

***“EST-CE AU MEDECIN OU A L'HERITIER?”: THE CRESCENDO  
AND DECRESCENDO OF TSAR NIKOLAI I'S MANAGEMENT  
OF OTTOMAN DECLINE, 1825-53***

**A Master's Thesis**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

### *“Est-ce au medecin ou a l'heritier?”: The Crescendo and Decrescendo of Tsar Nikolai I's Management of Ottoman Decline, 1825-53*

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This thesis provides a history of Tsar Nikolai I's foreign policy toward the Ottoman Empire, in particular regards to his attempt to both protect and dominate the Empire in its decline and to manage what he viewed as its imminent and inevitable fall. While the Tsar adeptly carried out this policy throughout most of his reign, he committed a number of critical diplomatic blunders in the 1850's climaxing in Russia's defeat in the Crimean War. In this thesis I investigate his increasingly aggressive policy toward the Ottomans and the causes of his ultimate failure to maintain Russia's dominance through diplomatic means, as well as catalog the evolution of Nikolai's strategy to manage the Ottomans' collapse. I conclude that the Tsar's personal ideology and prideful inflexibility proved to be the cause of Russia's diplomatic failure and isolation, ultimately resulting in their defeat in the Crimean War and that Nikolai's diplomatic failures correlate with his increasingly aggressive plotting to dismantle the Ottoman Empire.

Key Words: Crimean War, Eastern Question, Holy Places Dispute, Nicholas I, Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire, Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi, Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca

## ÖZET

### *Est-ce au medecin ou a l'heritier?"*: Çar I. Nikolay'ın Osmanlı'nın Gerilemesini İdare Etmedeki İnişleri ve Çıkışları, 1825-53

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Bu tez çalışması Çar I. Nikolay'ın hem İmparatorluğa hakim olmak hem de İmparatorluğu korumak adına yaptığı girişim ile olmasını yakın ve kaçınılmaz olarak tasvir ettiği çöküşü idare etmesine istinaden Osmanlı İmparatorluğuna karşı uyguladığı dış politikanın tarihini sunmaktadır. Çar bu politikayı hükümlerinin büyük bir bölümünde beceriyle icra etse de 1850'lerde Rusya'nın Kırım Savaşı yenilgisiyle ciddi seviyelere ulaşan birkaç diplomatik hataya düşmüştür. Bu tez çalışmasında Osmanlıların çöküşünü idare etme hususunda Nikolay'ın stratejisinin gelişimini listelemenin yanı sıra Osmanlılara karşı gittikçe agresifleşerek gittiği politikayı ve diplomatik yollarla Rus hakimiyetini devam ettirme konusundaki nihai başarısızlığının nedenlerini araştırıyorum. Ulaştığım sonuçlar Çar'ın şahsi ideolojisi ve gururlu eğilmez duruşunun en sonunda Kırım Savaşında yenilgiyle yüzleşen Rusya'nın diplomatik başarısızlığının ve yalnızlaşmasının nedenini oluşturması ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğunu parçalamaya yönelik gittikçe agresifleşen tasavvurlarının Nikolay'ın diplomatik başarısızlığıyla ilişkili olmasıdır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: I. Nikolay, Kırım Savaşı, Kutsal Mekanlar İhtilafı, Küçük Kaynarca Antlaşması, Hünkâr İskeleyi Antlaşması, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Rus İmparatorluğu, Şark Meselesi

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There is little debate that Tsar Nikolai I's foreign policy in regards to the Near East was a catastrophic failure, considering that his reign ended with Russia isolated in a hopeless struggle against the United Kingdom, France and the Ottoman Empire, embroiled in an unwinnable war Russia never should have had to fight. However, there is more room for discussion as to why Nikolai drove Russia into such an unfortunate position. Nicholas Riasanovsky attributes Nikolai's foreign policy failures to "conviction that the Porte could not survive in the modern world, and that therefore the leading European states had to arrange for a proper redistribution of possessions and power in the Balkans and the Near East in order to avoid anarchy, revolution, and war."<sup>1</sup> By contrast, W. Bruce Lincoln calls Nikolai the relic of past ages: "He did not comprehend the political system within which British diplomats were obliged to work, and he found the institution of Parliament and its political debates incomprehensible."<sup>2</sup> Constantin De Grunwald sees a "Last Crusader", full of "faith in his mission, and even of Christian piety, which had always thrust him towards dangerous and unselfish actions."<sup>3</sup> Bolsover faults him with an overly strong faith in his "personal charm and diplomatic frankness," which "cannot in themselves banish hard political realities, and even good intentions cannot excuse blunders in statesmanship and may sometimes pave the road to war."<sup>4</sup> And while Western historians such as LeDonne and Pipes cast Nikolai as an expansionist and warmonger whose aggression was "not a phase but a constant", part of the Russian Empire's "expansionist urge that would remain unabated until 1917", an urge that led Nikolai into a humiliating defeat,<sup>5</sup> the Tsar in fact spent the vast majority of his reign as the decaying Ottoman Empire's *de facto* suzerain publicly committed to its preservation, and for the vast majority of his

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia, Fifth Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. p. 338

<sup>2</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978, p. 331

<sup>3</sup> Constantin de Grunwald, *Tsar Nicholas I*. Translated by Bridget Patmore. Macmillan, 1955. p. 261

<sup>4</sup> G.H. Bolsover, "Nicholas I and the Partition of Turkey." *Slavonic and East European Review* 27 (1948), pp.115-45. p.145

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Rendall, "Restraint or Self-Restraint of Russia: Nicholas I, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, and the Vienna System, 1832-1841". *The International History Review*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Mar. 2002). pp. 37-63. p. 37.

reign adeptly and occasionally even brilliantly managed his relations with the Ottoman Porte and Russia's position in the Balkans and Near East. That said, while sincerely working to protect the tottering state, he also plotted its dismemberment, spending much of his reign seeking a collaborator to take part in the Empire's eventual partition, his schemes growing increasingly serious over the course of his reign. This paradox is explained by Nikolai's perception of the Ottoman state, a crumbling realm he infamously likened to a "Sick Man". The title of this work was a question Prince Metternich put forth to the Tsar in which he demanded to know whether Nikolai saw himself as the Ottomans' healer or as its heir. The answer, I argue, is both. As a healer, Nikolai wished to prolong the life of the Empire, for a weak yet stable Ottoman state firmly under Russia's thumb could manage the restless peoples of the Balkans and Transcaucasia and help secure Russia's southern borders while restricting European naval access to the Black Sea, which Nikolai saw as a Russian lake. However, as his reign progressed he became increasingly certain he was to become the Ottomans' unwilling heir and sought partners to share in an inheritance he did not want. And despite competently carrying out this policy for almost thirty years, a series of blunders in the last years of his reign suddenly and catastrophically undid his efforts to transform the Ottomans into a Russian vassal state. The purpose of this work will be to follow the rise and fall of Nikolai's foreign policy toward the Ottoman Empire while observing the evolution of Nikolai's perception and treatment of his Sick Man from a patient in a hospital whose infirmity could be managed, to a patient in a hospice whose final days should be carefully managed and whose estate should be properly divided. The structure of this work shall be largely chronological, focusing mostly on Ottoman wars and conflicts in which Russia had a central role as protector, mediator and plaintiff, and centered in particular on the two main components of their negotiations and disputes, as well as Russia's relations with the other Great Powers, especially those of the United Kingdom, Austria and France.

The first of the two centerpieces of Russo-Ottoman relations revolved around access to the Turkish Straits, those being the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, which connect the Black Sea to Aegean and the Mediterranean. It was Russia's sole year-round lane to the high seas and crucial to its commerce and national defense. The second matter of contention regarded the Eastern Orthodox Christians who lived in the Ottoman Empire as subjects of the Sultan but claimed by the Tsar as a great religious community under his protectorate due to the controversial 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca.

Russia's relations with the other Great Powers are also of much importance. Until the final years of Nikolai's reign Austria served Russia as a reliable if unenthusiastic ally. France stood as Russia's distant and less powerful rival for influence in the Near East whereas Great Britain's status as global superpower ensured that they would play a factor in any move Russia made for or against the Ottoman Empire.

Finally, I will not focus merely on diplomatic relations in a vacuum. I will attempt to analyze Nikolai's character as well as his personal and political leanings to see how they may have affected his policy and decision-making. The overall goal shall be to write a history of Nikolai I's relations with the Ottomans and to identify both how his policy of managing the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire resulted in failure and to identify at what point he believed the Ottoman collapse to be inevitable, imminent, and if he began to actively work towards its collapse.



## CHAPTER TWO: SOURCES

Among the primary sources I studied, the most important are Francis Rawdon Chesney's *The Russo-Turkish Campaigns of 1828 and 1829*, George Fowler's *History of the War*, Aleksandr Genrikhovich Zhomini's *Diplomatic Study on the Crimean War* and the text of the *Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca*, the Treaty which arguably created the era on which this thesis is centered. Chesney's work does indeed discuss the 1828-9 Russo-Ottoman War, but is also very useful for its contemporary information discussing the leadup to the Crimean War. Chesney, though an Englishman, is also a relatively objective voice among the many commenting on the Great Game between the United Kingdom and Russia. Fowler's work is briefer, but provides a contemporary counterpoint perspective on the Holy Places Dispute, so that we may not be forced to depend excessively on Zhomini. Though Zhomini writes a couple of decades after the end of the Crimean War, his work is an official Russian government publication and his prose nearly obliterates the author's identity; it as if his words and the perspective of the Russian Court are one. Indeed, given that he almost never contradicts or criticizes the actions of Nikolai or his ministers, I would argue that Zhomini represents the perspective of St. Petersburg. There are several other primary sources I have cited for more peripheral purposes, and they may be found in the bibliography.

However, there are many primary accounts that I did not list in the section dedicated to primary sources. It was impossible for me to gain access to the *Eastern Papers* on which much of the diplomatic communications dealing with this region in this era are centered. The same could be said about the dispatches sent by the numerous Russian, Ottoman and Austrian diplomats of this period. Fortunately, a few secondary sources were rich with directly quoted and cited archival information on which I have greatly depended. A.L Macfie's short work on The Eastern Question, for instance, has an appendix full of unabridged primary information. That said, it is my fortune that three secondary texts cover three of the most distinct periods on which this thesis is centered with great detail. The first is F.S. Rodkey's *The Turco-Egyptian Question in the Relations of England*,

*France and Russia, 1832-1841*, the second is V.J. Puryear's *England, Russia and the Straits Question, 1844-1856*, and the last is John Shelton Curtiss' *Russia's Crimean War*. Each of these texts helped form the backbone of what this work has become. However, other texts were critical for individual segments. Anderson and Mariott's works on the Eastern Question, Riasanovksy's *History of Russia*, and Virginia Aksan's *Ottoman Wars* helped me put together the general narrative. For the information of the personality, beliefs and background of the Tsar himself, I relied on De Grunwald's biography and Riasanovksy's *Nicholas I and Official Nationality* to understand this thesis' protagonist, both as individual, ruler, diplomat, and Demigod-Emperor of Russia. The latter work is especially important for it is the only text I know of that deals with the ideas of Nikolai's era rather than simply its events and developments. Other works had more specific and minute utilities. Daly's work provides much detail on the First Oriental Crisis. Bolsover centers on the politics of Nikolai's ambitions to partition the Ottoman Empire. Rendall and Sedivy also focus on diplomacy between the Great Powers. Most of the other sources, both primary and secondary were used mostly to fill in the blanks the aforementioned sources could not.

## CHAPTER THREE: 1721-1833

### 3.1 The Black Sea, The Turkish Straits and Russia's Quest for a Warm Water Port

Even during the Petrine Era, Russia was a trans-continental empire stretching from the Baltic to the Bering Seas, yet for all its vast expanse it remains to this day a virtually landlocked country. Though in possession of the world's longest coastlines, none of its ports possess free access to the open seas. Its Arctic and Pacific coastlines are frozen most of the year, rendering maritime commerce impractical at best, and though the extreme south of the Russian Far East possesses warm water ports, these were far too distant from the Russian heartland to be of any practical use.<sup>6</sup> While Peter seized a number of Baltic ports after his victory against the Swedes in 1721, Russian maritime access to the high seas remained restricted by narrow straits rival European powers could easily blockade.<sup>7</sup>

However, there was another route to the high seas. Peter also sought access to the Black Sea, despite it also being choked off from open waters by the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, firmly under the control of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the Ottomans maintained total and exclusive control of the entire Black Sea. which Peter sought to challenge by taking control of the Sea of Azov in 1696.<sup>8</sup>

By the reign of Tsarina Anna, Russia had no more enemies in Europe, enabling Baron Ostermann, her Foreign Minister, to direct Russia's imperial policy exclusively toward gaining access to the Black Sea.<sup>9</sup> In 1735-6, the Russian resident ministers of Constantinople convinced Anna's government that the Ottomans were on the brink of collapse and it was not only time to take revenge for the defeat on the Pruth but to evict the Turks from Europe and partition the Balkans among Christian powers, as well as forcibly annex the Crimean Peninsula.<sup>10</sup> Again Russia

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<sup>6</sup> Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 3-4

<sup>7</sup> Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 226.

<sup>8</sup> John P. LeDonne, "Geopolitics, Logistics, and Grain: Russia's Ambitions in the Black Sea Basin, 1737-1834". *The International History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Mar., 2006), pp. 1-41. Taylor & Francis, Ltd, 2006. p. 2. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 219-21,

<sup>9</sup> George Verdansky, *Political and Diplomatic History of Russia*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company. 1936. p. 243-4.

<sup>10</sup> LeDonne, 2-3, 5

underestimated Ottoman power, and while they eked out a relatively minor victory in 1739, gaining Azov and advancing their frontier to the Konskye Vody and Berda rivers, it was not only far from the decisive victory they expected. Ostermann's original demands for the independence of Moldavia and Wallachia and the advancement of Russia's borders to the Danube were entirely ignored and the Ottomans continued to forbid Russian merchants access to the Black Sea. However, the 1736-9 Russo-Ottoman War was the first instance in which Russia insisted that the Ottoman Empire was in a moribund state and proposed its partition, and the first time it attempted to demand independence for the Christians in Ottoman territories. Ostermann's demands would also form the “catechism” of Russian imperial policy toward the Ottomans, which later Tsars would aim to realize.<sup>11</sup>

The Ottomans failed to account for Russia's advances in military organization as well as the decline of its own, having been at peace for 28 years. Ottoman methods of discipline and recruitment had fallen into complete disarray since the last Russian war, and even its once elite Janissary corps was in little shape to fight. Peace had also caused the Ottomans to fall insurmountably behind Europe in terms of military technology, as the Seven Years War of the 1750's had rendered Ottoman military technology and tactics obsolescent.<sup>12</sup> When Catherine made war on them, the outcome was virtually a *fait accompli*.

On July 21, 1774 the exhausted Ottomans were forced to sign a humiliating treaty at Küçük Kaynarca. The treaty ceded all the land between the Dnieper and Bug rivers to Russia. Kuban and Terek were likewise given to Russia, bringing their borders to the Caucasus Mountains. The Sea of Azov was now made a Russian lake. The Ottoman cessions of Kerch, Yenikale and Kinburn provided Russia with their coveted access to the Black Sea and the Turkish Straits. Though warships were not allowed to pass the Straits, Russian merchants now had free and legally protected access to the open seas. Russia had thus achieved most of its territorial and maritime ambitions, largely fulfilling the “catechism” Ostermann set forth for Russia's imperial future. However, Russia

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<sup>11</sup> LeDonne, 2-5

<sup>12</sup> Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars, 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged*. Pearson, 2007. p.. 130, 134-5, 144-6, 154

was not merely interested in land grabs and sea access. Several articles specifically concerned the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Article XVI returned Bessarabia and the Principalities, which had fallen under Russian occupation in the course of the war, but demanded “free exercise of the Christian religion and to interpose no obstacle” to its practice. In essence, Russia received a protectorate over the Christians of the Principalities. While this protectorate is made explicit in Article XVI, Russian rights denoted in Article VII, which concerned all Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire, were far more open to interpretation:<sup>13</sup>

The Sublime Porte promises to protect constantly the Christian religion and its churches, and it also allows....Russia to make, upon all occasions, representations, as well in favour of the new church of Constantinople...as on behalf of its officiating ministers, promising to take such representations into due consideration, as being made by a confidential functionary of a neighboring and sincerely friendly Power.<sup>14</sup>

Was this a “loose protectorate”, as Lentin asserts?<sup>15</sup> Or merely a right to provide advice and counsel to the Porte, who are explicitly mentioned as the Christians' protectors? Questions such as this and Russia's constant concern over maintaining the maritime rights Küçük Kaynarca bestowed upon it would embroil Russia and the Ottoman Empire in a near-constant conflict for the next eighty years. According to Catherine's perennial critic Prince M..M. Shcherbatov, this was all by design. In his tract *Otvét na vopros*, he writes:

...the first thing that comes to mind is the treaty of Kainardzhi itself, which, by making the Crimean peninsula independent of the Ottoman Porte, by Russia's seizure of Kerch and Yenikale in the peninsula, and by the conditions laid down with respect to Moldavia and Wallachia- could not be acceptable to the Turks.<sup>16</sup>

He also points out that Russia's protectorate over the Principalities served Russia no purpose

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<sup>13</sup> Aksan, 159, A. Lentin, “Prince M. M. Shcherbatov as Critic of Catherine II's Foreign Policy”. *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 49, no. 116. (Jul 1971). pp. 365-381. the Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1971., p. 369-370. *Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca*, Arts III, VII, XI, XVI “Documents Archive”, *National University of Singapore*. [http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/hist/eia/documents\\_archive/Küçük-kaynarca.php](http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/hist/eia/documents_archive/Küçük-kaynarca.php) . Accessed 3/31/2019.

