

# Shattering Empires

*The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and  
Russian Empires, 1908–1918*

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In order to head off the development of separatist tendencies, the tsarist regime in 1903 initiated a program to Russify the tsar's Armenian subjects. Among other measures, the regime wrested control of Armenian schools from the Armenian Church, expropriated Church properties, and imposed Russian-style curricula. The effort backfired badly. It drove anti-clerical Armenian socialist groups to rally in defense of the Armenian Church and launch a campaign of violent resistance that with "bullets, bombs, and knives" took the lives of tens, if not hundreds, of Russian state servants.

Indeed, in 1908 the Russian empire, not the Ottoman, came to loom as the greater oppressor for the Armenian revolutionary movement. That year Stolypin ordered a general crackdown on potential subversives, including Armenian activists. In 1909 up to 4,000 Armenians were languishing in tsarist prisons on political charges, and some 3,000 more were in exile.<sup>1</sup>