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Reactionary and Repressive Policies of Nicholas I

The reign of Emperor Nicholas I (1825–1855) is best remembered for its anti-revolutionary spirit abroad and its quasi-military dictatorship at home. The dictatorship expressed itself in various forms, ranging from extensive use of ad hoc secret committees to suppression of all forms of dissent. Authorities dealt harshly with not only the Decembrists, but also with peasants, intellectuals, and national and religious minorities. These measures, however, failed to produce the desired results. The harsh treatment of the Decembrists, for example, produced a generation of dedicated followers. The firm stand on maintaining serfdom resulted in over 700 peasant uprisings, half of them serious enough to require the deployment of military forces to suppress them. Censorship of intellectuals and of the press gave birth to student circles, "thick journals," and the "Golden Age" of Russian literature. Finally, official attempts to impose Russian values on the non-Russian peoples of the empire led to the emergence of local nationalisms. In short, the reactionary and repressive policies of Nicholas I were a disaster because they ran counter to Russia's national and vital interests.

Nicholas I's Manifesto on Peasant Unrest, May 2, 1826

Governors have called to Our attention that in some settlements peasants of the state and of the nobility, misled by malicious rumors and evil talk, digress from normal order and think that the former, that is, state peasants, will be freed from tax payments, while the latter, that is, peasants of the nobility, [will be freed] from their obligations to their masters.

Feeling sorry about the misleading of these villagers, and wishing to direct them to the truth by means of the kindness natural to Our fatherly mercy, I am ordering announced everywhere:

1. That all talk about freedom of state peasants from the payment of taxes and of the nobility peasants and household people from obligations to their

masters is a malicious rumor conceived and spread by ill-intended people for a profit motive, that is, to enrich themselves at peasant expense.

2. All social strata within the state, including state and nobility peasants and household people, should fulfill all of their obligations according to the law and obey their appointed superiors submissively.

3. After this declaration has been published, should there occur among state or nobility peasants or household people some disturbance based on a false rumor about freedom from payment of taxes or legal authority of the nobility, the guilty ones will invite Our anger and will be punished immediately to the fullest severity of the law.

4. Governors are hereby authorized to keep continuous vigilance and to bring the spreaders of such rumors or talk before the court without delay and deal with them likewise to the fullest severity of the law.

5. And inasmuch as We have received weekly petitions from peasants written on the basis of the above mentioned rumors and talk, to terminate this evil and to preserve safety and order, We decree that the composers or writers of such petitions be brought before the court as disturbers of general peace and punished to the fullest severity of the law.

The Governing Senate will make an appropriate regulation for the publication of Our order for universal knowledge, causing it to be read in churches on Sundays and Holy Days, at fairs and markets for a period of six months from the day this manifesto is received in the *gubernia*. Governors are, in addition, instructed to keep continuous vigilance in execution of Our order, as they will be personally responsible for any disorder that may occur.

Nicholas

A Memorandum to Emperor Nicholas I from Admiral A. S. Shishkov Concerning his Views on Censorship, December 12, 1826

Most Merciful Sovereign!

Everyone knows and no one doubts that the French Revolution, which occurred at the end of the last century, was prepared and was caused by inadequate governmental supervision of book publishing. The prime reason for this was the presence [in France] of highly educated and at the same time most impious individuals, namely, Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot and many others. Their sharp minds and their trenchant pens, agitated by a sense of

pride and selfishness, implanted seeds which, when ripened, multiplied free thought and immorality and then destroyed the faith and the throne. After it suffered great privation, weary France recognized its mistake and returned to its religion and government. Someone has said, erroneously to be sure, that while it died in France, the French Revolution, nevertheless, will not be extinguished until it has affected all other nations. We already have witnessed the result of this prophecy [in 1820] in Spain, in Naples, and in other countries.

Russia was unaffected by it in the past. However, we are now seeing some signs of this plague. Loose talk, which never existed here about religion, freedom, and government, has multiplied sects and dissidents among us, has stirred up common people, and has implanted in the inexperienced heads and hearts of young people the audacity to form a governmental system based on their dreams. This has been verified not only by rumors but by real events. Many developments and reports show that free thinking and atheism is on the rise. . . .

We are witnessing now things that did not exist before; namely, frequent incitement of peasants against nobles and the resolute demand for freedom which, in their view, consists of parasitic behavior and licentiousness. We have witnessed with horror the development of last December [1825]. Its participants were not common people, but officials, princes, nobles, and writers, who called themselves enlightened, who were endowed with keen minds and a worldly outlook. There developed—and I would like to emphasize it—a treasonous and ill-intentioned phenomenon based on delusion and unbelief and which had never existed among the people belonging to that class. . . . In France, as well as among us, all of them stemmed from the circulation and reading of mystic, immoral books and journals, which, because of the lack of proper review, passed the weak system of censorship.