<sup>14</sup> Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, Art. VII.

<sup>15</sup> Lentin, 370.

<sup>16</sup> Lentin, 370.

other than to have another excuse to provoke the Ottomans and intervene in their affairs. The construction of Kherson and the buildup of the nascent Black Sea Fleet was another gesture meant to insult their southern rivals, stating: “Warships began to proceed past Ochakov, threatening to submit Constantinople itself to bombardment.” Far from keeping the peace, Shcherbatov declared that Catherine was hoping the Ottomans would take the bait. “It was clear to Russia that the Ottoman Porte would only keep the peace of Kainardzhi until it felt itself in a position to renew the war against Russia with greater effort,” for if it could once again frame the Ottomans as the aggressors, Catherine could strip even more from her faltering rival.<sup>17</sup> One might argue that the conservative Shcherbatov was far from objective in his criticism of Catherine, who disdained men of his politics and faction, but he again displayed a keen awareness of the Tsarina's ambitions. Would not Russian meddling in Crimean affairs, a blatant violation of Küçük Kaynarca, force the Ottomans into a conflict the Russians would inevitably emerge from victorious? As Russia had achieved only marginal successes against the Ottomans in the past, Catherine could not have been sure that in 1768 her armies could soundly defeat the Ottomans, and was wise enough to consider them Russia's greatest threat. However, by 1781 she had proven without a doubt that the prowess of her armies was far superior to that of the Ottomans, and the old contempt for the Turkish Empire that once possessed rulers like Peter and Anna now likewise possessed Catherine. But whereas contempt had once blinded her predecessors, it now sharpened the fangs of a far more dangerous beast.

Indeed, by 1781 she, along with her ministers Bezborodko and Potemkin, devised the “Greek Project”, which envisaged a catastrophic Ottoman defeat followed by their expulsion from Europe and the division of its territories. Russia would extend its borders to the Dniester, Wallachia, Moldavia and Bessarabia would be united in a Principality of Dacia under a Russian protectorate, whereas Greece, Macedonia and Thrace including Constantinople would form a reconstituted Byzantine Empire with her grandson Constantine as its first *Basileos*. Their Austrian allies would be

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<sup>17</sup> Aksan 159, Lentin, 370-2., Verdansky 271-2

rewarded with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, while France, Great Britain and Spain were to be pacified with unspecified compensations.<sup>18</sup>

Catherine did not have to wait long to initiate her plan. As in Poland, the Crimean Tatars rebelled against her client king, allowing her to intervene. And as her intervention in Poland allowed her to annex Polish land in the name of protecting Russian interests in 1772, she used the same pretext to annex Crimea in 1783.<sup>19</sup> Shcherbatov accurately pointed out that this was a gross violation of Kaynarca:

The Crimea has been acquired, or rather, stolen...Russia occupied the Crimea against the express stipulation of Kainardzhi...one would have thought that Russia, knowing how gravely she had offended the Turkish court by her seizure of the Crimea, would have acted more moderately, if she did not want war. But no.<sup>20</sup>

Shcherbatov further alleged that if this were not enough to provoke the Ottomans into war, Catherine took the extra step of sending soldiers to Georgia to threaten a seizure of the Caucasus region and demanded the surrender of Bessarabia and the right to pass warships through the Straits. If there was any remaining doubt about Catherine's imperial ambitions, these were put to rest when she invited a number of diplomats to accompany her on her inspection of her new naval bases in Crimea in which she and her entourage passed under triumphal archways constructed for the occasion in which each was etched an inscription: "The Road to Byzantium".<sup>21</sup>

Catherine's brazen yet calculated insults to the Ottoman Empire successfully vexed them into declaring war in 1787, despite the counsel of cooler heads in the Porte. By doing so, they played right into Catherine's hands, who had even enlisted the help of Austria to attack their left flank. Predictably, Ochakov was Russia's primary target, but they opened a second front to seize the Danube estuary as well. By 1791, the Russian army had penetrated as far as Varna and their guns could be heard from Constantinople, forcing the Ottomans to sue for peace. A new treaty was signed

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<sup>18</sup> Lentin 372, Verdansky 271-2

<sup>19</sup> Lentin 372

<sup>20</sup> Lentin 373

<sup>21</sup> Aksan 160-1, Lentin 373

at Jassy in 1792, in which the Ottomans ceded Ochakov and the Black Sea littoral up to the Dniester while forfeiting any claim they had on Crimea. While it was far from the achieving any of the objectives put forth in the “Greek Project”, it satisfied all of Catherine and Russia's practical ambitions. The Russians had gained a natural southern border on the banks of the Dniester, and the annexation of Ochakov allowed for the development of the port of Odessa, which served as a far superior replacement for Kherson. However, another precedent emerged as a result of Catherine's second war against the Ottomans; as the French were changing their once hostile attitudes towards the Russians, going so far as to sign a commercial treaty with them in 1787, the Ottomans for the first time turned to the United Kingdom for assistance, and while the British offered little more than a failed attempt to mediate, British plenipotentiaries sat at the negotiation table at Jassy “for the first time as an interested person”.<sup>22</sup> It was also the first time a European power commenced hostilities against the Russians as an Ottoman ally. Sweden was persuaded by Great Britain, the Netherlands and Prussia to form an alliance with the Ottomans in 1788, well after the Ottomans' declaration of war against Russia, as Europe now began to worry that Russia would gorge itself on the Ottoman carcass. Sweden went so far as to stage an attack on its own outpost to justify their intervention in July 1788.<sup>23</sup> Their effect on the outcome of the Russo-Turkish war was negligible, as Catherine was able to defend St. Petersburg with a mere reserve force, but it was a clear sign that the Eastern Question was a problem all Europe now recognized, and that no European power was to look the other way while Russia exploited Ottoman fragility.<sup>24</sup> After Jassy, the future of the Ottoman Empire was to be decided by committee.

### **3.2 Russo-Ottoman Relations in the Reigns of Pavel and Alexander**

While Russia was and would later be the greatest menace to the Ottomans' survival, their common fear of French invasion caused a rapid thaw in their relations. It did not hurt that the new

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<sup>22</sup> Aksan 161, 163, 166-7, LeDonne 14-5, Anadi Bhusan Maity. “The Problem of the Turkish Straits.” *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (April-June 1954), pp. 134-152. Indian Political Science Association Stable, 1954, p. 135, Riasanovsky, *History* 266-7

<sup>23</sup> Tapani Mattila, *Meri maame turvana*. Jyvaskyla: K.J Gummerus Osakeyhtio, 1983. p. 136-7, 142

<sup>24</sup> Lentin 375



Tsar Pavel despised his mother, and reversing her policies seems to have been the defining trait of his reign.<sup>25</sup> Since 1797 the Russians had urged the Ottomans to join the Coalition against France, and when the French threat to the Empire became apparent, the Ottomans agreed to an eight year alliance with Russia on 3 January 1799. For the first time, Russian warships were a given right of passage through the Straits for the duration of the struggle against France. Notably, Russia was the only European power that enjoyed this privilege. The alliance was of some benefit to the Ottomans, as the Russians expelled the French from the Ionian Islands, but the Porte had little trust in their traditional enemies, especially after Russia insisted the Ionians be given independence instead of being bequeathed to the Empire. However, the Islands were no more independent than Poland and Crimea had been under Catherine, which provided the Turks with a bitter reminder of Russia's prior perfidy and aggression.<sup>26</sup>

Hurewitz states that the Russo-Ottoman alliance “fizzled out in the Franco-Ottoman peace of Amiens” in 1802, but the prior actions of the Russian court had long made their supposed partnership a dead letter. If anything, the Court's murder of Pavel and the succession of his son Alexander on 24 March 1801 was the last benefit it paid to the Ottomans, for while Alexander still made peace with the French on 8 October of that year, he had little interest in destroying the Empire in a partition scheme, fearing that dismantling a waning Empire would only strengthen another far more dangerous imperium.<sup>27</sup> Alexander would usher in a new era of Russo-Ottoman relations, in which Russian contempt for Ottoman weakness was kept in check and rather than openly discuss the Empire's dissolution, the Russian court now pledged itself to its preservation. While this work shall show that this was not a pledge that would always be taken seriously and sincerely, never again throughout the reigns of Alexander and his successor would Russia openly or publicly desire anything but the sustainment of its weak but stable neighbor on its southwestern border. In 1804,

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<sup>25</sup> Riasanovsky, *History*, 273

<sup>26</sup> M.S Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923*. Macmillan, 1966. p. 29-30

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, 33, J.C Hurewitz, “Russia and the Turkish Straits: A Revaluation of the Origins of the Problem”. *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Jul., 1962), pp. 605-632. Cambridge University Press, 1962., p. 620.

Alexander's deputy Foreign Minister and close associate Prince Adam Czartoryski wrote an essay on the future of the Ottoman Empire that would effectively describe Russia's ostensible attitude towards its southern neighbor and toward European powers that wished to cast influence on said neighbor for the next fifty years:

There is no doubt that the Ottoman Empire threatens to collapse and that its future fate touches on the most essential interests of Russia. It is therefore urgent that our court should draw up a plan on this important subject in which every possible and probable case is foreseen, so that we can see clearly where we are going and proceed with assurance towards an immediate or eventual objective, according to the course taken by events. Our objective at the moment cannot be other than that of preserving the Ottoman Empire in its present state and hindering its partition. The advantage of having a weak and peaceful neighbor, and the facilities which our trade on the Black Sea has recently obtained, are sufficient reasons for contenting ourselves with the present state of affairs and preferring it to any opportunities which the future might offer and of which the consequences must always be to some extent uncertain...the facilities which the Black Sea trade has obtained, and which are for the Russian Empire an object of the highest importance, result only from the extreme weakness of the Turkish government...the facilities and the incalculable advantages in power and prosperity which may result from them must still be regarded as not entirely assured since we should lose them as soon as the Porte succeeded in regaining its former strength....(or if) any European power succeeded in taking....Constantinople. It is easy to see that...the safety of the Russian Empire would be deeply compromised and one of the most essential outlets of her trade would find itself at the mercy of another power.<sup>28</sup>

Alexander sincerely had no interest in depriving the Ottomans of their dominion. He in fact resurrected their defunct alliance with a new treaty in September 1805. His mildly Turcophilic sentiments were rewarded with Ottoman perfidy, who double-crossed Russia to be a part of what Napoleon, once again writing to Talleyrand, called his “triple alliance of myself, the Porte and Persia, aimed directly or by implication against Russia.” Why were the Ottomans so willing to be the Emperor's junior partner and an instrument of French policy? Napoleon again provides the answer: “I wish to strengthen and consolidate this great empire and use it, such as it is, against Russia”. Anderson suggests the Ottomans were seduced by French promises that Crimea would be

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<sup>28</sup> “Czartoryski on the Future of the Ottoman Empire, 29 February 1804”. Published in: A.L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923*. London: Longman Group Ltd. 1996, p. 85.

restored to them if they took arms against Russia. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ali forced the Sultan into making him Pasha of Egypt, a vassalage that was purely nominal. Incidentally, this would-be Pharaoh was a steadfast ally and client of France, a friendship that would not only survive the fall of the First French Empire but rise to even greater prominence during the July Monarchy of Louis-Phillipe.<sup>29</sup>

Amidst this decrepit state of affairs, Napoleon instructed Horace Sebastiani, his ambassador to Constantinople, to pressure the Porte into closing the Straits to Russia, to intentionally violate the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca by asserting its authority in the Principalities, and to join the Franco-Persian Entente while sending agents throughout Turkey in Europe to stir up anti-Russian sentiment among the populace. Czartoryski feared the Ottoman Empire was rapidly becoming a French vassal. He was so convinced that the Sultan was submitting himself to serve as the Emperor's puppet that he convinced Alexander to reverse his old policy and propose partitioning the Empire to the United Kingdom. Alexander and Czartoryski's plan would see Russia annexing Moldavia and Wallachia while the United Kingdom would receive Egypt. Czartoryski hoped that this would gradually lead to the creation of a Russian protectorate in the Western Balkans. Unfortunately for him, the United Kingdom showed no interest in his scheme.<sup>30</sup> However, while at onset this would appear as yet another proposal by Russia to carve up the Empire, here Alexander and Czartoryski set a new precedent. Whereas his predecessors proposed partitions as part of an imperial project, Alexander had little interest in expanding at the Ottomans' expense for the benefit of his own empire. He simply did not wish for the waning Turkish state to fall into the hands of his rivals. If the Ottomans were to accept foreign vassalage, he felt the need to engineer its reduction so as to protect Russia's interests and the security of its dominion. With one questionable exception in 1807, Russia would never again propose to annex Ottoman land out of a desire for expansion, but out of a need, real or

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<sup>29</sup> Anderson, 35-9, Lawrence P. Meriage, "The First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813) and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Eastern Question". *Slavic Review*, Vol 37, No. 3 (Sept, 1978), pp. 421-439. Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 422

<sup>30</sup> Anderson, 35-9, Meriage, 424, 426

perceived, to consolidate its present interests. It is also notable that Alexander and Czartoryski attempted to collaborate with the United Kingdom in their scheme, and would not act without their collaboration. Throughout the reign of Alexander's successor, Anglo-Russian relations would often be based on a similar dynamic.

