

Russia on
international
scale in
the early
19th
century

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INTRODUCTION

the reforming impulse at the Russian court did not die out after 1803, Peter the Great's conquests in the early eighteenth century had brought Russia into the European state system.

- in 1803, when hostilities reignited between France and Great Britain, Alexander hoped to be able to act as a peacemaker and tried above all to restrain Napoleon's expansionist policies.
- in 1804, Relations between Russia and France took a sharp turn for the worse when Napoleon seized the Duke of Enghien from a neighbouring neutral country and had him summarily executed for plotting the overthrow of the French government. Soon after, Russia joined a new coalition against Napoleonic France, which led to war the following year and a major defeat of Austrian and Russian forces at Austerlitz.
- in 1806 After further defeats, abandonment by his allies, and the opening of hostilities between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, Alexander saw no option but withdrawal from the war largely on terms dictated by Napoleon in the summer of 1807 at Tilsit (town on the Niemen river in Poland.)
- The famous accords signed at Tilsit had the practical effect of dividing Europe between France and Russia and also committed Russia to adhere to the continental blockade through which France hoped to undermine British commerce and finances.

MIKHAIL SPERANSKII'S REFORMS

Concern about the inadequacies of the Russian political order continued. Alexander seemed to see the problem as essentially one of personnel, a shortage of honest and effective administrators. Other however recognized the need as well for structural changes.

One of these was Mikhail Speranskii, a priest's son, who rose from humble origins to the pinnacle of Russian government. A brilliant seminary student and teacher, he became secretary to a highly placed aristocrat, served in the Ministry of Internal Affairs early in Alexander's reign, and by 1808 had risen to the position of State Secretary, the leading official for domestic affairs.



MIKHAIL SPERANSKII'S REFORMS

- Speranskii convinced the tsar to introduce exams for promotion to senior government ranks, a step that many noble officials did not like
- Speranskii also proposed legal and financial reforms and achieved some success in stabilizing the currency and increasing tax revenues. His financial measures included a temporary tax on the nobility.
- The most sweeping changes proposed by Speranskii touched political and administrative organization and included a plan for the separation of powers patterned on Montesquieu's ideas.
- He proposed to divide the Senate into separate administrative and judicial hierarchies and to create a third branch of government, the legislative, with an assembly elected on a narrow franchise.

MIKHAIL SPERANSKII'S REFORMS

Alexander ultimately refused to approve major changes and implemented only the plan for the State Council, which was established in 1810 together with a reorganization of government ministries.

By this time, the clouds of war were again gathering as Napoleon prepared the invasion of Russia. This was not the time to launch a political experiment that could have compromised lines of authority.

Moreover, **Speranskii was unpopular with the nobility because of his crack-down on incompetence and support of financial policies harmful to noble interests.** The nobility supplied Russia's military leadership and officer corps, and to solidify support for the regime in the face of the impending challenge, Alexander sacrificed Speranskii's policies and indeed Speranskii himself, whom he exiled to Siberia on trumped-up charges just before the invasion by Napoleon's armies.

NAPOLEON'S INVASION

- Napoleon's Grande Armée entered Russia in June 1812. Its forces numbered nearly half a million, The size of Napoleon's army also presented grave problems of supply, especially after the Russian generals decided to withdraw deep into the country while stripping away supplies and housing in the path of Napoleon's advance.
- Russian generals, particularly Mikhail Kutuzov, had learned in earlier encounters with the French that they could not expect to win, Their hope lay in the exhaustion of the Grande Armée as failing supplies and disease steadily reduced its numbers, morale, and fitness. Alexander courageously supported this strategy
- The Russians could not surrender Moscow without a fight and decided to make a stand Borodino, a village in the western reaches of Moscow province. This epochal battle proved costly for both sides, but especially so for the French. Although the Russians pulled back (to save what remained of their army) and left open the road to Moscow, Napoleon's occupation of the ancient capital brought no resolution to the conflict.