To stop this trend, the Sovereign Emperor of blessed memory [that is, Alexander I] was pleased to appoint me as Minister of Public Education [in January, 1824] with the understanding that I would erect a barrier against the entrenched and gradually spreading evil known as *the spirit of the time*. He empowered me to do it with these strong words. The *ukaz* he gave me stated, among other things: "I am authorizing you to begin a resolute supervision [of publications] so that in the works that have already been published and in those that may be published in the future, as well as in translations [of foreign books], especially those intended *to be used in schools*, there be included nothing that would disturb our faith and morals. National well-being could suffer a great deal from this [disturbance] and, therefore, you are obligated before God and Us to employ indefatigable supervision in eliminating and exposing all evil thoughts that are currently being disseminated

through books, and you are not to allow them to appear in any form in the future. . . ."

I do not know whether in these difficult times and circumstances the existing weak censorship that has allowed this to happen should continue to function, or whether I should submit for Your Majesty's approval a new set of strict censorship rules that would erect barriers to evil thoughts without endangering the content of morally-written literary works. In the previous censorship code there was an article providing that if there was a double meaning [in the text of a work], the author was favored; that is, it allowed every evil-minded writer, by using clever skills, to disseminate dishonesty and lewdness freely. Whether similar provisions should be incorporated in the revised Code, which is currently being prepared, or whether they should be deleted altogether, it is imperative that every precaution be taken to make impossible in the future the development of any nation-wide disturbances. . . .

A Restriction on Educational Opportunities for Nonprivileged Members of Russian Society, August 1827

It has been brought to Our attention that serfs belonging to rural nobles and to [well-to-do] peasants frequently are allowed to study in *gymnasias* and other institutions of higher learning. This practice causes two-fold harm. On the one hand, these young people, after receiving elementary schooling from their masters or from their careless relatives, enter institutions of higher learning with harmful habits which they then either transmit to their classmates, or else they prevent children of diligent parents from attending those institutions.

On the other hand, depending on their academic progress, the capable youngsters of this group become exposed to a life, thoughts, and ideas that are beyond their social status. The resulting burden becomes unbearable for them and they frequently fall into a dangerous depression or develop low self-esteem. To prevent these harmful tendencies from developing in the future, We feel obligated to decree as follows:

1. That in all universities and all other institutions of higher learning, both state and private, which are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Education, as well as in *gymnasias* and similar institutions of instruction, only members of [the legally] free classes be allowed to attend lectures. This rule applies to those who currently are registered in the free category and who are able to provide satisfactory evidence [concerning their free status], even though

they may not yet have been assigned to the category of merchants or townsmen or have a [bona fide] profession.

2. Serfs belonging to nobles or household serfs are allowed as before to attend church and *uezd* schools as well as private institutions of learning whose curricular offerings are identical with those of *uezd* schools.

3. Serfs may be allowed to attend special institutions of learning that have already been founded or that may be established for them in the future either by the state or by private individuals, where they may study agriculture, horticulture, or skills essential to their well-being so they can then improve agricultural, handicraft, and other enterprises. In these institutions the following restrictions will apply to them: subject matters that are not essential to mastering crafts and industrial know-how are to be the same as those taught in *uezd* schools.

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The Eastern Question, 1828-1833

The reign of Nicholas I (1825-1855) is best remembered for his suppression of the Decembrists, the subsequent maintenance of autocratic firmness at home, and his preoccupation with the Eastern Question in the realm of foreign policy. By Eastern Question is meant Russia's attempt to dislodge the Ottoman control of the Balkan peninsula and of the Straits and replace it with Russian control. It was not a new policy because its foundations were laid down in the Treaty of Kutchuk Kainardzhi in 1774. Nicholas I sought to obtain the objectives of this policy with greater vigor and determination than did his predecessors. He involved Russia in a major war against the Ottoman Turks in 1828, and in the Treaty of Adrianople extracted numerous concessions from them. In 1833

The following selected documents depicting Russian interest in the Eastern Question were taken from Sir Edward Hertslet, *The Map of Europe by Treaty* . . . (London: Butterworth Harrison and Sons, 1875), II, pp. 813-823, 925-928. To facilitate reading and recognition the spelling of certain names has been modernized. Thus, Serbia has been rendered throughout as Serbia. In other cases modern geographical spellings have been placed in parenthesis wherever they differ from the original.

he gained additional advantages for Russia through negotiations that culminated in the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi. Finally, to dislodge Ottoman power in the area completely, he involved Russia from 1853 to 1856 in a major war, the Crimean War, not only against the Turks, but the French and the British as well. The Crimean War ended in a great disaster and humiliation for Russia.