Alexander was no friend of the Greek revolutionaries of the 1820's, or revolution of any kind for that matter. Napoleon had fallen in 1815, but as it was a revolutionary regime that allowed for Bonaparte to rise to power and subject all Europe to two decades of war, Alexander founded the Holy Alliance with Austria and Prussia, who at the Congress of Troppau agreed to stamp out any revolutionary activity against legitimate regimes in their own states and in others.<sup>31</sup> Thus, when Alexander Ypsilantis, the Tsar's aide-de-camp and leader of the Philiki Hetairia, a Greek nationalist partisan vanguard movement, announced his intention to revolt and called for the Tsar's assistance, The Russian Emperor's immediate response was to demand he lay down his arms, and even allowed the Ottomans to occupy the Principalities to crush Ypsilantis' insurrection.<sup>32</sup>

Had the Ottomans crushed the Greek revolt with humanity and efficiency, it is highly unlikely Alexander would have ever involved Russia in their internal strife, despite the Ottoman closure of the Straits to destroy Greek trade and their seizure of Russian ships carrying foodstuffs, which was Russia's primary export to Western Europe.<sup>33</sup> However, Sultan Mahmud II's outrage over Christian pogroms against Muslims in the Peloponnese led him to make a serious blunder which left even the reactionary Holy Alliance outraged. Mahmud allowed Muslim mobs to massacre thousands of Christians and destroy hundreds of churches to avenge their co-religionists. Worse still were his personal acts of retribution. He personally ordered the execution of fifty Phanariots and several senior bishops, including Patriarch Gregorios. The latter's execution utterly enraged Alexander, who demanded an end to the violence and pulled his ambassador when the Ottoman

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<sup>31</sup> Alexis Heraclides and Ada Dialla. "Intervention in the Greek War of Independence, 1821-32", in *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent*. Manchester University Press, 2015. p. 105. Riasanovsky, *History* 314-5

<sup>32</sup> Anderson 53, Heraclides and Dialla 106-7

<sup>33</sup> Anderson 60

reply was unsatisfactory. The Russian court now largely clamored for war as G.A Stroganov, C.A. Lieven and Pozzo di Borgo, the respective ambassadors to the Ottoman Empire, the United Kingdom and France implored the Tsar to commence hostilities. There was a smaller faction of doves led by Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode, who would continue to serve as both Russia's top foreign policy advisor and as a voice of pacifism for the remainder of Alexander's reign and through the entire reign of his successor. Though the Tsar personally wanted to punish the Ottomans, he refused the counsel of more aggressive voices and stood down, reasoning that he would do nothing without the collective approval of Europe, an example of Russia's decreasing willingness to act unilaterally against the Ottomans.<sup>34</sup>

The Greek Revolution was also an early sign of the United Kingdom's growing influence in the region, particularly as a rival to the Russians' own interests. In early 1824 Russia proposed the establishment of three autonomous Greek principalities, which the British refused to support, fearing it was a Russian plot to dominate Greece.<sup>35</sup> This was much in line with Foreign Secretary George Canning's agenda, which Heraclides and Dialla summarize as a desire to “further British interests in the region, not to allow Russia to take undue advantage of the Greek case, to limit French influence and not to permit a Franco-Russian alliance, (and) not to permit the collapse of the Ottoman Empire”.<sup>36</sup> These objectives would fundamentally remain the bedrock of British policy toward Russia in the Near East. As shall be seen in later chapters, the “Greek case” would not be restricted to the nation, which plays little role in Russo-Ottoman relations hereafter, but would come to include the Greek Church, whose disputes within the Ottoman Empire later become far more relevant to Russian interests. Alexander would not live to see the end of the Greek Revolution, as he unexpectedly passed away in December 1825. He was succeeded by his brother Nikolai, who would control Russia's destiny for the next three decades and on whose policy and personality this work shall focus. With that in mind, I feel it is necessary to first provide a brief biography of this man

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<sup>34</sup> Heraclides and Dialla 105, 108

<sup>35</sup> Anderson 62

<sup>36</sup> Heraclides and Dialla, 111

who would rule Russia at the height of its Imperial era, focusing mostly on his educational background, his chief influences, his political beliefs and ideals, and his fundamental character.

### **3.3 Tsar-Father: The Creation and Evolution of an Absolute Monarch**

The Tsar of all the Russias is an autocratic and absolute monarch. God Himself commands us to obey the Tsar's supreme authority, not from fear alone, but as a point of conscience<sup>37</sup>

To say Nikolai was very much a product of his circumstances and his upbringing would be an understatement. He would in fact serve as both the leader of Russia and the personification of its severe and sterile stagnation. Born on 6 July 1796, he would never know his father Pavel, murdered in a palace coup in 1800. However, before his death, Pavel entrusted the young Grand Duke's education to the General de Lambsdorff, who would prove to be a severe, formalistic and cruel guardian. From his unrefined yet dignified governesses he learned to be forthright and direct yet impeccably polite and to carry himself with a domineering frankness and a pride that would become an integral part of his character. He became acceptably proficient in French, though he never acquired full fluency. He also studied English and German, but with even less success. One must question whether his imperfect knowledge of European tongues affected his dialogues with the sovereigns and ambassadors of the Great Powers, which shall be explored in more detail in coming chapters. From his tutors he was taught to hate revolutionaries, a lesson which would be further reinforced during his adolescence, coming of age as part of the heavily Francophobic courts of Gatchina and Pavlovsk and set in stone during Napoleon's invasion of Russia. His religious lessons made him a devout Orthodox Christian who believed his role as Tsar was by divine right, and his duty as autocrat was to preside over the Russian people as a stern but fatherly patriarch.<sup>38</sup>

Yet not all of the fundamental characteristics of his personality could be attributed to his parental figures or his education. He was blessed with extraordinary good looks and a majestic

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<sup>37</sup> *Svod Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii, vol. 1, art. 1*, found in Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-55*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959, p. 96.

<sup>38</sup> Constantin de Grunwald, *Tsar Nicholas I*. Translated by Bridget Patmore. Macmillan, 1955, p. 19-25, 53, 59-61, 156, 203. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 9, 24-7, 38-40.

bearing, leaving a stunning impression on courtiers and diplomats throughout Europe. One example of the fawning praise he received can be found in the autobiography of the American ambassador Andrew Dickson White: “(He) was generally considered the most perfect specimen of a human being, physically speaking, in all Europe...whenever I saw him...there was forced to my lips the thought: 'You are the most majestic being ever created’”.<sup>39</sup> Foreign diplomats constantly showered him with praise. His own subjects, from the lowest peasant to the highest noble, were reduced to effusive excitement or solemn reverence wherever he made an appearance. Even his enemies were humbled at his presence. Riasanovsky records how a Polish rebel once confessed that he could not look the Tsar he detested in the eye, and during the Decembrist trials one of the defendants announced that “since yesterday evening I love you as a man: I want with all my heart to be able to love you as sovereign”.<sup>40</sup> Foreign emissaries such as Marshal Marmont complimented him on his modesty, but Nikolai was a man fully aware of the immense power he had been given. At a military review, he was heard to have thanked God for his own virtual omnipotence: “God, I thank thee for making me so mighty, and I beg thee to give me the strength never to abuse this power”.<sup>41</sup> However, not all his contemporaries were so favorably impressed. Countess Nesselrode considered him a martinet who often made himself “detested and loathed by the troops: they say he is...severe, vindictive and mean.”<sup>42</sup> George M. Dallas, who also served as an American ambassador to Russia, corroborates the Countess' testimony:

Although frank, conciliating, and even gay, in his manner, he is liable to outbreaks of anger, during which he inspires universal terror: at a recent review, he is said to have torn, with his own hand and in the presence of his troops, the badges of honour off the breast of an officer who displeased him....he is inflexible, but not cruel...<sup>43</sup>

The English found him especially distasteful. On his fateful trip to the United Kingdom in

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<sup>39</sup> Andrew Dickson White, *Autobiography*. Vol. 1. New York, 1905, p. 451.

<sup>40</sup> De Grunwald 63, Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 3

<sup>41</sup> De Grunwald 76-7, 154. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 9

<sup>42</sup> De Grunwald 33.

<sup>43</sup> Frederick Stanley Rodkey, “The Opinions of Three American Diplomats on the Character of Tsar Nicholas I” in *The Slavonic Review*, vol. 6, no. 17 (Dec 1927) pp 434-437., p. 437

1844, which I shall describe in detail in later chapters, the Chancellor Nesselrode described how Queen Victoria was left unamused by Nikolai's charms, and even feared being near him. He would cause even worse offense with her ministers, who were offended by his attempt to lecture them on the viability of the Ottoman Empire in the long term.<sup>44</sup> Nikolai was, in short, an arrogant and exacting martinet whose ego was elevated to a point short of megalomania, and whose severity fell short of sadism, concealed by his natural beauty and affable manner. Indeed, even as a boy he possessed an irascible yet emotionally withdrawn temperament, permitting himself few friends. As a man he remained quick to anger and was prone to take any opposition against him extremely personally, as could be seen during the trials held against the Decembrist revolutionaries who tried to depose him in the beginning of his reign. He chose to ignore their actual motivation to force the Romanovs to accept a constitutional monarchy and abolish serfdom, preferring to rebuke and condemn the rebel ringleaders as if they had rebelled against him out of personal animosity. Yet despite the passionate fury he would hold toward both his domestic and foreign adversaries throughout his reign, with his allies he continued to keep a great distance, allowing none of his ministers or family into his confidence beyond their assigned role or to direct or significantly influence his policy as Tsar.<sup>45</sup>

However, while he was an unenthusiastic student in most categories, he adored every facet of military science.<sup>46</sup> Obsessed with drill and discipline, he was never more alive than on the parade ground. As Tsar, he would foist a military-style uniformity on several aspects of Russian society, demanding that nobles and university professors and even their students adhere to an excessively strict dress code, harshly punishing any deviation from the norms he imposed.<sup>47</sup> His upbringing thus instilled in him a firmly conservative and conformist mentality that would become the bedrock of his fundamental principles as sovereign. Riasanovsky writes that Nikolai was “at heart a

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<sup>44</sup> De Grunwald 198-9.

<sup>45</sup> De Grunwald 19-25, 53, 59-61, 203. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 9, 24-7, 38-40.

<sup>46</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 8, 24-7.

<sup>47</sup> De Grunwald, 80-1.



dedicated junior officer”, but this was not the case. As Lambsdorff was Nikolai's paternal figure and his field marshal, so would Nikolai be to the country he ruled.<sup>48</sup> In the words of the Tsar himself:

Here (in the army) there is order, there is a strict unconditional legality...no contradiction, all things flow logically one from the other; no one commands before he has himself learned to obey; no one steps in front of anybody else without lawful reason; everything is subordinated to one definite goal, everything has its purpose...I consider the entire human life to be military service, because everybody serves.<sup>49</sup>

Nikolai's ruling doctrine was only gradually defined over his reign, but this is not to say his political beliefs evolved over time. There is little evidence that he ever modified his attitudes except when circumstances forced him to do so. While his ideology was only properly explained by scholars over time, Nikolai for the most part held firm to the same set of beliefs throughout the thirty years he reigned. But the uninventive Nikolai did not forge an ideological path for Russia to follow. He was merely product, adherent and incidental leader of the conservative and paternalistic authoritarianism that dominated Russian intellectual thought during his reign.

The task of defining Russian imperial rule in general and Nikolai's doctrine in particular as a lucid political theory fell to Count Sergei Uvarov, who formulated the principles of what would come to later be called “Official Nationality”. Like the Tsar himself, it was “sincere, even passionate, unquestioning, and uncompromising.” Uvarov was not alone in his work. He was supported by scholars such as Pogodin and Shevyrev, and many prominent figures such as Gogol and Pushkin were linked to its ideas and promulgation.<sup>50</sup> Writing in the *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosvesheniya*, Uvarov in 1834 organized the main tenets of Official Nationality into three main principles: “Our common obligation consists....according to the Supreme intention of our August Monarch, in the joint spirit of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality”.<sup>51</sup> Nikolai obviously approved of Uvarov's definition of Russian ruling principles, as he ennobled Uvarov and allowed

<sup>48</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 27

<sup>49</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 1

<sup>50</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 51-2, 73.

<sup>51</sup> Sergei Uvarov, “Tsirkulyarnoe predlozheiye G. Upravlyayushchego Ministerstvom Narodnogo Prosvesheniya Nachlastvam Uchebnykh Okrugov o vstuplenii v upravlenie Ministerstvom”, *Zhurnal Miisterstva Narodnogo Prosvesheniya*, 1834, part 1, page 1. Found in Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 73

him to use “Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality” as his family motto. Uvarov later elaborated on what these principles stood for:

Without a love for the faith of his ancestors a people...must perish. A Russian, devoted to his fatherland, will agree as little to the loss of a single dogma of our *Orthodoxy* as to the theft of a single pearl from the Tsar's crown. Autocracy constitutes the main condition of the political existence of Russia...Russia lives and is protected by the spirit of a strong, humane, and enlightened autocracy...together with these two national principles there is a third....nationality.<sup>52</sup>

What was nationality? It was the sum of Russian Orthodoxy and autocracy. According to Bulgarin: “In Russia there could never and cannot exist any other nationality, except the nationality founded on our Orthodoxy and on autocracy.”<sup>53</sup>

Orthodoxy was simply proper Russian Christian spirituality and moralism, which lay at the heart of Russian tradition. Nikolai sincerely embraced it and according to Riasanovsky, it was his sole means of solace in his most desperate moments. It stood in firm opposition to the revolutionary concepts of materialism, determinism and atheism, which brought only chaos.<sup>54</sup> It respected other denominations of Christianity, but held itself as its purest interpretation of Christ's teachings, and the only faith Russia needed. Nikolai even took to referring to a “Russian God”, as if his nation had added a special national component to the Holy Trinity.<sup>55</sup> Orthodoxy under Nikolai was thus a national religion. It was not evangelical; it did not seek converts outside of Russia's borders. It was essentially a belief by Russians and for Russians. This is notable, as the last section of this work describes Nikolai's intervention on behalf of non-Russian Orthodox, who by this criteria were of little interest to his ideological principles in this regard. I shall argue that his intervention was not out of a sincere desire to come to the aid of his coreligionists, for they only shared a common belief in a looser sense.

Autocracy was equally sacred to these intellectuals. According to Gogol:

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<sup>52</sup> Uvarov, *Desyatiletije ministerstva narodnogo prosvesheniya 1833-1843*, p. 2-3. St. Petersburg, 1864. Found in Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 73

<sup>53</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 77.

<sup>54</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 78-83.

<sup>55</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 85.

Why is it necessary that one of us should acquire a position above all others and even above the law? Because law is wooden; man feels that law contains something harsh and unbrotherly...that is why we need supreme grace to mitigate the law, and it can come to men only in the form of absolute power. A state without an absolute monarch is an automaton...the people will be fully cured only when the monarch will apprehend his highest significance-to be an image on earth of the One Who Himself is love.<sup>56</sup>

The Tsar was as a Caliph, God's own shadow. He needed to be afforded a near-divine supremacy because only under divine power could Man be virtuous. Men were full of sin, but a stern but loving hand could guide them as God himself guided them. As Pogodin stated, "The Russian people is (sic) marvelous, but marvelous so far only in potentiality. In actuality it is low, horrid, and beastly...(they) will not become human beings until they are forced into it". He also argued that institutions were inherently imperfect, and good governance depended on worthy individuals: "There is no institution or law which cannot be abused....institutions and laws are not as important as the people on whom depends their functioning". Autocracy was thus not an institution, but the rule of one man who governed as he personally saw fit. Such an autocracy must be dynastic. Bulgarin argued that the Fall of Rome was due to its Senate failing to recognize a hereditary monarchy, and the Caliphates had likewise fallen because the ruling families failed to maintain their power.<sup>57</sup> Power was maintained by constantly pressuring the people into meek obedience. Bulgarin writes:

It is better to unchain a hungry tiger or a hyena than to take off the people the bridle of obedience to authorities and laws...all the efforts of the educated class must be directed toward enlightening the people concerning its obligation to God, to lawful authorities and laws...toward the eradication of the beastly egoism inborn in man, and not toward exciting passions, not toward generating unrealistic hopes. Whoever acts differently is a criminal according to the law of humanity. One who has seen a popular rebellion knows what it means.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 98.

<sup>57</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 98-102

<sup>58</sup> F. Bulgarin, *Vospominaniya*, Vol. 1, 14-15. Found in Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 101.

Nicholas had shared this belief his entire life. Even as a boy he was said to have argued that the French Revolution was the consequence of Louis XVI being too lenient with his political enemies. Compromise with his adversaries was thus impossible.<sup>59</sup> But Nicholas was not to be Russia's tyrant or dictator, he was its father. Pogodin summarized Russian paternalism:

Russian history always depicts Russia as a single family in which the ruler is the father and the subjects the children. The father retains complete authority over the children while he allows them to have full freedom. Between the father and the children there can be no suspicion, no treason; their fate, their happiness and their peace they share in common. This is true in relation to the state as a whole...the military commander must be father of the soldiers, the landlord must be the father of his peasants, and even the servants of the house of every master were called children on the house...<sup>60</sup>

...we are all one family. Here (the Tsar) is our father.<sup>61</sup>

“Tsar-father” was in fact a common term for Russia's emperor.<sup>62</sup> Russia's fate and policy was thus entirely under Nikolai's direction. With the sole exception of his brother Constantine, who played little role in his government, no one in Nikolai's ministries, in his small group of friends, or in his court were allowed to significantly influence or contradict him. His inflexibility was exacerbated by his inflated opinion of his own competence as statesman, micromanaging responsibilities that could have been easily and more preferably handled by a minister with specialized knowledge. His contemporary and acquaintance Lady Tutcheva noted that “he sincerely thinks himself capable of seeing everything with his own eyes...and regulating everything according to his own knowledge”. He did listen to advisors, but would hear nothing outside of that individual's specialty. “If I spoke to him about the Caucasus or finance he would send me about my business”, said the ambassador Pierre Meyendorff, who held a near daily presence at the side of the imperial family.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Riasanovksy, *Nicholas I*, 12

<sup>60</sup> M. Pogodin, *Rechi, proiznesennyye v torzhestvennykh i prochikh sobraniyakh, 1830-1872*. Moscow, 1872. p. 90  
Found in Riasanovksy, *Nicholas I*, 119.

<sup>61</sup> Pogodin 198. Found in Riasanovksy, *Nicholas I*, 119.

