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# Tokugawa Bakumatsu Military Reforms [Encyclopedia Entry]

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that tied together key liege vassals, noble families, and *daimyō*. Moreover, wealthy merchants and other commoners who lent money to the shōgunate submitted memorials regarding, for example, how to reform shōgunal finances. Gradually the shōgunate allowed input from outer *daimyō* and court nobles, thus weakening its position as the ruling institution in Japan.

*Michael Wert*

**See also:** Buke Shohatto; Civil Wars, Sengoku Era; Ii Naosuke; Muromachi *Bakufu*; Tokugawa Ieyasu; Tokugawa Nariaki.

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## Tokugawa Bakumatsu Military Reforms

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By the 19th century, leaders within the shōgunate, and *daimyō* throughout Japan, bemoaned the backward state conditions of their military organization and technology, and complained about the deteriorating state of the samurai class as a reliable pool of skilled warrior-bureaucrats capable of maintaining stability in Japan. The shōgunate's solution was to streamline its military organization, eliminate inefficiency, provide new sources of military technology from Western countries, and reinvigorate samurai physical and moral training. The first reforms were brief, occurring in 1854, the year that treaties were signed with the United States. They consisted of cost

cutting, expanding coastal defenses, and encouraging military drills and frugality among the samurai. Domains carried out these reforms as they saw fit—for example, increasing the number of schools available for samurai learning and martial arts. The reform did little to change the Tokugawa military, however, as other domestic concerns attracted the shōgunate's attention—major reform would have to wait until the 1860s.

The most expansive institutional military changes occurred as one part of a broad effort called the “Bunkyū Reforms” of 1862. These reforms included a shifting of the political relationship between the shōgunate and the court, whereby the shōgunate recognized itself as subordinate to the emperor, and institutional reforms such as the weakening of the alternate attendance system (*sankin kōtai*). On the military front, the shōgunate increased purchases of Western weaponry, like the newly invented Minie rifle, which possessed greater range and accuracy than previously available rifles. The shōgunate encouraged domains to buy warships, and even sent men abroad for training. It also established firing ranges. Other reforms included a complete reorganization of the military structure, using a Dutch model of “tactics of three combat arms,” which employed light infantry armed with Minie rifles, artillery units, and heavy and light cavalry. Taking advantage of its close relationship to France, the shōgunate invited several military advising missions to Japan. From the mid-1860s and throughout the early Meiji period, French drill and military science continued to influence the modern Japanese military. This included a French-led construction of an arsenal, dockyard, and iron works at Yokosuka, with plans to build a shipyard that would buttress the shōgunate's navy.

However, traditional weaponry, such as units of pike-wielding samurai, remained.

The shōgunate also redefined its retainers' roles. On the one hand, it no longer required the lowest-ranking men to support the army with their labor, but instead asked them to pay a tax on their stipend—an attempt to accrue more funds for reforms. On the other hand, fief-holding bannermen were asked to send men from their fiefs to Edo and elsewhere for training.

Reforms did not happen at once, but were implemented in piecemeal fashion throughout the 1860s. Many of the reforms changed over time—for example, even units consisting of fief-holding bannermen were eventually disbanded and their military duties converted into tax obligations. Large domains also carried out similar reforms, especially the Satsuma domain, which relied on the British for new weapons and warships. Moreover, the shōgunate and domains included more commoners in their militaries. Shōgunate offices throughout the Kanto regions, such as the Iwahana intendent station in Kōzuke Province, ordered local peasant elites to form militias. These militias, and their counterparts in domains such as Chōshū, were burdensome for peasant populations who had to provide their manpower and funding. At the same time, the peasant militias allowed young peasants from elite families to build upon their swordsmanship training, presenting them with an opportunity to act out fantasies of being a warrior. In at least one domain, a popular fencing instructor who was a commoner was hired to teach his “realistic” style to the domain's samurai, as part of the *daimyō's* effort to remilitarize them.

For the shōgunate, the military reforms were too little, too late. It lacked the funds to buy the full range of weapons and training it needed. Moreover, many high-ranking

samurai resisted the reforms. For example, they did not want to pay the new obligatory taxes or train with Western rifles, an activity more suitable to low-ranking men or commoners. Nevertheless, many of these reforms influenced the military development during the Meiji period, especially the use of commoners in the army instead of samurai. In addition, the Meiji government continued to support the French-constructed Yokosuka naval base, and used French models for infantry.

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**See also:** Bakumatsu Fencing Schools and Nationalism; Navy, Modernized; Rise of the Modern Army; *Sankin kōtai* (Alternate Attendance); Tokugawa *Bakufu* Political System; Tokugawa Economic Reforms.

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## Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616)

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Tokugawa Ieyasu was born Matsudaira Takechiyo on January 31, 1543, near Nagoya; he was the son of the *daimyō* Matsudaira Hirotada. Seeking to expand his lands from the mountains onto the plains of Mikawa, Hirotada made an alliance with the neighboring Imagawa clan and sent his six-year-old son to live with the Imagawa as a hostage. There, Ieyasu learned military and administrative skills and even led forces