NAPOLEON'S INVASION

- Moreover, as Napoleon reached the heights above the city's western outskirts and waited for the 'boyars' to greet him in submission, He only saw the fire lit by the Muscovites, left many traces of ruin in the capital, It was the middle of September by the time Napoleon entered Moscow, a devastated city without adequate shelter for his troops; foraging parties sent out of the town encountered fire from Russian troops, Alexander steadfastly refused to negotiate.
- A month after its arrival, the Grande Armée departed from Moscow, moving out towards the south in the hopes of retreating through a region untouched by the Russian scorched-earth policy. But Russian forces met the invaders at Malojaroslavets and forced them back onto the path of destruction by which they had entered the country, helping to turn what might have been an orderly withdrawal into an increasingly desperate and disorganized flight
- Napoleon himself abandoned the army to its fate and made a dash for France to raise new forces. Only about 10 per cent of the original invading army was able to escape from Russia in good order. And so it was The end of the Napoleonic empire in Europe in sight.





Areas of Moscow destroyed by the fire in red

AFTER THE WAR

- In Russia itself, the same conflict being played out on the European stage between dynastic (and in some cases still feudalistic) regimes and the proponents of democratic nationalism was repeated on a smaller scale.
- The stunning victory over Napoleonic France resolved the earlier doubts on the part of most of Russia's leaders about the country's administration and social system
- This mood accompanied a European-wide change in political thinking away from the rationalist, mechanistic ideas of the eighteenth century towards organic theories of society on the model enunciated by Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, and Friedrich Karl von Savigny. De Maistre, a refugee from Napoleonic Europe who spent many years in Russia, was able to exert a direct personal influence on Russian statesmen

AFTER THE WAR

- The post-Napoleonic settlement for the European world associated with the name of the Congress of Vienna created a long period of general peace for the continent despite continuing stormy calls for democracy and national self-determination and the occasional limited conflicts they generated
- Towards the end of Alexander's reign, the principles of the system—the legitimacy of established governments and territorial integrity of existing countries—were tested by the rebellion of Greeks within the Ottoman Empire. Many Russians were sympathetic to the Greek cause. Catherine the Great had even worked out a plan in her time to resurrect Greece under the rulership of her grandson Constantine
- during Alexander's reign, Russia supported the conservative European regimes in resisting popular aspirations throughout the continent for greater political participation and national expression

AFTER THE WAR

- The reform impulse died after 1820. Vigorous opposition from the nobility finally convinced the tsar of the hopelessness of attempting a change in the status of the serfs.
- **serf:** The status of many peasants under feudalism, specifically relating to manorialism. It was a condition of bondage, which developed primarily during the High Middle Ages in Europe and lasted in some countries until the mid-19th century. Those who occupied a plot of land were required to work for the lord of the manor who owned that land, and in return were entitled to protection, justice, and the right to exploit certain fields within the manor for their own subsistence. They were often required not only to work on the lord's fields, but also his mines, forests, and roads.
- Since ideas of constitutional order were linked in the minds of reformers with the necessity for emancipation of the serfs, opposition to serf reform doubled as opposition to constitutionalism. It seems, moreover, that Alexander had lost interest in the idea of a constitution for Russia after dealing with the increasingly refractory Polish diet (Sejm).

AFTER THE WAR

- Some reforms were implemented in the post-war period of Alexander's reign, but they were of an entirely different kind; they represented an accommodation and adaptation to the given political and social system.
- The most prominent such reform was the creation of military settlements , subsidies to families, government-sponsored health care and birthing services, and regulation of community hygiene.
- Military settlements lasted until the Great Reforms of the 1860s.
- the Ministry of Education was combined in a dual government department with the Directorate of Spiritual Affairs (the former Holy Synod).
- In 1819 a member of this institution's governing committee, Mikhail Magnitskii, visited Kazan University and discovered to his horror that professors were teaching about the rights of citizens and the violence of warfare. Although Magnitskii could think of no better recommendation than closing down the university, Alexander decided instead to appoint him rector with powers to reform the institution. Magnitskii promptly dismissed eleven professors and shifted the curriculum towards heavy doses of religion and the classics, a direction that was subsequently followed at St Petersburg University and others

(QUESTIONS)

- what happened in 1804, in Relations between Russia and France?.
- who is Mikhail Speransky?.
- why Speranskii was unpopular with the nobility ?.
- when did Napoleon's Grande Armée entered Russia?and how many of his forces? .
- what is the status of the serfs?.