<sup>62</sup> Riasanovksy, *Nicholas I*, 120.

<sup>63</sup> De Grunwald 157.

Count Karl Nesselrode was as close as one could come to the exception to the rule. Though he held several positions throughout his career, he served essentially as Nikolai's foreign minister throughout his reign. He was also one of the few voices in the Tsar's ministry who could disagree with his sovereign and work to temper his often aggressive policies, as later chapters will show. There were several reasons that provided Nesselrode with his unique independence of thought. The first was simply that he had a mind of his own. He was, for one, no supporter of Official Nationality.<sup>64</sup> He believed in a pacifistic policy and cooperation with Europe, particularly the United Kingdom, and envisioned the Eastern Question as a problem that must be solved by multilateral discussions with European powers, a much loathed idea among the Russian nobility. Notably, he went so far as to subtly warn the Tsar to accept this policy or to find a new minister.<sup>65</sup> As shall be seen, this was a policy the Tsar by and large followed until the collapse of Russo-European relations at the end of his reign. Nesselrode likely owed his unique freedom of expression at the court in St. Petersburg to the fact that his career predated Nikolai's accession, having served as a diplomat under Alexander and was heavily endorsed by Constantine.<sup>66</sup> Nesselrode was also wise enough not to oppose the Tsar too firmly, in mind or in deed. While no Russian conservative, his politics were firmly on the right wing and despised leftist and reformist political movements. Though the Tsar primarily worked to secure Russia's advantage in its foreign policy, he acknowledged Nesselrode's opinion that isolation from Europe would work against said interests.<sup>67</sup> Nesselrode was also prudent enough to serve, in his own words, with "pliancy, even abnegation" and as "a modest tool of the emperor's designs, and an instrument of his political plans".<sup>68</sup> He was, in other words, properly submissive save for when the situation called for a more frank voice. Skilled diplomat and Europhile that he was, Nikolai often used Nesselrode to act as his spokesman, and much of Russia's

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<sup>64</sup> Harold N. Ingle, *Nesselrode and the Russian Rapprochement with Britain, 1836-44*. University of California Press, 1976., p. 21.

<sup>65</sup> Loyal Cowles, "The Failure to Restrain Russia: Canning, Nesselrode, and the Greek Question, 1825-1827". *The International History Review*, vol. 12, no. 4 (Nov 1990), pp. 688-720. Published by Taylor & Francis, Ltd., p. 701, 707, De Grunwald 181, Ingle 28

<sup>66</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 44-5.

<sup>67</sup> Cowles 701, Ingle, 21-27.

<sup>68</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 45

(or Nikolai's, as the two were essentially synonymous) foreign policy was announced via Nesselrode's announcements, memoranda, and circulars, as the Tsar believed Nesselrode had the gift of making Russian policy more palatable to the courts, parliaments and public of the European states.<sup>69</sup> But it must be remembered that Nesselrode was no Talleyrand or Metternich. In almost all cases, he did not direct foreign policy, but merely served as the Tsar's chief advisor.

The third tenet of Official Nationality was “nationality”, but this is not to be confused with nationalism, at least not as a modern reader may understand it. As mentioned before, nationality for Nikolai was the combination of Russian Orthodoxy and Autocracy, and little more. Certainly, Nikolai and his intellectual followers promoted a cultural Russophilism, constantly praising the virtues of Russian culture and language, and posed Russian values as superior to those of the West, but first and foremost Russia was the fief of the Romanovs, whose sovereign had the unique right of deciding just what Russian values were. As Count E. Kankrin once declared: “Everything: glory, power, prosperity, and enlightenment, we owe to the Romanov family...we should change our general tribal name of *Slavs* to the name of the creator of the empire...the empire should be named Romanovia...”, to which Bulgarin commented, “An unusual idea, but an essentially correct one!”<sup>70</sup> Nikolai in fact took a firm stand against several nationalist ideas. He decried attacks on the Baltic German nobles such as Nesselrode, and condemned calls to Russify them. He was in fact perfectly satisfied with the Baltic German nobles as they were, for while “the Russian nobles serve the state, the German ones serve us”.<sup>71</sup> The Tsar had a particular disdain for Pan-Slavism. He even had one particular Pan-Slavist by the name of Ivan Aksarov arrested for his views, and in his condemnation of his subversive activities wrote:

Under the guise of a sympathy for the Slavic tribes supposedly oppressed in other states there is hidden the criminal thought of a union with these tribes, in spite of the fact that they are subjects of neighboring and in part allied states. And they expected to attain this goal not by through the will of God, but by means of rebellious

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<sup>69</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 183-4

<sup>70</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 130, 134-5, 139

<sup>71</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 144-5.

outbreaks to the detriment and destruction of Russia herself...and if, indeed, a combination of circumstances produces such a union, this will mean the ruin of Russia.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, Nikolai explicitly viewed Pan-Slavism as a radical and destructive movement that would entail the seizure of land from states Nikolai considered friends of Russia, namely Austria and the Ottoman Empire. Such a union with these “tribes” would come to the benefit of none and the ruin of all. His minister Uvarov argued that their so-called brothers were of no value to Russia: “Everything that we have in Russia belong to us alone, without the participation of other Slavic peoples who now stretch their hands toward us and beg for protection....is not the name of the Russian more glorious for us(?)”<sup>73</sup> It must be said then that Nikolai had no interest in expanding against the Ottoman Empire as a means of liberating its Slavic brothers from the Sultan's grasp. Whatever his designs against the Empire were, they were crafted for the benefit of Russia alone.

Nikolai's fundamental doctrine did have one tenet that was not explicitly mentioned as a component of Official Nationality. Revolutionary concepts such as nationalism and Pan-Slavism were especially offensive to the Tsar as they opposed his commitment to Legitimism. Legitimism predated Nikolai; Alexander's Holy Alliance was an effort to preserve Europe's *ancien regimes* against the tide of revolutionary fervor that destroyed the Kingdom of France and plunged the continent into chaos. Nikolai's primary foreign policy was to continue Alexander's legacy to the point of single-mindedness. It did not matter whether a state was ruled by a monarch or by a republic, Nikolai would act as Europe's policeman against those who sought the overthrow of established regimes. In fact, it did not matter to Nikolai whether the established regime was Christian, European, or even a friend of Russia. As will be explained in detail in the next chapter, Nikolai initially supported the Ottoman Muslims against the Greek Orthodox rebels as the Sultan was the Greeks' legitimate and recognized sovereign, and it was nothing for him to support the

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<sup>72</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 164

<sup>73</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 163

legitimate infidel against the rebel Christian. Even against his enemies he refused to press his victories, as they too were legitimate rulers. In 1828 he crushed the Persian armies who had attacked him, but despite the his total victory he took little territory and only pressed for commercial advantages and command of the Caspian Sea, as the Qajar Dynasty were legitimate rulers of Persia and Nikolai would not risk their overthrow for what he would consider trifling gains in the Persian heartland.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, this was typical of Nikolai's imperial policy for much of his reign, particularly against Muslim states. As shall be seen, Nikolai preferred to take commercial rather than territorial concessions in his victory, for while he believed Russia was already too large to properly administer as it was, he was surely aware of its relative poverty in comparison to Europe.<sup>75</sup> And while this work is concerned with Nikolai's intentions toward the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, it must be emphasized that he did not share Catherine's ambitions to build an empire in the Balkans, but to halt the aggrandizement of rival powers. To destroy the Ottoman Empire would be to betray his strategic security and his personal ideology and was seen by him as nothing more than an unpleasant necessity, and even then his mind changed throughout his reign, which this work shall document and analyze.<sup>76</sup>

To sum up, Russia was a pure autocracy, not run by institutions or ministers but by and large by one man who governed as he saw fit. This man's foreign policy was designed for the empowerment of Russia, but not its aggrandizement. Nikolai did not sincerely support Christians or fellow Slavs abroad, and in the latter case despised any attempt to cause a revolt against their legitimate sovereign. However, this same man was an irascible, stiflingly conservative and excessively proud ruler of mediocre talents, lacking the wisdom to see his shortcomings, the modesty to defer to wiser counsel, or the foresight to effectively consider and negotiate with the powers and potentates of Europe and the Near East. And while the "Policeman of Europe" would

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<sup>74</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 235-41

<sup>75</sup> Vernon J. Puryear, *England, Russia and the Straits Question, 1844-1856*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931, p. 11. Riasanovksy, *History*, 344-346

<sup>76</sup> Ingle, 13



for decades make powers from the United Kingdom to the Pashalik of Egypt dance to a beat set by the Russian colossus he commanded, it would be his policies and his designs toward the Ottoman Empire that would cause Russia's eventual ostracization and humiliation in the Crimean War.

### **3.4 The Treaty of Adrianople**

Nikolai took the throne at a high point in the Greek Crisis. In 1825, the first year of his reign, Sultan Mahmud II ordered Muhammad Ali to send him support to crush the Greek rebels. The Egyptian Pasha complied, and his disciplined army easily crushed the revolutionaries. However, while the Egyptian army had for the most part avoided massacring innocents, Russia had come to believe otherwise. In October 1825 the Russian ambassador to the United Kingdom reported to Canning that the “Court of Russia had positive information that...an agreement was entered into by the Porte with the Pasha of Egypt...to remove the whole Greek population, carrying them off into slavery in Egypt or elsewhere, and to re-people the country with Egyptians and others of the Mohammedan religion”. This was an entirely false rumor, but one Alexander found credible. But while he was willing to go to war to save the Greeks from a general massacre, Nikolai was far less enthusiastic. His attitude towards them was explicit and succinct: “I detest, I abhor the Greeks, I consider them as revolted subjects and I do not desire their independence. My grievance is against the Turks' conduct to Russia”. Ever the inflexible Legitimist, for Nikolai to mobilize his armies for Greek independence would be anathema to his political doctrine. Nonetheless, he had “grievances”. As mentioned earlier, the seizure of Russian merchant ships sorely damaged Russia's trade in foodstuffs and stopped the booming Odessa trade in its tracks. This situation was exacerbated by the attacks of the Barbary Pirates on Russian ships in the Mediterranean, despite the Ottomans agreeing to take full responsibility for their actions.<sup>77</sup>

However, Greece was not to be ignored, as Russia would use its revolution as a means of achieving its designs against the Ottomans. Nesselrode saw the opportunity to give Russia a

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<sup>77</sup> John C.K. Daly, *Russian Seapower and the “Eastern Question”, 1827-41*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991. p. 3, Heraclides and Diaila, 112-4, 120, LeDonne, 31-2, Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 239.

diplomatic advantage. While Nikolai had little interest in promoting Greek independence, Nesselrode wanted to position Russia as the Greeks' protector. Nesselrode did not do so out of sympathy for the Greeks' cause, but to give Russia the opportunity to protect and promote Russia's own interests within the Ottoman Empire. Cowles argues that this was a win-win gambit on Nesselrode's part, for if the Ottomans rejected a Russian ultimatum, Russia could go to war with the weak Ottomans with a just *casus belli*, and if they accepted said ultimatum the United Kingdom would be forced to support Russia's efforts to mediate the Greek Question. Ministers Wellington and Canning were cognizant of the Russian gambit, but Nikolai's insistence that Russia had no other honorable options forced them to sign the St. Petersburg Protocol on 4 April 1826, which demanded that the Ottomans provide the Greeks with autonomy. Notably, while the Russia permitted the British to mediate the peace, Article III bound the United Kingdom to the Protocol even if Russia declared war on the Ottomans, which as mentioned before would be the inevitable result of their refusal to accept the terms the Protocol forced upon them.<sup>78</sup> Nikolai and Nesselrode pulled off a brilliant coup. Not only would their interests be served whether or not the Ottomans accepted the Protocol, they successfully persuaded the United Kingdom to accept the responsibility of mediating the peace and to implicitly sanction a Russian invasion if their efforts should fail. But if Nikolai loathed the Greek cause, why would he threaten the legitimate Ottoman regime? Metternich understood Nikolai's probable motivation. He argued that full Greek independence was actually a better solution for peace in the region, as autonomy could serve as a "wooden horse" with which European powers could use to bully the Ottomans into their diplomatic sphere of influence.<sup>79</sup> Nikolai could therefore extend Russian influence in the Balkans without offending his Legitimist principles. It is also possible that Nikolai, while clearly seeking to exploit the situation, opted to do so with a moderation even Nesselrode found lenient. When Russia prepared for war against the

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<sup>78</sup> Anderson 65, Cowles 707-8

<sup>79</sup> Miroslav Sedivy, "From Adrianople to Münchengrätz: Metternich, Russia, and the Eastern Question 1829–33" *The International History Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (June 2011), pp. 205-233 Published by: the Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, p. 208.

Ottomans in 1828, Nesselrode proposed that Russia should demand an independent Greek state that included the Morea, the Archipelago and territory north of the Isthmus of Corinth with “the commercial and maritime resources which the well-being of our southern provinces require”. In other words, Nesselrode wanted a Greece dependent on Russia's grain trade. He also proposed making Constantinople a nominally free city under “irresistible” Russian influence, forcing the “tottering edifice of this (Ottoman) Empire” into a decrepit vassal of the Tsar.<sup>80</sup> At no time in the 1820's would Nikolai entertain such an aggressive stance. Greek independence was not only odious to the Tsar, it was unnecessary. As Metternich pointed out, it would be possible and perhaps even easier to control Greece as an autonomous Ottoman tributary. Furthermore, even if the British supported Greek independence, later chapters shall demonstrate that they would fight to the last man to keep Constantinople out of Russia's control, and would have found such a severe policy toward the Ottoman Empire to be utterly intolerable. Later chapters shall also demonstrate that Nikolai would base much of his foreign policy on keeping the United Kingdom contented, if not fully satisfied.

Despite being crippled at sea after suffering the annihilation of its fleet at Navarino Bay in October, the Ottomans insisted no foreign state had the right to interfere with their suppression of the Greek revolt. On November 22, Mahmud's *Reis Efendi* proclaimed:

...every independent power has a right to govern its own subjects without permitting the interference of any power whatever...history presents no example of conduct so opposed to the reciprocal duties of governments as that of the present interference in the internal concerns of another state, followed, as this has been, by succours given almost openly to an insurgent people, as the means of prolonging their rebellion against their sovereign.<sup>81</sup>

The Ottomans offered instead to grant amnesties and promised a milder government in Greece, which the Great Powers found completely unacceptable. Despite their insistence that the Ottomans make peace, the Empire refused on 31 November. Strangely, the Ottomans appear to have

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<sup>80</sup> LeDonne, 33

<sup>81</sup> Francis Rawdon Chesney. *The Russo-Turkish Campaigns of 1828 and 1829: With a view of the present state of affairs in the East*. New York: Redfield, 1854. p. 34

been taken by surprise when the Allied ambassadors responded by breaking off relations nine days later. Perhaps having realized the gravity of their error, the *Reis Efendi* attempted to appeal to Nesselrode for a final negotiation, which the latter ignored. Seeing war with Russia as inevitable, On 27 December a *Hat-i sherif* was issued throughout the Empire declaring that “the object of the enemy was to annihilate Islamism...” Russia waited four months to reply to the *Reis Efendi's* attempt to negotiate. Nesselrode's response was simple: “your Excellency cannot be surprised to learn that I am ordered to reply to your letter of the 27<sup>th</sup> December by the annexed declaratory statement; which will be immediately followed up by the march of an army into the Sultan's dominions..”<sup>82</sup>

In the course of two months, the Porte had managed to lose their navy, alienate three Great Powers and place themselves in a situation in which Russia had *carte blanche* to invade, occupy, and threaten the very existence of the Ottoman Empire. One might consider that the Ottomans placed themselves in this catastrophic situation thanks to their own abominable tactlessness and incompetence, but according to the *Reis Efendi*, the Ottoman court had long suffered from Russian provocations and that their supposed aggressions and repudiations of binding treaties were a result of Russia acting in bad faith, for it had blockaded Ottoman ports and denied their ships the right to leave the Morea, yet forced them to allow Russian ships through the Dardanelles and block Ottoman subjects from crossing from Asia into Europe. Chesney describes an almost incredulous Ottoman minister who questions if Russia really believed that their sailing a fleet into Ottoman waters and blowing its navy out of the water would not inevitably result in the Sultan repudiating their agreements. Moreover, the *Reis Efendi* accused Russia of plotting against the Ottomans for years, as they had long mobilized an army in Bessarabia that could cross the Pruth at a moment's notice, and illegally seized fortresses along their Asian border with a squatter's logic, claiming that since Russia had held them for so long, there was no point in returning them.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Anderson 67, Chesney 33- 38

