

# Was the collapse of tsardom inevitable in russia by 1914



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In 1914, Russia had the largest army in the world, the largest air force and a respectable naval fleet. Yet, this military powerhouse had just a few years back suffered a terrible setback with the loss of their Baltic fleet at the hands of the Japanese at Tsushima. During the First World War, Russia lost more than three million people, close to 2% of their entire population and had a further five million wounded. Three years later came the collapse of tsardom. Had the wars proved too much for the Tsar to handle?

The question suggests that the collapse was a done deal as of the year 1914 and there was nothing anybody or anything could have done to prevent its collapse. In this essay, we will attempt to weigh the factors that seemed to suggest that tsardom was doomed by 1914 against those which seem to suggest otherwise in order to make a valued judgment on just how assured the collapse of tsardom by the said year is, if even at all. The situation certainly looked bleak for tsardom since Nicholas' ascension in 1894.

Against a backdrop of political confusion caused in no less part due to the conflicting approaches in the handling of state matters by the two previous Tsars, Nicholas had to lead a country, which had been unceremoniously thrust upon him due to the sudden passing of his father due to kidney failure. There was an increasing number of the middle class who had become enlightened over the years to liberal ideas of democracy and constitutional representation such as those developing in other parts of Europe.

These people wanted to see Russia move in the direction of some of constitutional representation and felt betrayed when with the sudden reversal of policies from the seemingly forward moving policies of Alexander

II to the sudden repression by Alexander III. With Nicholas II seeming to favour the more traditional school of thought, resentment grew among these people. One such policy was Russification which restricting the influence of the national minorities with the aim of uniting all of them under the great banner of a Russian identity.

However, the discrimination that followed caused great suffering to many such as the Poles and Ukrainians through the banning of their national languages and attempt at diminishing their culture. The Jews were known to have suffered the greatest. Already unpopular with their being labeled as 'Christ killers' as well as being infamous as moneylenders, they were heavily persecuted often being the target of the pogroms. The tightening of such controls on the people led to the alienation of a large number of national minorities who resented the move.

The incongruence of Tsarist policies made them confused and frustrated and this in no small part gave rise to greater opposition to tsardom with the growth of more organised reformists and revolutionaries. In the years leading up to 1905, Nicholas II had indeed caused much unhappiness amongst the national minorities and educated middle class. The result of this were inherent splits in the country and growing dissatisfaction which seemed to point towards the impending collapse of tsardom in the near future. The events that led however were more serious.

With Russia's costly battle with the Japanese and failure to bring victory home, there was great humiliation having lost to a supposedly inferior island nation. This contributed to the buildup of tension leading up to the 1905

revolution. The Bloody Sunday incident, which was essentially a petition to the Tsar by groups of workers and their families to relieve them of their desperate conditions but ended in a violent dismissal with 200 marchers killed and hundreds injured gravely damaged the image of Nicholas II as the anointed protector and ruler of the country.

Following the disorder that followed and the Potemkin mutiny, the Tsar was forced to issue the October Manifesto in the face of such united opposition. The revolution revealed the cracks in the system and showed that in the face of pressure, even the 'great' Tsar had to look towards appeasement. Compared to the unquestionable authority and absolute respect held by previous Tsars from the masses for the past 300 years, Nicholas's reign seemed to be look bleak and it would not have been far-fetched to have considered a possible end to tsardom at that point in time.

However, from 1894 to 1904, the fact that there was little incident probably suggested that the institution albeit having a number of unpopular policies was largely able to contain any blatant show of resistance and could still keep their control of Russia through the operations of the Okhrana and support from the military and the nobles. The unrest in 1905 was also put down rather easily with the support of the military.

Moreover, the Tsar had essentially repealed the October Manifesto with the promulgation of the Fundamental Laws in April 1906. Had the Tsar seen any legitimate threat to his power, he would not have so easily reasserted his absolute authority. This serves to support the view that as long as the Tsar could keep the 'ruling' elite happy and maintain the support of the military,

he would not be greatly threatened by the middle class which he had suppressed with military support following the 1905 revolution.

We should also note that while unhappiness towards the Tsar was growing, so too was the economy under the guidance Sergei Witte and Peter Stolypin. Russia saw the securing of French loans under Witte and saw the proposed build up of a strong peasantry by Stolypin who saw it as a way to restore the sense of security of the masses since peasants made up 80% of Imperial Russia. These progressive actions served to dampen the unhappiness towards the Tsar. Alas, both characters were sidelined from future events but the result of their efforts was not.

The direction these two men were taking would have strengthened support for the Tsar with whom their allegiance had been to and had they been given a chance to continue with their efforts, tsardom might have seen the light past 1917. It is therefore at this point not absolute that tsardom was doomed to collapse by 1914 despite growing unhappiness; for while the boat of tsardom was rocking, it could easily be stabilised as long as control over the military was held and key groups of people appeased; thereby limiting the ability of anyone from removing the entire institution.

The First World War would prove to be the catalyst for the 1917 revolution as well as the collapse of tsardom because it removed the stabilisation criterion from the equation. With the desertion of one million soldiers as well as the loss of support of close aides and supporters with them going so far as to call for his abdication, Nicholas II no longer had the necessary support needed to maintain his reign and subsequently this ended tsardom in its entirety.

<https://assignbuster.com/was-the-collapse-of-tsardom-inevitable-in-russia-by-1914/>

We can therefore say at this point that without the foundations for the collapse in place, which would be the events from 1894 to 1905, tsardom might not have collapsed and it was the culmination of all these factors that spelt its end. But if the First World War had not happened, there would not have been a catalyst for this reaction and it would have materialised. Therefore, I am not in support of the view of the assured collapse of tsardom by 1914.