The Treaty of Adrianople, September 14, 1829

Article 1

All hostility and dissention which, up to the present time, have existed between the two Empires shall cease from the date hereof, as well by land as by sea, and there shall be perpetual Peace, amity, and good intelligence between His Majesty the Emperor and Padisha of All the Russias, and His Highness the Emperor and Padisha of the Ottomans, their heirs and successors to the Throne, as well as between their respective Empires. The two High Contracting Powers will employ a special attention for preventing all that may cause the renewal of any misunderstanding between their respective subjects. They will scrupulously fulfill all the conditions of the present Treaty of Peace, and will use all their vigilance to prevent its being contravened in any manner, either directly or indirectly.

Article 2

His Majesty the Emperor and Padisha of All the Russias, desirous of giving His Highness the Emperor and Padisha of the Ottomans a proof of the sincerity of his amicable disposition, restores to the Sublime Porte the Principality of Moldavia, with the same limits which that Principality had before the commencement of the War which has just been terminated by the present Treaty. His Imperial Majesty likewise restores the Principality of Wallachia, the Banat of Craiova (Craiova), without any exception whatsoever, Bulgaria and the country of Dobrudgia (Dobrudzha), from the Danube as far as to the sea, . . . and lastly, all the cities, towns, and villages, and, in general, all the places which the Russian troops have occupied in Rumelia.

Article 3

The Pruth shall continue to form the Boundary of the two Empires, from the point where that River touches the Territory of Moldavia as far as its confluence with the Danube. From this place the frontier line shall follow the course of the Danube as far as the embouchure of St. George, so that while leaving all the Islands formed by the different branches of this River in the possession

of Russia, the right bank will remain, as heretofore, in that of the Ottoman Porte. . . . The merchant-vessels of the two Powers shall be competent to navigate the Danube throughout its whole course, and those which bear the Ottoman flag may freely enter the Kilia and Souline (Sulina) embouchures, that of St. George remaining common to the war and merchant flags of the two Contracting Powers. But the Russian Ships of War must not, in sailing up the Danube, go beyond the place of its junction with the Pruth.

Article 4

Georgia, Imeritia, Mingrelia, Gouriel (Guria), and several other provinces of the Caucasus, having been for a long time and in perpetuity annexed to the Empire of Russia, and this Empire having moreover acquired by the Treaty concluded with Persia at Tourkmantchai (Turkmanchai), on the 10th-22nd of February, 1828, the Khanates of Erivan (Erevan) and Naktchivan (Nakhichevan), the two High Contracting Powers have been convinced of the necessity of establishing between their respective States, throughout the whole of this line, a well-defined frontier and such as shall prevent all future misunderstanding. . . . In consequence whereof it has been agreed to recognize henceforth for the frontier between the States of the Imperial Court of Russia and those of the Sublime Ottoman Porte in Asia, the line which, following the present boundary of the Province of Gouriel (Guria), from the Black Sea, ascends to that of Imeritia, and thence in the most direct line to the point where the frontiers of the Pashalics of Akhaltzik (Akhalsikhe) and of Kan unite with those of Georgia, leaving, in this manner, to the north and within this line the city of Akhaltzik (Akhalsikhe) and the fort of Alkhalkhalik (Akhalkalaki), at a distance which must not be less than two hours. All the countries situated to the south and west of this line of demarcation towards the Pashalics of Kars and of Trebizond, together with the greater part of the Pashalic of Akhaltzik (Akhalsikhe), shall remain in perpetuity under the dominion of the Sublime Porte, whilst those which are situated to the north and east of the said line, towards Georgia, Imeritia, and Gouriel (Guria), as well as the whole of the coast of the Black Sea, from the mouth of the Kouba (Kuban) as far as the port of St. Nicholas inclusively, shall remain in perpetuity under the dominion of the Empire of Russia. . . .

Article 5

The Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia having been in consequence of a Capitulation placed under the Suzerainty of the Sublime Porte, and Russia having guaranteed their prosperity, it is understood that they shall preserve all the privileges and immunities which have been granted to them either by their Capitulations, or by the Treaties concluded between the two Empires

or by the Hatti-Sherifs promulgated at different times. In consequence whereof, they shall enjoy the free exercise of their Worship, perfect security, an independent national Government and full liberty of Commerce. . . .