<sup>83</sup> Chesney 38-9

There is other evidence in addition to the *Reis Efendi's* accusations that the Russians were looking to provoke the Ottomans. While it is true that the Allied fleet at Navarino drew up their ships in battle formation in preparation for a battle, it does not seem apparent that, as Anderson asserts, that there was an “expectation” on the part of the British or French that the battle was to take place when it did.<sup>84</sup> Two days before the battle, the Allied admirals had actually discussed the details of a potential winter blockade, before agreeing to enter Navarino Bay to reopen negotiations with the Ottoman fleet, “without effusion of blood and without hostilities, but simply by the imposing presence of the squadrons”. The “imposition” upon the Ottomans would have more to do with the threat of possibly going to war with the Great Powers than with the fleet itself, as the Ottoman fleet had 2,000 guns to the Allies mere 1,298. However, while the British squadron sailed in under a flag of truce, the Russian admiral gave his men “a rousing speech about duty to God, Tsar and Country,” clearly expecting a fight. There is no evidence that the Russians did more than their allies to provoke the Ottomans at Navarino, but they were the only ones pleased with the result. Chesney reports that both London and Paris were horrified at their own victory, with even Wellington considering it an “untoward event”, especially as the preservation of the Ottoman Empire is most essential to the balance of power in Europe”.<sup>85</sup> It was not so considered in St. Petersburg. A secret dispatch supposedly written by Pozzo di Borgo suggests that the Russian provocations were indeed deliberate. “How formidable we should have found the Sultan had he time to give his organization more solidity, and render that barrier impenetrable which we find so much difficulty in surmounting, although art has hitherto done so little to assist nature”.<sup>86</sup> It was indeed an opportune time for Russia to strike, as the Auspicious Occasion had left Mahmud practically defenseless against a standing army. But until Navarino, it was not so defenseless against the European navies, which significantly outgunned the allied squadrons sent against it. One may assume the Ottoman fleet was obsolete, but would only be partially correct. In his *Travels to and*

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<sup>84</sup> Anderson 67

<sup>85</sup> Chesney 33, Daly, 11, Heraclides and Dialla 118

<sup>86</sup> Chesney 39

from *Constantinople in the Years 1827 and 1828*, British officer Charles Colville Frankland described his disdain for the Sultan's fleet: "I cannot comprehend how the Turks manage with such materials as they possess, since the loss of their maritime population, to man and equip their vessels of war, and still less how they can possibly find officers capable of taking charge of them...(the ships are) dreadfully rotten".<sup>87</sup> However, not only did the French and British not wish for hostilities to commence, they were only there at all because they wished to restrain Russia, whom they feared would start a war if allowed to act unilaterally. According to Daly, immediately upon his accession Nikolai planned to establish a Mediterranean squadron to support the Black Sea Fleet in a potential conflict with the Ottomans, causing the British and later the French to push for an alliance to restrain Russia from inciting a war. Ironically their inclusion of a secret article in the Treaty of London which obligated all signatories to blockade the Ottoman fleet not only allowed Russia to incite a war, it allowed them to do so as the aggrieved party, and to do so without protest from its allies. This must have been a necessity for Nikolai, as prior to the Treaty of London he conceded that they were the only two states capable of stopping the Russian fleet. It is no wonder Nikolai "approved completely" of the victory at Navarino, he managed to destroy the strongest component of the Ottoman armed forces and got the two greatest threats to his ambitions to do it for him.<sup>88</sup>

It was also an opportune time for Russia to provoke, as Mahmud had explicitly endorsed the hard-line policy put forth by war hawks in the Porte led by one Pertev Efendi, who blamed foreign powers for enabling the Greek revolt to continue and argued that only their submission would bring peace to the region. He was recorded arguing to a French diplomat that "Greece does not exist. The *Rum* are simply a *millet* headed by their patriarch".<sup>89</sup> Pertev was not merely denying Greece's national identity. It must be remembered that the *Millet-i Rum* was within Ottoman borders a quasi-legal classification that encompassed all the Empire's Eastern Orthodox subjects with the sole

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<sup>87</sup> Charles Colville Frankland, *Travels to and from Constantinople in the Years 1827 and 1828*, vol 1. London, 1829, p. 108.

<sup>88</sup> Daly, 4, 15-6

<sup>89</sup> Heraclides and Diassa, 119-120

exception of the Armenian Church. The ethnicity of *Rum* were typically not considered under Ottoman law, and if one were to convert to Islam, he would cease to be *Rum*. That said, *Rum* were at the time the majority demographic in the Ottoman Empire, and within its European territories the *Rum* dwarfed the Muslim population.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, Pertev appears to have believed that providing autonomy for the artificial Greek community would be to encourage insurrection among other segments of the real *Rum* community who were left out, which would throw the entirety of the Empire's European territory into chaos. Mahmud likely shared Pertev's perspective as it is quite logical from an empire that classifies its constituent demographics according to their religion. However, Mahmud and Pertev's willingness to demand and expect the Great Powers to adhere to their own conventions was a stunning example of their own myopia and hubris, which the Russians relied on. Chesney makes an excellent point:

The Grand Vizier's letter of the 27<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1827 invited negotiation and explanation. Russia, on the contrary, as if dreading the possibility of an adjustment, allows this letter to remain without any reply being sent, until the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 1828. The manifesto then dispatched reached Constantinople on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, and the Sultan had already heard on the 12<sup>th</sup> of the advance of the Russians from the Governor of Brailow. Not a single complaint was made by Russia during this interval, nor any explanation demanded; until at length she embodied her grievances in a declaration of war, at the very moment that a powerful army was marching in Europe, and another preparing in Asia, to obtain redress for grievances not previously complained of by her. The preparation of the Asiatic army was still a stronger proof than any of the proceedings in Europe of the intentions of Russia. The historian of Marshal Paskewitch (Felix Fouton) states, that a campaign was undertaken in the midst of winter in Persia, with the express object of leaving the army disposable for another service; and *by the end of February*, 1827, the Marshal had received orders to prepare to invade Asiatic Turkey.<sup>91</sup>

The first part of the above passage asks a very important question. The Ottomans were all but begging the Russians not to break off relations, yet Russia does not reopen negotiations. The Ottomans did repudiate their treaties and utter strong words against perceived Russian provocations,

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<sup>90</sup> Evgeniy Radushev, personal interview, April 2019.

<sup>91</sup> Chesney, 40.

but took no action. Yet Nikolai felt he “had no alternative but to maintain the dignity of his country”.<sup>92</sup> It is true that the Ottomans had committed several acts of war against Russia by attacking its fleet, abusing its subjects and repudiating their treaties. It is also true that Russia had effectively been given permission by the United Kingdom to embark on a campaign of retribution. But Russia had four months to demand satisfaction without going to war, yet delivered no ultimatums that could have possibly prevented the outbreak of hostilities. It is thus apparent that Nikolai had intended since before Navarino and probably before even the ratification of the Protocol of St. Petersburg to provoke the Ottomans into providing the Russians with a suitable *casus belli*, and after Navarino were actively working to avoid a peaceful resolution/that would get them far less than victory on the battlefield ever could. In fact, one month before Russia's declaration of war, Metternich begged Russia to demand autonomy for the Peloponnese and the Aegean Islands, and to threaten to recognize Greek independence upon refusal. This very moderate proposal may have actually been accepted by the Ottomans, who had allowed Christian communities on their Danubian periphery to enjoy autonomy, but Nikolai scoffed at the idea.<sup>93</sup> If peace and the rights of the Greek nation meant anything to Nikolai, it would have at least been worth a try, but as Nesselrode said, only “ the march of an army into the Sultan's dominions, in order to obtain satisfaction for his just complaints” would satisfy the Tsar now.<sup>94</sup>

The Ottomans were predictably dominated on the battlefield. While the Sultan's army put up a dedicated and stubborn resistance which significantly slowed the Russian advance, it did little but to delay the inevitable. It should be noted that Russia's grand strategy was a march on Constantinople via the coast of what is now Eastern Bulgaria to force an Ottoman capitulation. In preparation for this invasion, Nikolai released a proclamation to the Ottoman Bulgars promising that they would not be harmed and to keep calm, but that the war was not to liberate them from Muslim rule but merely to ensure that the Sultan observed their treaties with Russia. The Tsar thus

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<sup>92</sup> Chesney 37

<sup>93</sup> Heraclides and Dialla 120

<sup>94</sup> Chesney 38



made it clear that he had no intention of dismantling the Empire and forbade the Bulgars to rise against their sovereign. The war was, as one of his ministers stated, “a simple argument between two courts, which was to be settled by the army without the participation of the people”. It is clear that in 1828 Nikolai had no interest in the independence or rights of Slavic Christians in the Empire, and in fact highly discouraged any attempt on their part to exploit the Russian advance to liberate themselves.<sup>95</sup>

Ironically, despite Nikolai's expressed wish that the Ottomans remain in power, the Russian victory at Kulevcha in June 1829 was so complete that Adrianople was forced to capitulate in August, leaving the defenders in Constantinople severely demoralized.<sup>96</sup> Fearing the inevitable fall of the capital, The British and French sent their ambassadors with a joint statement to General Diebitsch, who was a mere 60 miles from the city, warning him that if Constantinople should fall, the Ottoman Empire “would cease to exist, and in annihilating its power the most terrible anarchy will strike indiscriminately...” As Nikolai had gone out of his way to prevent such chaos, this was the last thing he would have wanted. In any case, the Ottomans had signaled their willingness to surrender by accepting the agreements at Akkirman and London and sent plenipotentiaries to Adrianople for a final settlement with Russia on 1 September<sup>st</sup>.<sup>97</sup>

In her article “Writing Up the Eastern Question”, Margaret Lamb makes an interesting statement:

Compared with the terms which Russia had imposed upon the Ottomans as a result of her military victories at the end of the eighteenth century, the terms which Russia imposed in the treaty of Adrianople were moderate. She obtained small territorial concessions around the mouth of the Danube and on the eastern shore of the Black Sea and was guaranteed a free passage for her merchant ships through the Straits. British statesmen were immediately alarmed and indignant. They believed that by the St. Petersburg protocol of 1826, signed by Great Britain and Russia, and by the treaty of Paris of 1827, signed by Great Britain, Russia, and France, all the signatories had

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<sup>95</sup> Alexander Bitis, “The 1828–1829 Russo-Turkish War and the Resettlement of Balkan Peoples into Novorossia” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (2005), pp. 506-525. p. 510-1.

<sup>96</sup> Bitis 511

<sup>97</sup> Aksan 355-6

bound themselves not to gain in any way from their attempts at the pacification of the Greek-Ottoman conflict. Russia, therefore, was viewed as deceitful and treacherous, and her modest gains as merely the springboard for future expansion.<sup>98</sup>

This is true, if one would consider the Treaty of Adrianople from an eighteenth century mentality. It is true that Russia took little territory for itself, annexing little more than the Caucasian ports of Anapa and Poti, “the fortress and Pashalik of Akhaltsikh...the left bank and islands of the Lower Danube, as well as the Sulina mouth of that river.”<sup>99</sup> However, the sovereign of an already enormous empire was uninterested in adding yet another province to his domain. Russia's declaration of war against the Ottomans had declared as much: “Russia is far from cherishing ambitious projects; sufficient people and countries acknowledge her sway; already sufficient anxieties are connected with the extent of her dominion”.<sup>100</sup> In fact, five months before it declared war it had along with the United Kingdom and France promised not to “seek any exclusive advantage whatever in the shape of commercial privileges or of territorial aggrandisement”. Pozzo di Borgo did inform London Russia would also seek war reparations, but was met with no protest.<sup>101</sup> On the face of it, Russia largely appears to have made just and moderate demands, asking for nothing but the commercial rights Russia had already informed Europe it was entitled to. Though Russia only demanded the Ottomans accept Greek autonomy in the Treaty, they did nothing to stop Austria and the United Kingdom in proclaiming and recognizing its independence a mere five months later, which was almost certainly a concession to these two Powers, as they feared Russia could cast more influence as a “wooden horse” over an autonomous Greece. Russia was certainly aware of the United Kingdom's wariness of Russian designs, as they had loudly protested the demands Russia laid upon the Porte, and as later examples will show, Nikolai took great pains not

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<sup>98</sup> Margaret Lamb, “Writing up the Eastern Question in 1835-1836”. *The International History Review*, Vol 15, No.2 (May 1993), pp. 239-268 p. 240

<sup>99</sup> Chesney 225, LeDonne 33,

<sup>100</sup> David Urquhart, *The Mystery of the Danube. Showing how through secret diplomacy, the river has been closed.* London: Bradbury & Evans, 1851. p. 22

<sup>101</sup> Urquhart 20-1

to offend the British.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.5 The Kochubey Conference

While Nikolai anticipated victory, he apparently did not foresee it being as decisive and crushing as it was. As Adrianople fell, it is clear he saw an Empire on the brink of total collapse. Certainly he was not alone in this thinking. The British and French had persuaded General Diebitsch not to march on Constantinople for its capture would effectively shatter Ottoman authority throughout the Empire. However, while Nikolai did not wish to dismantle the Ottoman Empire at that particular moment, he gathered the aforementioned Special Committee in a secret meeting in September 1829, as the Treaty of Adrianople was being negotiated, to discuss whether it might be in Russia's interest to do so in the near future. This Special Committee was chaired by Count Viktor Kochubey and included Prince Alexander Golitsyn and Counts Pyotr Tolstoy, Alexander Chernyshev, Dimitri Dashkov, and of course, Karl Nesselrode. All these were important members of the State Council. Kochubey opened the conference by declaring its purpose, “to deliberate on the political complications which the events of the present war might bring about in the Ottoman Empire and of which the result might be its collapse in Europe”. Clearly, while St. Petersburg did not wish to knock over the tottering Ottoman regime, it was fully aware all it would take was one small push.<sup>103</sup> Nesselrode then read a prepared memorandum which summarized Russia's long-held policy toward the Empire:

We have always considered that the maintenance of that empire was more useful than detrimental to the true interests of Russia, that any order of things which might be substituted there would not balance for us the advantage of having for a neighbour a weak state, always menaced by the spirit of revolt which agitates its vassals, reduced by a successful war to submit to the law of the conqueror.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Sedivy, “Adrianople to Münchengratz” 208, Miroslav Sedivy “From Hostility to Cooperation? Austria, Russia and the Danubian Principalities 1829–40”. *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 89, no. 4 (October 2011), pp 630-661. Published by: the Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, p. 636

<sup>103</sup> Robert J. Kerner, “Russia's New Policy in the Near East after the Peace of Adrianople; Including the Text of the Protocol of 16 September 1829”. *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1937). pp.280-290. p. 280.

