict with Japan. By 1904, Russia's imperial ambitions ignited the Russo-Japanese War, in which the modernized Japanese military humiliated the Czar's armed forces, reducing Russia's international prestige.



Japanese attack at Russia's Port Arthur naval base on the Liaodong Peninsula

Russia's defeat and subsequent acceptance of the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905 worsened the effects of the internal political pressures on Czar Nicholas II. In 1905, the Czar's relations with Russia's factory workers deteriorated after the Imperial Guard massacred demonstrators in St. Petersburg.



Imperial troops stationed outside the Winter Palace on Bloody Sunday

Afterwards, the number of worker strikes increased, and Russia's inflation rate rose. With internal pressures growing in 1905, Marxist groups ignited a revolution.



Russia's February Revolution, 1905

Pressured by worker strikes, peasant unrest, and military mutinies, Nicholas issued the October Manifesto, which led to establishing the Duma and enacting the Russian Constitution of 1906.



Russians celebrating Czar Nicholas II's October Manifesto depicted in "17 October 1905" by Ilya Yefimovich Repin

Impact of WWI

On the eve of WWI, Nicholas received conflicting reports from his advisors regarding the severity of domestic turmoil at the time of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination. Nicholas also remained unaware of his government's vulnerability to social unrest if the country was dragged into war.

Despite efforts to prevent WWI, Nicholas defended Russia's Orthodox and Slavic cousins in Serbia against Austrian aggression, initiating his reign's collapse. Nicholas' commitment of troops on behalf of Serbia triggered a series of military alliances that plunged Europe into war.



Czar Nicholas II in a WWI propaganda poster

Despite Russia's large population, its industrial progress trailed that of western nations, which left the Czar's army inadequately supplied for war. As a result, the army suffered heavy losses due to death and desertion, intensifying an already strained situation.

By 1917, Nicholas had lost control of portions of the army as riots and demonstrations quickly evolved into open rebellion. Nicholas had failed to address the internal economic pressures that fueled a Communist Revolution.

Realizing the seriousness of the situation, Nicholas renounced the throne on March 15, 1917, bringing 300 years of imperial rule to an end. Nicholas was overthrown and placed under house arrest, and revolutionaries eventually assassinated the Czar and his entire family.



Assassination of Czar Nicholas II and his family
by Social Revolutionaries, July 17, 1918

The Soviet Union gives way to new states

The brutality that gave birth to the USSR's communist government began with the Red Terror and the Great Purge. Repressive measures, such as using gulags (forced labor camps) and imprisonment of political opponents, remained a feature of Soviet rule until the USSR's collapse.

By 1988, as the USSR weakened under Cold War pressures, Soviet republics began demanding greater autonomy after decades of political repression. The repression that had previously empowered the communist government became a rallying point for Soviet citizens.

The impassioned Soviet populace contributed to creating new states, from Estonia to Moldova, replacing the USSR's empire in Eastern Europe. By 1991, all former Soviet Republics had gained their independence.



Regional categorization of former Soviet states that gained independence in 1990–1991

The Mexican Revolution challenged the existing political and social order

Russia's laborers and Communist Party leaders asserted that their revolution was necessary to overthrow the corrupt government and improve workers' lives. In 1910, the Mexican Revolution began based on a similar rationale.

Mexico faced a political crisis stemming from the corrupt dictatorial government of Porfirio Díaz. Díaz's government also permitted the exploitation of workers, widening the divide between the upper and lower classes.

On the eve of Mexico's national election, Díaz imprisoned his political rival, Francisco Madero, who then wrote the Plan of San Luis Potosí, encouraging his countrymen to rebel.



Francisco "Pancho" Villa, Mexican Revolutionary, 1914

By 1911, revolutionary leaders like Emiliano Zapata and Francisco "Pancho" Villa helped overthrow Díaz in the early phase of the Mexican Revolution, which lasted until 1920.

Things to remember

The long-standing land-based Ottoman, Russian, and Qing empires collapsed because of internal and external factors. Internal factors included:

- governmental corruption and inefficiencies.
- the rise of opposing political parties.
- social and economic pressures.
- nationalist revolts.

External factors contributing to the empires' collapses included:

- political and military pressures from foreign adversaries.
- economic demands from unequal treaties.
- impacts stemming from WWI.

Throughout the 1900s, political crises affected other areas, including:

- the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), which created a new political order aimed at improving the lives of lower-class citizens and ending government corruption.
- the USSR's collapse in the early 1990s, leading to new independent states that replaced the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe.

7.1 Check for Understanding

- 1. Which of the following events of the late 1890s contributed most to destabilizing the Qing Dynasty?**
 - A. The Opium War
 - B. The Boxer Rebellion
 - C. The Russo-Japanese War
- 2. How did the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) impact the Ottoman Empire?**
 - A. The empire recognized the independence of several states within the Balkans.
 - B. The empire was exposed as a second-rate power despite being on the winning side.
 - C. The empire increased its control over its Middle Eastern and North African territories.
- 3. At the turn of the twentieth century, which of the following empires contributed to the degradation of Czar Nicholas II's authority?**
 - A. The British Empire
 - B. The Ottoman Empire
 - C. The Japanese Empire
- 4. After the Soviet Union (USSR) collapsed, new independent republics were established primarily in**
 - A. East Asia.
 - B. Eastern Europe.
 - C. Western Europe.
- 5. Which of the following individuals wrote the Plan of San Luis Potosí in 1910?**
 - A. Porfirio Díaz
 - B. Pancho Villa
 - C. Francisco Madero