Article 6

The circumstances which have occurred since the conclusion of the Convention of Akkermann, not having allowed the Sublime Porte to occupy itself immediately with the carrying into execution the clauses of the Separate Act relative to Serbia, and annexed to Article 5 of the said Convention; it undertakes in the most solemn manner to fulfill them without the least delay, and with the most scrupulous exactitude, and to proceed especially to the immediate restitution of the six districts detached from Serbia, so as to secure forever the tranquility and welfare of that faithful and devoted nation. . . .

Article 7

Russian subjects shall enjoy, throughout the whole extent of the Ottoman Empire, as well by land as by sea, the full and entire freedom of trade secured to them by the Treaties concluded heretofore between the two High Contracting Powers. This freedom of trade shall not be molested in any way, nor shall it be fettered in any case, or under any pretext, by any prohibition or restriction whatsoever, nor in consequence of any regulation or measure, whether of public government or internal legislation. Russian subjects, ships, and merchandise shall be protected from all violence and imposition. The first shall remain under the exclusive jurisdiction and control of the Russian Minister and Consuls; Russian ships shall never be subjected to any search on the part of the Ottoman authorities, neither out at sea nor in any of the ports or roadsteads under the dominion of the Sublime Porte; and all merchandise or goods belonging to a Russian subject may, after payment of the Customhouse dues imposed by the tariffs, be freely sold, deposited on land in the warehouses of the owner or consignee, or transshipped on board another vessel of any nation whatsoever, without the Russian subject being required, in this case, to give notice of the same to any of the local authorities, and much less to ask their permission so to do. It is expressly agreed that the different kinds of wheat coming from Russia shall partake of the same privileges, and that their free transit shall never, under any pretext, suffer the least difficulty or hindrance.

The Sublime Porte engages, moreover, to take especial care that the trade and navigation of the Black Sea, particularly, shall be impeded in no manner whatsoever. For this purpose it admits and declares the passage of the Strait of Constantinople and that of the Dardanelles to be entirely free and open to Russian vessels under the merchant flag, laden or in ballast, whether they

come from the Black Sea for the purpose of entering the Mediterranean, or whether, coming from the Mediterranean, they wish to enter the Black Sea, such vessels, provided they be merchant ships, whatever their size and tonnage, shall be exposed to no hindrance or annoyance of any kind, as above provided. The two Courts shall agree upon the most fitting means for preventing all delay in issuing the necessary instructions. In virtue of the same principle the passage of the Strait of Constantinople and of that of the Dardanelles is declared free and open to all the merchant ships of Powers who are at Peace with the Sublime Porte, whether going into the Russian ports of the Black Sea or coming from them, laden or in ballast, upon the same conditions which are stipulated for vessels under the Russian flag.

Lastly, the Sublime Porte, recognizing in the Imperial Court of Russia the right of securing the necessary guarantees for this full freedom of trade and navigation in the Black Sea, declares solemnly, that on its part not the least obstacle shall ever, under any pretext whatsoever, be opposed to it. Above all, it promises never to allow itself henceforth to stop or detain vessels laden or in ballast, whether Russian or belonging to nations with whom the Ottoman Porte should not be in a state of declared war, which vessels shall be passing through the Strait of Constantinople and that of the Dardanelles, on their way from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean, or from the Mediterranean into the Russian ports of the Black Sea. And if, which God forbid, any one of the stipulations contained in the present Article should be infringed, and the remonstrances of the Russian Minister thereupon should fail in obtaining a full and prompt redress, the Sublime Porte recognizes beforehand in the Imperial Court of Russia the right of considering such an infraction as an act of hostility, and of immediately having recourse to reprisals against the Ottoman Empire. . . .

Article 14

All the Prisoners of War, of whatsoever nation, condition, and sex they may be, who are in the two Empires, must, immediately after the exchange of the Ratifications of the present Treaty of Peace, be delivered up and restored without the least ransom or payment. Exception is made in favour of the Christians who, of their own free will, have embraced the Mahometan religion in the States of the Sublime Porte, and of the Mahometans, who in like manner, of their own free will, have embraced the Christian religion in the States of the Empire of Russia.

The same shall be observed with respect to the Russian Subjects, who after the signing of the present Treaty of Peace, may have, in any manner, fallen into captivity, and who are in the States of the Sublime Porte. The

Imperial Court of Russia promises, on its part, to act in the same manner towards the subjects of the Sublime Porte.

No reimbursement of the sums which have been expended by the High Contracting Powers for the maintenance of the Prisoners of War, shall be required. Each of them shall provide all that is necessary for them during their journey to the frontier, where they will be exchanged by Commissioners appointed respectively.