<sup>104</sup> Kerner 281

The Ottomans were too internally decayed to ever pose a real threat to Russia, but were strong enough at least to keep their large dominion from suffering a catastrophic fragmentation. Any “order of things” that could realistically replace the *status quo* would weaken Russia's position in the Balkans and along the Danube. Furthermore, Nesselrode argued, once the Ottomans were destroyed, they could not be reconstituted. A New Order would have to be assembled in the Balkans, and Russia would have to directly intervene to protect its interests. However, it could never do so alone: “To wish to solve the question without their participation whilst their vital interests are involved would be a most obvious attack upon their honour and burden us with too great a responsibility”. Nesselrode's statement points out two severe difficulties that faced Russia. If they attempted to solve the Eastern Question unilaterally it would come under direct attack by the Great Powers, whose own interests would inevitably be harmed, and even if they decided not to interfere Russia would be stuck with an enormous burden it would be unable to handle. Ever the internationalist, Nesselrode proposed if the Empire should fall, a congress of Great Powers should be called to peaceably and collectively decide the fate of Ottoman Europe. He reminded the Committee that the Tsar personally had no desire to expand his realm at Ottoman expense, revealing that Nikolai had previously instructed Prince Lieven to inform the British that Russia had no desire “either of keeping Constantinople or any part of the Ottoman Empire, the acquisition of which would upset the equilibrium of Europe”, and had written to General Diebitsch “May the Lord prevent....(making us) lords of Constantinople and thereby consequently (bringing) the end of the Ottoman Empire in Europe”. However, it was also revealed that not everyone in the Tsar's ministry dreaded this outcome. Capo d'Istria was not at the conference, but his ideas regarding the future of Ottoman Europe were presented as a counter to the Tsar's views. He proposed partitioning Ottoman Europe into a confederation of five kingdoms comprising of Dacia, Serbia (which would expand to East Rumelia and rule the Bulgars), Macedonia, Epirus, and Greece, with Constantinople serving as the confederal capital.<sup>105</sup> However d'Istria's ideas were to be utilized as nothing more than a

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<sup>105</sup> Kerner 281-2

strawman for the Committee to discredit. Dashkov severely criticized d'Istria, arguing that dismantling the Empire would spark a pan-European conflict. Even if the Ottomans collapsed due to its own feebleness and Europe could agree to partition the European portion of its carcass, it would be of no benefit to Russia:

The possession of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles would not fail to encourage our commerce, but at the price of what sacrifices could we obtain it! Moreover, other Powers, thanks to their geographic positions, could make more advantageous acquisitions at the expense of the Porte than could Russia. Austria could acquire Serbia, Herzegovina, Bosnia, Albania, and likewise subjugate Montenegro; England and France could seize the islands of Greece, Candia and Egypt. In such circumstances the Russian flag would be called on to meet dangerous enemies in southern Europe instead of indifferent Turks.<sup>106</sup>

Dashkov assumes Russia would receive Constantinople in a general partition. However, since Constantinople's strategic importance lay in its control of the Turkish Straits and securing free access through these was Russia's ultimate goal, a partition of the Ottoman Empire would actually nullify Constantinople's strategic value, as these “dangerous enemies” would be a short march from the city's gates. To keep Constantinople secure, Russia would have to not only have to fortify the city itself, it would have to occupy and defend the entirety of the Turkish Straits on both its European and Asian shores. And as Dashkov feared a European threat from the west, he feared the danger a reinvigorated Turkey could pose from the east. The Committee assumed that if the Ottomans did collapse, they would only do so in Europe. Dashkov predicted the Ottomans would retreat to Anatolia, where they would ferment a Muslim revival which not only could pose a grave threat to the recent Russian annexations in the Caucasus. The Committee was in unanimous agreement with Dashkov's argument, and concluded that Russia's interests were best served by maintaining its “weak neighbor” policy.<sup>107</sup>

However, the Committee also decided that the time had come to plan for the possibility of an

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<sup>106</sup> Kerner 283

<sup>107</sup> Kerner 283

Ottoman collapse. Though the Committee concurred with Dashkov's argument that dismantling Ottoman rule in Europe and the Straits would be politically and practically ruinous, they resolved that if the Ottomans were to maintain their intransigent attitude toward Russia, they would proceed with such an action regardless:

*...le Comite a unanimement reconnu: que les avantages du maintien de l'Empire Ottoman en Europe, sont su perieurs aux inconveniens qu'il presente; que sa chute seroit des lors contraire aux vrais interets de la Russie; que par consequent il seroit prudent de chercher 'a la prevenir, en profitant de toutes les chances, qui peuvent encore se presenter pour conclure une paix honorable...*

*...le Sultan, tout en se refugiant en Asie, perseveroit encore dans ses refus, la consequence de son aveugle obstination seroit pour lui, la perte de ses possessions en deca du Bosphore et du Detroit des Dardanelles, et pour nous, l'obligation de proceder immediatement 'a l'execution des mesures provisoires qui seront indiquees plus bas...*

*Dans le cas donc ou cette catastrophe, que nous aurions la conscience d'avoir cherche 'a prevenir par tous les moyens en notre pouvoir, viendroit 'a s'effect uer, comme dans celui, oiu le Sultan, refugie en Asie, continueroit 'a se refuser a nos propositions et se depouilleroit ainsi lui meme de Ses Etats en Europe, il deviendrait urgent d'adopter certaines dispositions provisoires sur les quelles le Comite a ete egalement appele a deliberer...le Comite a arrete: i. que la Turquie d'Europe seroit militairement occupee par les armees Russes, tant que le sort des pays dont elle se compose, ne soit definitivement regle. 2. que cette occupation doit presenter le caractere le plus imposant. 3. qu'a cet effet Constantinople, les Chateaux du Bosphore et ceux des Dardanelles auront garnison Russe.<sup>108</sup>*

Despite acknowledging that an Ottoman collapse and retreat to Europe would force Russia to negotiate with the Great Powers to partition Ottoman Europe, despite understanding that it would position “dangerous enemies” at Russia's borders, despite knowing that such a partition would transform Constantinople into a strategic liability, and despite predicting that the Ottomans were more dangerous as an Asian rump state than as an overextended empire, the Committee stubbornly resolved that if the Ottoman Empire did not give in to Russian demands, it would annex the Straits without accounting for or compromising with the concerns of the Great Powers or the threat of a

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<sup>108</sup> Kerner 286-8

revitalized Turkish nation bent on retribution. While Nikolai did not take an active role in this conference, the unanimity of its participants and their stubborn inflexibility is reflective of his character and foreign policy. The Committee knew very well such a drastic move would be of no good to Russia and they sincerely did not desire to punish the Ottomans, but if they would not bend to the Tsar's will, the Tsar would assert his will upon them even if doing so would incite the enmity of the Great Powers. Russia would never intentionally antagonize its Western rivals, but neither would it hold its own will and interests as subordinate to theirs. That said, Nikolai had no desire to isolate Russia diplomatically. He understood that even his enormous realm could not stand against the collective might of Europe, and that if his will entailed committing to an action as drastic as the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, he would need an ally in his corner. This would serve as one of his fundamental foreign policy goals for the remainder of his reign.

### **3.6 The First Oriental Crisis**

The Treaty of Adrianople ended the Ottomans' war with Russia, but it would not long remain at peace. The Greek Crisis would produce an aftershock that no one in Europe had predicted. The Ottomans' Syrian provinces were “historically seen as an extension of Egypt” as well as a region rich in manpower, resources and as a strategic buffer between Egypt and Anatolia. Damascus served an important role both as a trade hub and as a stop for pilgrims. It is then no surprise that it was coveted by Muhammad Ali. One of his motives for supporting the Sultan's fight against the Greeks was to pressure his liege into giving him Syria as reward for his service, and was insulted when Mahmud instead offered him control of Crete, which was a far inferior asset crawling with Greek nationalists and a paltry compensation for the 20-25 million *riyals* Muhammad Ali spent defending his suzerain. That said, by 1828 the Ottomans were embroiled in their war against Russia, allowing Muhammad Ali to prepare an invasion without arousing the suspicion of the distracted Porte. Even when peace was declared the following year, the Ottomans suffered sporadic but empire-wide uprisings against the Sultan's reform policies to take note of Muhammad Ali's rapid military

buildup. Interestingly, though Europeans residing in Egypt noticed the sudden whirlwind of martial activity in Cairo and Alexandria, they could not ascertain Muhammad Ali's motives until his fleet departed for Syria at the end of 1831.<sup>109</sup>

The disciplined Egyptian Army under the adept leadership of Ibrahim Pasha bludgeoned the Ottoman opposition in Syria, driving them out of the region altogether. By August 1832 Ibrahim had taken control of Adana and Tarsus. By the end of the year Konya had capitulated, and Kütahya was in Egyptian sights. Ottoman power was utterly broken. Marshal Marmont observed:

Had (Ibrahim) marched on Constantinople...he might have arrived opposite that capital, without difficulty, by the third or fourth of January (1833)...the appearance of the Egyptians at Scutari [Üsküdar] would have produced a revolution at Constantinople, and overturned the Turkish Government, crushing the Sultan in its fall, or compelling him to act as an instrument of Ibrahim's power...A new Mussulman Empire might then have arisen, which with Egypt for its basis would have been guaranteed from external dangers...in the possession of a brilliant reputation and would have been respected by European nations, from the successful adoption of their military institutions.<sup>110</sup>

As Syria fell, the Ottomans frantically begged the British for military assistance.

Preoccupied both with domestic reforms and with naval operations in the Netherlands and in Portugal, Britain had neither the time nor the resources to consider such a request. The French, who had long been sympathetic to Egypt, cared little for the Ottomans' plight, and even after the Ottoman Army was routed at Konya, the *Journal des Debats* inexplicably dismissed the possibility of Ibrahim successfully advancing into Asia Minor. *The Times* lampooned the apathy of the British and French governments: "From the official silence maintained on the subject by the Governments connected with the Mediterranean, one would have supposed that the decisive battle of Koniah was the first event of the war, and that this *denouement* of an extraordinary drama came upon Western Europe with all the surprise of novelty."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Aksan 364-6

<sup>110</sup> Aksan 373

<sup>111</sup> F.S. Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question in the Relations of England, France and Russia, 1832-1841*, Urbana, 1924. p. 14-5



Though neither the United Kingdom nor France seemed to care whether the Ottoman Empire lived or died, the Russians, who had Constantinople at its mercy merely four years prior, would now arise as the Empire's savior. Of course, Nikolai would not come to their aid as a born-again Turcophile. Having secured his Black Sea commerce, which was rapidly growing post-Adrianople, he needed to protect his interests. Egypt threatened his “weak neighbor” policy, as it was an upstart power that threatened to overthrow the tottering Turkish regime. It was unlikely Egypt would wish to respect the unequal treaties Russia had laid upon the Ottomans, and would be in the position to resist Russian pressure. The Russians particularly feared the possibility of Egypt backing Caucasian insurgents within Russian borders, which would throw the Eastern Black Sea littoral into chaos. Not only was Egypt a strong state that threatened to replace Russia's weak southern neighbor, it was under France's tutelage and sphere of influence, and if Constantinople were to fall to Alexandria, Nikolai feared Paris would gain an unshakable foothold in the region.<sup>112</sup>

Nikolai also saw an opportunity to shore up his alliance with Austria. Relations with the Habsburg Empire were actually good, as the July Revolution of 1830 convinced Metternich that he would need the “Policeman of Europe” to suppress the wave of liberalism and nationalism that was sweeping Europe.<sup>113</sup> Nikolai was well aware he would have to cement his bond with Austria to create a conservative entente against the increasingly liberal and increasingly hostile Western Powers.<sup>114</sup> Thus at the end of January 1833 Nikolai sent a confidential note to Metternich informing him that he wished to utilize the Oriental Crisis as a means of coming to an agreement with Austria “on the imminent questions of the Orient, in order to consider hypotheses destined to formulate a plan of future action conforming to the views of the two friendly and allied governments...” One gets the feeling that Nikolai is speaking to Metternich about the Ottomans as if he were discussing a man on his deathbed, this sentiment is further reinforced in conversation the Tsar had with Austrian Foreign Minister K.L. Fiquelmont, in which Nikolai reiterates his desire to preserve the Empire, and

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<sup>112</sup> Daly 81, Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 16

<sup>113</sup> Sedivy “From Adrianople” 211-2

<sup>114</sup> Puryear 14.

would freely offer his support. However:

*Mais voila tout ce que je peux. Je n'ai pas le pouvoir de donner de la vie a un mort, et l'Empire turc est mort. Il nous sera peut etre possible d'arreter la crise actuelle. Mais quand meme nous pourrions y parvenir; je n'ai aucune confiance dans la duree de ce vieux corps; il est en dissolution de tous les cotes ; un peu plus tot ou plus tard, il tombera.*<sup>115</sup>

This was hardly empty doom-and-gloom speculation, considering that Nikolai was speaking in the wake of the rout of the Ottoman army at Konya. What worried the Tsar was the possibility of the Western Powers carving up the Ottoman corpse:

*Que faire ? L'idee d'un partage est celle qui a toujours occupee la pensee des puissances. Je vous avoue que je crains toutes les intrigues que la France et l'Angleterre, telles que nous avons le malheur de les voir aujourd'hui, ne manqueraient pas de venir susciter a Constantinople. Les fuites de ce demembre ment seraient immenses ; comment prevenir qu'elles nous deviennent dangereuses ? Voila la pensee qui m'occupe et sur laquelle nous devons nous entendre.*"<sup>116</sup>

The Tsar asserted that Russia and Austria had to work together to protect their national security and their interests from Western imperialism in the event of this collapse. He assured Fiquelmont by insisting he was no Catherine and that the Ottomans had nothing he wanted for himself, and that he would implement all resources available to him to prolong the life of “l'Empire mort”.<sup>117</sup> This appears to have been Nikolai's first serious attempt at working out a partition plan with another Great Power, but Metternich was wholly uninterested in making such a deal. He had only ordered Fiquelmont to ensure that the Tsar agreed that the Ottomans had to be preserved, and having gained that assurance, Metternich did not see any possible partition of the Ottoman Empire that could serve Austria's interests. He would merely assure Russia that Austria would not allow a post-Ottoman settlement that would be detrimental to Russia's own interests.<sup>118</sup> Nikolai had thus

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<sup>115</sup> Bolsover 116. Puryear 16-7 6 Wiener Staats Archiv, “Berichte aus Russland”. Ficquelmont a Metternich ?13/25 fev./33, No. 234 Found in Bolsover 116-7.

<sup>116</sup> Bolsover 117, 7 W.S.A., Berichte aus Russland. “Ficquelmont a Metternich”, 13/25 feV/33, No. 234 A. Found in Bolsover 116-7.

<sup>117</sup> Bolsover 117

<sup>118</sup> Bolsover 117-9

failed to achieve a partition agreement with Austria, but his negotiations were at least a marginal success, as he did earn Metternich's assurance that Austria would at least diplomatically support Russian intervention in the Turkish Straits, and would not allow the Western Powers to prevent them.

On November 9, 1832, Nesselrode wrote to Russia's ambassador to the Porte that “The Emperor, *s'est penetre de l'idee* of putting an end to the insurrection in the Orient; with this in view he has resolved to exert all of his moral influence upon the Viceroy of Egypt.”, and would send Lieutenant General Muraviev to discuss matters with both the Ottoman and Egyptian courts.<sup>119</sup> Russia was not content to merely dispatch a mediator. Nikolai ordered the Black Sea fleet to mobilize and to sail to Constantinople upon the Sultan's request, which the Tsar apparently believed was very soon in coming. Well aware that the Western Powers would react with alarm at the fleet's mobilization, Nikolai took care to send an explanatory note to Prince Lieven to reassure the British government Russia was coming as a peacemaker. Rodkey does not mention whether Pozzo di Borgo or some other diplomat to France was likewise informed. It is likely that Nikolai believed that the pro-Egyptian French would never accept Russian intervention under any circumstances. Indeed, when Muraviev arrived in Constantinople, M. de Varennes, the French *charges d'affaires* to the Porte, instantly worked to sabotage Muraviev's mission, but to little avail. After all, it was Russia, and only Russia, who was offering military assistance to the utterly defenseless Porte, while all Varennes could accomplish was to write an impotent appeal to Ibrahim to cease his advance. Meanwhile, British Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston, despite now comprehending the existential threat the Egyptian Army posed toward the Ottomans, callously refused to aid them. “The fleet of the Sultan suffered at Navarin losses, which have mainly contributed to deprive the Porte of that maritime security, which in a contest with the Pasha of Egypt, it might otherwise have expected to command.” However, it should not escape notice that despite offering practically nothing, some members of the Divan still supported Varennes over Muraviev, and even when Ambassador

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<sup>119</sup> Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 15

Butiniev placed the Black Sea Fleet at the Sultan's disposal, the Porte first attempted to negotiate a settlement with Egypt. Only when Varennes' attempts to halt the Egyptians failed and Ibrahim began to advance on Constantinople did the Sultan accept Russian aid. Varennes and his British counterpart Mandeville begged the Ottomans to reconsider, only to be told by their foreign minister that "A drowning man will clutch at a serpent". The Sultan exercised his prerogative. The Black Sea fleet was summoned to Constantinople on 2 February.<sup>120</sup>

However, the serpent proved to be a valuable ally. Only days later, Muraviev traveled to Alexandria and returned to Constantinople reporting that Muhammad Ali had agreed to halt at Kütahya. As Constantinople was no longer under imminent threat, Varennes and Mandeville prevailed upon the Porte to countermand the summons of the Black Sea Fleet. The *Reis Efendi* shared their sentiments and on 8 February he asked Butiniev to order the fleet to return, but the ambassador responded that nothing short of a written command from the Sultan himself would cause the Fleet to turn around. Mahmud, perhaps still fearing the possibility of the Egyptians resuming their march, did not issue such a command until the French dispatched Admiral Roussin to Constantinople to counter the Russian mission. Nine days later Butiniev received the Sultan's order.<sup>121</sup> Whether it was due to Roussin's diplomacy or because the Porte felt insulted by Butiniev's refusal to accept the authority of the *Reis Efendi* as the *Journal de Saint Petersburg* asserted is unknown. What is known is that Butiniev ignored the order, and the fleet arrived at Buyukdere three days later, on 20 February. Rodkey points out that the 17 February order to rescind the fleet summons was issued far too late to be obeyed, but it is unlikely that anything could have stopped the sailing of the fleet at that point. Upon their arrival, the Russians had several motives for maintaining their presence, despite "thrice expressed" demands upon the arrival of the Black Sea Fleet that they take the first favorable wind out of the Bosphorus.<sup>122</sup> However, the Ottomans did not ask that the Russians go home, but rather that they retire to Sizepol "to be on call", as Fleet Admiral