Article 15

All the Treaties, Conventions, and Stipulations, entered into and concluded at different epochs, between the Imperial Court of Russia and the Sublime Ottoman Porte, excepting the Articles which have been modified or changed by the Present Treaty of Peace, are confirmed in all their force and integrity, and the two High Contracting Powers engage to observe them religiously and inviolably. . . .

The Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, July 8, 1833

In the name of Almighty God.

His Imperial Majesty, the Most High and Most Mighty Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias, and His Highness the Most High and Most Mighty Emperor of the Ottomans, being equally animated with the sincere desire of maintaining the system of peace and good harmony happily established between the two Empires, have resolved to extend and strengthen the perfect friendship and confidence which reign between them by the conclusion of a Treaty of Defensive Alliance. . . .

Article 1

There shall be for ever Peace, Amity, and Alliance between His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias and His Majesty the Emperor of the Ottomans, their Empires and Their Subjects, as well by land as by sea. This Alliance having solely for its object the common defence of their dominions against all attack, their Majesties engage to come to an unreserved understanding with each other upon all the matters which concern their respective tranquility and safety, and to afford to each other mutually for this purpose substantial aid, and the most efficacious assistance.

Article 2

The Treaty of Peace concluded at Adrianople on the 14th September, 1829, as well as all the other Treaties comprised therein, as also the Convention

signed at St. Petersburg on the 26th April, 1830 and the Arrangement relating to Greece, concluded at Constantinople on the 21st July, 1832, are fully confirmed by the present Treaty of Defensive Alliance, in the same manner as if the said transactions had been inserted in it word for word.

Article 3

In consequence of the principle of conservation and mutual defence, which is the basis of the present Treaty of Alliance, and by reason of a most sincere desire of securing the permanence, maintenance, and entire Independence of the Sublime Porte, His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias, in the event of circumstances occurring which should again determine the Sublime Porte to call for the naval and military assistance of Russia, although, if it please God, that case is by no means likely to happen, engages to furnish, by land and by sea, as many troops and forces as the two High Contracting Parties may deem necessary. It is accordingly agreed, that in this case the Land and Sea Forces, whose aid the Sublime Porte may call for, shall be held at its disposal.

Article 4

In conformity with what is above stated, in the event of one of the two Powers requesting the assistance of the other, the expense only of provisioning the Land and the Sea Forces which may be furnished, shall fall to the charge of the Power who shall have applied for the aid.

Article 5

Although the two High Contracting Parties sincerely intend to maintain this engagement to the most distant period of time, yet, as it is possible that in process of time circumstances may require that some changes should be made in this Treaty, it has been agreed to fix its duration at eight years from the day of the exchange of Imperial Ratifications. The two parties, previous to the expiration of that term, will concert together, according to the state of affairs at that time, as to the renewal of the said Treaty.

Separate Article

In virtue of one of the clauses of Article 1 of the Patent Treaty of Defensive Alliance concluded between the Imperial Court of Russia and the Sublime Porte, the two High Contracting Parties are bound to afford to each other mutually substantial aid, and the most efficacious assistance for the safety of their respective dominions. Nevertheless, His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias, wishing to spare the Sublime Ottoman Porte the expense and inconvenience which might be occasioned to it by affording substantial aid, will

not ask for that aid if circumstances should place the Sublime Porte under the obligation of furnishing it, the Sublime Ottoman Porte, in place of the aid which it is bound to furnish in case of need, according to the principle of reciprocity of the Patent Treaty, shall confine its action in favour of the Imperial Court of Russia to closing the Strait of the Dardanelles, that is to say, to not allowing any Foreign Vessels of War to enter therein under any pretext whatsoever. . . .

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Chaadaev's Comments on Russian History and Culture

Peter Ia. Chaadaev (1794–1856) came from an influential noble background. Although young, he participated in the War of 1812, and, upon its conclusion he became fascinated, as did many of his contemporaries, by the movement that eventually culminated in the Decembrist Revolt. He was not an active participant in the movement; in fact, during the mushrooming of the conspiracy, Chaadaev was in Western Europe, which was then engulfed in romanticism, liberalism, and an assortment of other "isms."

Because he sympathized with the Decembrists, Russian authorities arrested Chaadaev upon his return to Russia in 1826, but released him for lack of evidence of any apparent involvement in the conspiracy. Chaadaev then settled in Moscow where, thanks to his writings, he emerged as one of Russia's most controversial nineteenth century thinkers. His literary heritage is modest. It consists of a few essays and a number of letters—all written in French, "the language of polite and polished society." Chaadaev became an instant sensation in 1836 when the *Moscow Telescope* published one of his letters in which he praised West European experience and criticized Russian history and its Orthodox-influenced culture. Authorities suppressed the journal, exiled its editor, dismissed