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<sup>120</sup> Daly 85, 307, Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 15-9

<sup>121</sup> Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 19

<sup>122</sup> Daly 86, Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 20-1

Lazarev reported. Sizepol was a harbor town just a little to the north of Constantinople, was about as close as Lazarev could anchor without creating an international incident. However, he almost certainly did not anchor there to antagonize or intimidate the Ottomans, but to keep from antagonizing France. The Ottomans had “thrice expressed” their demand that the fleet take the first favorable wind out of Constantinople because such a wind had in fact come and gone, yet Lazarev refused to leave the region, as he had learned at a Russo-Ottoman conference at Butiniev's home on 2 March that Roussin had subtly threatened the Porte that if the Ottomans did not order Russia out of the Bosphorus, France would sail with Egypt and force a squadron into the Dardanelles. It was thus possible to claim that the Ottomans were ordering the Russian out under French duress, to which Lazarev would not bow. There is some evidence that the Ottomans were acting against their own will. The *Kapudan Pasha* paid a cordial visit to Lazarev in mid-March, and several days later the Admiral and his officers were invited to visit the Ottoman Mint, after which Mahmud gifted the Russian officers with gold and silver medals. These gestures of friendship suggest that the Ottomans were making a show of pressuring the Russians to placate the French. As the Ottomans wished for the Russians to remain at Sizepol “on call”, it is clear that the Ottomans were not altogether unwelcoming to their erstwhile “serpentine” allies.<sup>123</sup>

However, it is also possible that the defenseless Ottomans were working to insure their own position and please as many factions as they could. Before resorting to threats, Roussin had promised the Sultan that he would impose France's will upon Muhammad Ali if he refused to withdraw, on the condition that Mahmud order the Black Sea Fleet to leave the Bosphorus. Perhaps seeing an opportunity to gain both French and Russian assistance, he rather cunningly sent an order to the Russian fleet that would keep them as close to Constantinople as possible without risking the support of France. It was also sensible for the Sultan to hedge his bets, as Roussin was promising no action that Varennes had not already carried out, which was to simply send a strongly worded letter on 22 February to the hitherto invincible army rapidly advancing on the Ottoman capital to perhaps

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<sup>123</sup> Daly 28-9, 88

consider a peaceful negotiation of terms, or else “*Persister dans les pretentions que vous avez soulevees, ce serait appeler sur votre tete des consequences desastreuses, qui, je n'en doute pas, eveilleront vos craintes...*”<sup>124</sup> Muhammad Ali, who was wise enough to keep himself informed on the attitudes of the Great Powers, was well aware that Roussin was making an empty threat which he could easily laugh off, further warning the Sultan on 23 March that if he did not bequeath Syria as well as Cilicia to Egypt, he would march into Constantinople. By this point the French had not only been useless to the Porte, they were virtually working as Muhammad Ali's emissaries. On 18 March Lord Aberdeen informed Wellington that Roussin seemed to be acting as a negotiator for Muhammad Ali, carrying out negotiations as if he was Egypt's ambassador rather than France's, and that both the Austrian and Russian missions seemed to be have been kept away from these discussions. But despite the seriousness of the situation and the Ottomans continuing to beg for British naval assistance, the United Kingdom remained indifferent. Wellington, for instance, continued to insist that they “have not leisure to attend to nor means to interfere effectually in affairs at a greater distance and of minor importance...(The Cabinet) now prefer the establishment of French influence to that of the Russians in the Levant...there is no man in the Cabinet who has taken the trouble of ascertaining facts and considering how the interests of this nation might be affected...” One must take a moment to consider Wellington's perspective. He did not say “the establishment of Egyptian influence to that of the Turks in the Levant”. It appears he fully understood that both Egypt and the Ottomans were being used as proxies of France and Russia respectively, and that whatever the outcome of Muhammad Ali's rebellion, the winner was doomed to serve as a European pawn, if not a complete vassal. It is unknown whether Wellington really did speak for his Government, but it explains why Britain refused to interfere, as it did not wish to aid in the aggrandizement of a rival Great Power one way or the other. With that said, Russia remained the only Great Power willing to stand in between Ibrahim Pasha and Constantinople. On 5 April a

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<sup>124</sup> Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 21-22, Roussin to Muhammad Ali, Feb. 22 1833, found in *Journal des Debats*, April 19, 1833. Found in Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 21-22

second Russian squadron arrived in the Bosphorus, accompanied by transports carrying 5000 soldiers. A third squadron would be sent on the 11<sup>th</sup>. The only reason Nikolai did not dispatch a fourth squadron was because he had no more ships to send. Virtually the entire Black Sea fleet was now occupying the Bosphorus. Even an auxiliary corps was ordered to cross the Prut to further reinforce the city. There was no protest from the Porte.<sup>125</sup>

On 3 April Palmerston finally ordered Vice Admiral Hotham to sail his ships to Alexandria and pressure Muhammad Ali to stand down. This was the first time any Great Power besides Russia lifted a finger to aid the defenseless Ottomans, who almost certainly would have been forced to open Constantinople to Ibrahim Pasha were it not for the Tsar's forces. However, his intervention was too little, too late, and made little difference in the conclusion of the Turco-Egyptian conflict. France continued to do more harm than good to the Porte. Prior to Palmerston's belated decision to restrain Muhammad Ali, the Western Powers were less than useless to Constantinople. On 23 March, upon learning Egypt's terms for peace, the Ottomans were prepared to cede Syria but not Cilicia. In an attempt to help, Roussin ordered Varennes to accompany the Ottoman plenipotentiary to the negotiations at Kütahya in order to pressure Egypt into accepting Ottoman terms. Ibrahim effectively ignored Varennes and adamantly refused to amend his father's demands. As France still had no intention of backing up their diplomatic pressure with force, he could do nothing, nor could the equally impotent Ottoman plenipotentiary, who had no choice but to accept Egypt's demands on 8 April.<sup>126</sup>

On the other hand, Russia behaved as if there was no peace agreement. Nikolai discussed occupying two forts on both sides of the Bosphorus, namely the Anadolu and Rumeli *Hisarlari*. Lazarev reported such a move would be unnecessary, as Ibrahim was not fool enough to attack the 11,000 Russian soldiers stationed in the Bosphorus, but nevertheless Nikolai dispatched another ship to meticulously survey the defenses surrounding the Dardanelles, and upon the completion of this

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<sup>125</sup> Daly 87-92 Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 19-22

<sup>126</sup> Daly 91-2, Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 23-4.

survey engineers were sent to strengthen the defenses. One must wonder what Nikolai and his subordinates were intending, considering that peace had been made at Kütahya even before the arrival of the Black Sea Fleet's third squadron. Theoretically, there was nothing stopping Russia from packing up and returning home. One could argue that Russia wanted to ensure that the Ottomans would have some defense against a second Egyptian attack, which was certainly a likely possibility, but as Lazarev said, Russia was more than capable of holding off the Egyptian army with a mere 11,000 men, and that fortifying the Straits was unnecessary. It is also suspicious that the Russian forces were behaving as if they were following the protocols set forth in the Kochubey Conference.<sup>127</sup>

*Que si par contre, la revolution qui auroit eclate 'a Constantinople amenoit un bouleversement general, dont la consequence seroit la confusion et l'anarchie dans la Capitale meme comme dans les provinces, un tel evenement ne pourroit etre envisage, que comme le signal de la chute de l'Empire Ottoman...*

*Apres avoir examine celles, qui ont deja ete prescrites par SA MAJESTI, L'EMPEREUR au Commandant en Chef, ainsi que les mesures que le Ministere des affaires etrangeres a proposees, le Comite a arrete:*

- 1. que la Turquie d'Europe seroit militairement occupee par les armees Russes, tant que le sort des pays dont elle se compose, ne soit definitivement regle.*
- 2. que cette occupation doit presenter le caractere le plus imposant.*
- 3. qu'a cet effet Constantinople, les Chateaux du Bosphore et ceux des Dardanelles auront garnison Russe.<sup>128</sup>*

The Sultan remained on his throne, yet Russia behaved as if Constantinople were in the throes of “*un bouleversement general*”, and was in the process of carrying out the three above protocols exactly as described. Perhaps to the Russians “*la confusion et l'anarchie*” had effectively arrived, considering the fact that half the Empire was in the hands of rebels and the capital was for all intents and purposes an open city. Nikolai also appeared far from reluctant to carry out this

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<sup>127</sup> Daly 54, 94

<sup>128</sup> Kerner 288



occupation. Certainly he complained of the “sacrifice” he was making to foreign ambassadors, but by ignoring Lazarev's claim that fortifications were unnecessary and strengthening the defenses along the Dardanelles at his own expense demonstrate that Nikolai perhaps felt more enthusiasm for the venture than he let on.<sup>129</sup> This did not escape the notice of the British. Its new ambassador Lord Ponsonby instantly noticed Russia's imposing presence along the Straits, and his report caused a furor in Parliament, who seemed to fear Russia's potential threat to the Ottoman Empire more than Egypt's overt aggression. Palmerston, for instance, argued that “The matter of the greatest interest and importance after the restoration of peace in the Levant, will be the complete evacuation of the Ottoman territory by the Russian land and sea forces, and to the early accomplishment of this object...” The British Admiralty instructed Ponsonby to join ranks with the French and Austrian ambassadors to demand the Sultan order the Russians to evacuate the Straits. Unlike the French, the British were willing to put force behind their threats, sending their Mediterranean squadron into the Dardanelles, with instructions not to initiate hostilities with Russia without orders, which implies that said hostilities were being considered. As tensions escalated, On 5 May Nikolai replaced Butiniev, whom Mandeville had considered “too weak a character”, with the more indomitable Count A.F. Orlov, a clear gesture which demonstrated that the Tsar would not be cowed by Western posturing. Orlov's hardline approach was soon demonstrated when on 25 May Roussin attempted to bully the Ottomans into allowing French warships access into the Dardanelles by ordering the *Mesange* to sail directly to Constantinople. Not only did the Ottomans fire on the ship, forcing its withdrawal, when the French ambassador made a formal complaint he was responded to by Orlov, who threatened to crush further attempts with his own ships, cementing Russia's newfound reputation as the Ottomans' protector. Indeed, by June 1833 Russian soldiers wandered freely on the streets on Constantinople, and ships from Russia's Baltic Fleet were given *firman*s from the Sultan to cross the Straits and join the Black Sea Fleet. At this state of affairs, the Ottomans possessed an air of resignation, the Western Allies one of indignant rage, and among the Russians, hubris. When

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<sup>129</sup> Daly 86

the British consul of the Dardanelles questioned the Pasha who issued the *firmani*s to the Russian ships, the Pasha merely shrugged: “The Russians, you know very well, do as they like just now, and if they want more vessels in the Bosphorus, they will no doubt order them from where they are to be found...” The British and French certainly did know very well, and their constant protests drove Orlov into a haughty anger. “We only have one regret here,” he wrote to Nikolai, “and that is to leave without measuring ourselves against the French fleet!”<sup>130</sup> Orlov almost had to eat his words, as the British sent two warships into the Dardanelles, where neither the Ottomans nor Russians dared to oppose them. Seven line ships followed some days later. However, this show of force was far too late to prevent the Russo-Ottoman thaw and formalization of their friendship at Hünkâr Iskelesi on July 8.<sup>131</sup>

### 3.7 “One of the Most Misunderstood Documents in Middle Eastern History”

The Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi was nominally a defensive alliance agreement, but in fact only one article of the Treaty is of any importance, and it was drafted in secret:

...the two high contracting parties are bound to afford to each other mutually substantial aid...nevertheless, His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias, wishing to spare the Sublime Porte the expense and inconvenience....instead of the aid which it is bound to furnish in case of need, according to the principle of reciprocity of the patent treaty, will confine its action in favor of 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 whatever.<sup>132</sup>

The Emperor of All the Russias was likely being polite. Ottoman military assistance would merely be a liability. Russia's true objective in negotiating the alliance was to secure control of the Straits. As the Straits were in Ottoman hands, Russia was always at risk of an invasion from the south. While the Ottomans were obviously no threat, an Ottoman alliance with a Western Power would leave Russia vulnerable. Nesselrode claimed as much, arguing that the purpose of the secret article was to secure its southern frontier from an amphibious invasion.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Daly 92-7, 306 Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question* 24-5

<sup>131</sup> Daly 97-8

<sup>132</sup> “Separate Article of the Treaty of Unkiar-Iskelessi.” Found in Puryear 434

<sup>133</sup> Samuel Kucherov, “The Problem of Constantinople and the Straits”, *The Russian Review*, vol. 8, no. 3 (July 1949), pp 205-220. p. 206. Rendall 42, Sedivy 222

That said, one must not assume the treaty was the result of Russia simply dictating terms to a helpless Porte. Hünkâr Iskelesi was actually the result of Nikolai's tempered acceptance of a proposal made by Mahmud II for a full alliance. The Sultan had proposed a partnership on both offensive and defensive terms as far back as April 1833. The Tsar, however, was only willing to make an alliance on defensive terms. The motivations of both sovereigns could be easily deduced. A full alliance would enable the Sultan to call Russia in a retributive campaign against Muhammad Ali. A defensive pact would keep Russia from having to accept such a call while still protecting its own interests. As Nesselrode observed, the Treaty “serv(es) to fortify the peace in the Levant, to avoid new complications, and consequently to spare us the necessity of new sacrifices”. Nevertheless, Nikolai instructed Orlov and Butiniev to “act so that the initiative in the proposal...came from the Porte, as in fact the first idea of it was conceived and expressed confidentially by the sultan”. It is likely Nikolai did so to assuage the Great Powers that he was not manipulating the Ottomans into falling into his suzerainty. Russia would repeatedly stress that they were accepting an Ottoman proposal rather than forcing their own upon the Ottomans. Rendall agrees, arguing that

Given the Russians' bullying and refusal to withdraw their warships earlier in the year, such appeals to Ottoman sovereignty may seem disingenuous. Yet statements by a senior Ottoman official seem to have genuinely convinced them that, in not withdrawing their ships, they were acting consistent with the secret wishes of the sultan'.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Orlov wrote that, in beating down Ottoman resistance to the treaty, he was carrying out Mahmud II's wishes: 'I have followed with the Turks the system of caressing with one hand and clenching the fist of the other, and that has happily succeeded for me,' he explained to Kiselev. '*The ministry has bowed before the firm will of the sultan.*'<sup>134</sup>

However, if the Ottomans were so amenable to the Russian counter-proposal, why did they need to be “beaten down” into accepting it? The likely answer is that if Russia refused a full alliance because it did not serve their interests, a defensive pact was at least a potential disservice to

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<sup>134</sup> Nesselrode to Nicholas I, report for 1833, AVPRI, f. 137, op. 475, 1833, d. 3, 11. 28 OD.-29; 46-46 ob. Found in Rendall, p. 43, Rendall 43, 51

the Ottomans. Under the terms of a full alliance, the Ottomans could use Russia to reassert its authority in Asia. A defensive pact would do nothing but make the Ottoman Empire Russia's southern shield. Russia would return the favor as a protector of Ottoman sovereignty, but that naturally reduced the Ottomans to the status of protectorate. However, as an empire on the verge of collapse, the Ottomans were forced to agree to this humiliation, for becoming Russia's junior partner was far more bearable than being dissected or even deposed by their own vassal state.

However, as Russia feared an amphibious invasion from the Western Powers, the Western Powers dreaded the Ottomans allowing Russia to sail warships through the Straits into the Mediterranean. Sedivy argues that the British and French feared Russia would use this access to gain a foothold in the Levant. It is true that Russia did desire naval access to the Mediterranean in order to influence affairs in the region. In a report to Nikolai he claimed Russia was entitled to possess such influence, "which belongs to her by right and de facto...to be maintained at all costs".<sup>135</sup> Of what interest was the Levant to Russia? Russia did wish to protect the custodianship rights of their Orthodox co-religionists, as disputes with French-supported Catholics had been brewing since the mid eighteenth century, and both Russia and France had to intervene when in 1819 the Orthodox attempted to use a *firman* granting them the right to rebuild the Holy Sepulchre to seize "additional rights and privileges. Such disputes over the region's holy places would grow in intensity and eventually play a role in inciting the Crimean War, but Fowler points out that after 1819, "we do not find that any political differences had arisen between France and Russia on the subject of these rival claims...until 1836". It is thus unlikely that Russia had negotiated Hünkâr Iskelesi for the purpose of securing the Holy Places, though I will analyze whether the disputes over these sites played a role in later negotiations prior to the conflicts that incited the Crimean War.<sup>136</sup>

Another of Russia's possible motivations for gaining access to the Levant was to gain

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<sup>135</sup> Kucherov, 206. Sedivy 222

<sup>136</sup> George Fowler, *History of the War: A record of the events, political and military, between Turkey and Russia, and Russia and the allied powers of England and France*. London: Simpson Low, Son, & Co. 1855. 4 Norman Rich, *Why the Crimean War? A Cautionary Tale*, McGraw Hill, 1990. 41

control of its markets. Chesney posits that

the Ottoman Empire, in its fall would carry with it its Syrian and Egyptian dependencies. England, in case of such an event, must be content with an inferior place among nations. The overland communications with India, which only the other day were but an occasional luxury, must be sacrificed at a moment when they have become an ordinary part of the wants of almost every family. And, in addition to the chance of seeing another formidable maritime power in the waters of the Mediterranean, probably preparing to dispute the empire of the seas elsewhere also, the possibility of an invasion of India must cause uneasiness with regard to the safety of our Eastern possessions, independently of the expense which must be the consequence of such a threat.<sup>137</sup>

These arguments were not mere sensationalism propagated by Western propagandists.

Palmerston was convinced Hünkâr Iskelesi was a diplomatic prelude to a Russian seizure of the entire Ottoman Empire, reasoning in a dispatch to Ponsonby that

Russian fleet in the Black Sea & the Russian Troops in the Krimea are within a few days' sail of the Bosphorus, and may at any time return thither, before the British Squadron could arrive to prevent them, let it be stationed where it may, if not actually within the Dardanelles. But Russia would not risk the consequences which would follow a reoccupation of the Bosphorus, without an invitation from the Sultan; & the Sultan would not give her an invitation unless to relieve himself from some great and pressing danger. That danger could arise only from a renewed rupture with Mehemet Ali, or from some serious insurrection in some part of the Turkish Empire.<sup>138</sup>

Palmerston argued that a crisis that would require Russian intervention was nigh inevitable, as Mahmud was anxious to antagonize Muhammad Ali and resume hostilities. However, this foolish Sultan had no idea how Russia was manipulating him into dismantling his own empire. Palmerston, however, was more well-versed in Russia's history:

...the Sultan, while he endeavours to escape from one danger, exposes himself to another Danger, greater, and far more certain; that by placing himself thus under the Protection of Russia, he will soon find himself under her absolute Control; and that the example of Poland may serve as a warning to shew, how rapid is the Transition from Dependence, to Subjugation, and Partition. It may be stated that

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<sup>137</sup> Chesney 266

<sup>138</sup> R.L. Baker and Viscount Palmerston, "Palmerston on the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi", *The English Historical Review*, vol. 43, no. 169 (Jan 1928), pp. 83-89. Published by Oxford University Press. p. 87

Russia can be at no loss for occasions for the furtherance of her Designs; and that a fresh quarrel with Mehemet Ali will no doubt be excited, in order that it may afford a Pretext for renewed Interference; but that it by no means follows that Interference, begun upon the plea of resisting Mehemet Ali, might not ultimately lead to an arrangement with that Pasha for a division of Spoil; and thus the Danger, with which the Sultan conceives himself menaced, may be rendered greater and more imminent, even by the very Means by which he seeks to avert it.<sup>139</sup>

The United Kingdom's goal, Palmerston writes, is “to prevent the accomplishment of the ambitious Plans of Russia in the Levant; and to avert the Dangers which would arise to Europe from the Extension of her Power in that Quarter.”<sup>140</sup> Palmerston does not clarify exactly what those ambitions are, but it would not be too much of a stretch to assume that he shared Chesney's concerns that Russia was plotting to seize control of the Levant to corner its markets and imperil the United Kingdom's commerce with India. However, there is little evidence Russia had any such intention. Chesney's own work shows that Russia was only the Ottoman Empire's fifth largest trade partner, and rather heavily outmatched by the United Kingdom, Persia, France, and Austria.<sup>141</sup> As for Palmerston's suspicions that Nikolai would attempt to partition the Empire with Egypt, no such evidence of such a scheme exists. Such a plot would in fact contradict Russia's fundamental “weak neighbor” policy, as Nikolai would effectively be replacing the weak Ottomans with the strong Egyptians, and encourage the Caucasian uprisings he was so anxious to suppress. If the United Kingdom had to fear a Great Power encroaching on Ottoman markets in the Levant, perhaps it should have become wary of its own ally. According to Metternich, it was France, not Russia, who threatened to dominate the region:

The seas of the Levant will belong to Egypt in the future, in other words to France. Instead of becoming a market for all nations engaged in commerce, Egypt will become a power and this power will form a French outpost against England and Russia. The Mediterranean will thus become a French lake, exactly what

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<sup>139</sup> Baker and Palmerston 88

<sup>140</sup> Baker and Palmerston 89

<sup>141</sup> Chesney 263

Napoleon wanted to achieve.<sup>142</sup>

If the Tsar had an ulterior motive in the Levant, it was to prevent this possibility. He feared Egypt for its strength and a strong client of an antagonistic Great Power would be a nightmare for a Nikolai's Near Eastern policy. But French client or no, Egypt's fleet would always be a threat to Ottoman security, one Russia's own fleet would need to neutralize. That said, it is clear that the political minds of the Western Powers deeply misunderstood Russia's interests in the Ottoman Empire by projecting their own imperial ambitions upon their eastern rival. They accused Russia of attempting to dominate the Levant when it was they themselves who were attempting to do so. The West's misinterpretation of Russia's intentions is even more inexcusable, considering that the so-called secret article of Hünkâr Iskelesi was actually revealed to Ponsonby almost immediately after the treaty's ratification.<sup>143</sup> However, Russia had no Indian colony to worry about nor did it possess a satellite in the Near East. Russia's real intentions centered around gaining such a satellite.

As mentioned before, Russia's primary strategic intent with the Treaty was to place the Ottoman Empire as the barrier to its southern flank, ensuring that no Great Power could force the Straits without meeting a sanctioned and justified Russian response. In return, it would protect the Empire's sovereignty, which it would preserve in all matters outside of those that were deleterious to Russia's own policies. This had the added benefit of preserving the Empire against the ambitions of the French-backed Egyptians. But Palmerston was not altogether wrong in his assumption that Russia carried ulterior motives. While he falsely assumed Russia intended to use their alliance with the Ottomans as an excuse for dismantling the Empire, he rightly deduced that it enabled the Russians to do so. Indeed, Russia would use the Treaty as a means of ensuring that whatever would happen in the Empire, Russia would be in the Straits before any Power could do likewise. As Nesselrode wrote to the Tsar: "(Russia seeks) 'to be ready to arrive first in the theatre of events with imposing forces, so that the fate of the Orient should in no case be decided either *without Russia, or*

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<sup>142</sup> Sedivy, "From Adrianople to Münchengratz", 219

<sup>143</sup> Sedivy "Adrianople to Münchengratz", 220

*against her.*” He goes into more detail in another letter to Orlov, describing Hünkâr Iskelesi as a means of coming to the Empire's aid as 'the first and strongest... whether considering the preservation of the Ottoman Empire possible, or at last recognizing its dissolution as inevitable”. In other words, Russia would come to preserve the Empire, and failing that, to keep its corpse from falling into foreign hands. However, the Russians were well aware that their unequal partnership would earn the suspicion and ire of the other Great Powers, and needed to gain support for their policies in the Near East. General Paskevich summed up the general sentiment at St. Petersburg: “It is necessary to make preparations, but *under no circumstances to begin without Austria's assistance*. It would be still better if England takes part in this affair as well. If we go in on our own, we shall have all Europe as enemies”.<sup>144</sup> Russia's protectorate over the Ottoman Empire had been secured with Hünkâr Iskelesi. Now it was time to ensure the other Powers would respect it.

### **3.8 Münchengratz: Nikolai's Lost Opportunity?**

Austria was Russia's natural ally in Balkan affairs, as they were both under conservative regimes that wielded influence in Ottoman Europe and, to some extent, in its Asian territories. As mentioned earlier, they comprised two-thirds of the old Holy Alliance alongside Prussia, who is not known to have held more than a very peripheral interest in Ottoman affairs. However, during the 1828-9 War Austro-Russian relations had declined considerably. Metternich feared Russian annexation of Ottoman territories in the Balkans, and as late as 1833 passionately declared to the French that “ it would be better for the Empire of Austria to face the risk of a war of extermination rather than to see Russia aggrandized by a single village at the expense of the Turkish Empire”. Nikolai's diplomats reported that Metternich wished to organize a coalition of Great Powers to force Russia into accepting an unfavorable peace. Whether or not this was true, Nikolai seems to have believed it was, as Sedivy writes that the Tsar “strongly distrusted Austria” by 1829 and that Metternich, well aware of his suspicions, dispatched Ficquelmont to St. Petersburg in a successful

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<sup>144</sup> Rendall 45-7



mission to affect a reconciliation between the two Powers.<sup>145</sup> And as mentioned earlier, the July Revolution not only discredited France as a possible alternative ally, it accelerated the thaw in Austro-Russian relations, as Metternich desired the Tsar's assistance in suppressing liberal movements in his own country, which the Tsar was more than happy to provide. Metternich was also largely contented with Russia's attitude toward the Ottomans post-Adrianople, interpreting the Tsar's softened attitude toward Constantinople as a sign that Nikolai did not "aspire to the expulsion of the Ottoman power from Europe...It will content itself with the benefit that it has already acquired: the moral degradation of its two neighbours in the Levant and the advantage of becoming through certain concessions the sovereign arbiter of the Ottoman Empire's existence in Europe, which is much more important than the acquisition of some desert regions".<sup>146</sup> He also approved of Nikolai's intervention in the Oriental Crisis as it accorded to his own principles of upholding a legitimate regime against the armies of a rebel, particularly a rebel that was a client of a French state controlled by his ideological enemies.<sup>147</sup>

However, Metternich's goodwill toward Nikolai was once again put to the test after the signing of Hünkâr Iskelesi, for not only was the Russo-Ottoman defensive pact negotiated without his knowledge, he had to learn it from the French and British ambassadors at Vienna. Metternich humiliated himself further by passionately denying any such alliance had been formulated, reasoning that he would have been the first man to know, only to realize in mid-August that he was in fact the last.<sup>148</sup> Naturally, the Austrian minister was livid at having been kept in the dark by his own ally, and upon their meeting at Münchengratz in mid-September 1833 he angrily reproached Nikolai: "I took a guarantee for your conduct which has been falsified. I do not object to the principle of your Treaty, you have therefore committed no crime which should separate us, but you have weakened my power of serving you in the same way again. Should I ever feel myself called

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<sup>145</sup> Macfie 22, Sedivy "Adrianople to Münchengratz" 207-8

<sup>146</sup> Metternich to Apponyi, 17 Sept. 1829, F, 271 found in Sedivy "Adrianople to Münchengratz" 209

<sup>147</sup> Sedivy "Adrianople to Münchengratz" 215-6

<sup>148</sup> Sedivy "Adrianople to Münchengratz" 220-1.

upon hereafter to answer for the conduct of your Govt, what can I expect from France and England, but that they should reply — Dupe[d] once — you may be deceived again!”<sup>149</sup>

Metternich's reproach should not be dismissed as an enraged ejaculation. He was no short-tempered fool reacting to an insult and despite his personal humiliation continued to support the Russo-Ottoman partnership, as it aligned with Austria's own policy in the region. His perception of Russia's designs on the Ottoman Empire remained more grounded and correct than those of the Western Powers, who feared the treaty was a prelude to the fall of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>150</sup> He even conceded in his outburst that the Tsar “committed no crime which should separate us”. But Metternich also reminded the Tsar that he had withheld the truth from his own ally, and could not be completely trusted. Metternich's anger may have set the tone and perhaps even altered the nature of his discussions with Nikolai at Münchengratz. For instance, when the Tsar once again brought up “*un homme malade*”, asking Metternich “*Que pensez-vous du Turc?*” Metternich gave a sarcastic response: “*Est-ce au medecin ou a l'heritier que Votre Majeste adresse cette question?*” The journal *St. Petersburg und London in den Jahren 1852-64* reports that the Tsar was so taken aback that he not only failed to answer, he dared not mention the term “*un homme malade*” in Metternich's presence again.<sup>151</sup> Metternich's hostility must be considered alongside Bolsover's summary of the conference at Münchengratz:

There is no evidence that he made any very determined attempt to start detailed discussions on the shape of a new order in European Turkey.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Austria and Russia signed a secret convention which pledged them to maintain the existing Ottoman dynasty, to oppose any attempt at changing it or at substituting a regency, and to prevent Mehemet Ali from acquiring direct or indirect authority over any part of European Turkey. The convention also stated that if Turkey broke up, Austria and Russia would concert together in establishing a new order of things and in preserving their own security and the balance of power in Europe. But it made no attempt to define this new order, which meant that although the Tsar had now committed Austria to joint action with Russia if Turkey collapsed, he

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<sup>149</sup> Lamb to Palmerston, 26 Dec. 1833, FO 120/137, found in Sedivy “Adrianople to Münchengratz” 221

<sup>150</sup> Sedivy “Adrianople to Münchengratz” 222

<sup>151</sup> Vitzthum von Eckstadt: *St. Petersburg und London in den Jahren 1852-64*, Stuttgart, 1886, Vol. I, found in Bolsover 119

was still very far from having settled the precise ends to which this Austro-Russian action would be directed.<sup>152</sup>

Did the Tsar go all the way to Münchengratz to secure some vague assurance from Austria to work together in the event of an Ottoman collapse? Nikolai and Metternich spoke for ten days. Was that the most they could have accomplished with all that time afforded to them?<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, what advantage did the meeting provide the Tsar? Noted scholars P.E. Mosely, Alan Sked, Paul W. Schroeder, Barbara Jelavich are all in agreement that Russia actually disadvantaged itself at Münchengratz, as the Tsar was forced to act in accordance with Austria in any major action involving the Ottoman Empire. Sedivy disagrees, claiming that Nikolai intended for the conference to keep Austria from reconciling with the Western Powers and was successful in his efforts. But why would the anti-Liberal Metternich seek a reconciliation with the July Monarchy or even the United Kingdom when Russia was ideologically and geopolitically Austria's natural ally?<sup>154</sup> And again, if Nikolai really did command the negotiations, why wasn't a more firmly defined agreement made?

I argue that while Nikolai still had a genuine desire to preserve “*un homme malade*”, the fact that he still referred to the Ottoman Empire as such even after signing a treaty that should have ensured its survival meant that he still believed its collapse was imminent and that is at least plausible that he went to Münchengratz to set up a concrete partition plan with Austria, only to be deterred when Metternich's snide and contemptuous manner dissuaded him from pushing for a solid partition plan. After all, such a proposal ran counter to Metternich's own agenda, as he was firmly against any Russian expansion at Ottoman expense. I also argue that there is evidence that the Tsar did have ideas for an Ottoman partition that he simply never discussed at Münchengratz. According to Ficquelmont, who had spoken to Nikolai and Nesselrode in spring 1834, Nikolai had hoped that if the Ottoman state were to collapse, he would have its territories in the Balkans to be broken up

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<sup>152</sup> Bolsover, 119-20

<sup>153</sup> Bolsover 119

<sup>154</sup> Sedivy “Adrianople to Münchengratz” 224-5

into small states, and that he was already trying to organize the Danubian Principalities, Serbia and Montenegro and to eventually put these states “ in a strong enough position to give them rights to an independent, legal existence if the Turkish empire should come to break down”. Curiously, Fiquelmont also believed that the Tsar wished to place these states in a confederation under an Austrian protectorate, effectively preventing Austria from making any of its own territorial gains in the Balkans, apparently because Austria could never annex its own clients.<sup>155</sup> He further believed that while Russia had no interest in expanding in the Balkans, Nikolai had designs on Asia Minor toward the Persian Gulf. If Nikolai did in fact possess any of these ambitions, it is very likely Metternich would have strongly come out against any such proposal, and Nikolai did not even attempt to suggest such a plan for the simple reason that he was too afraid to do so. It must be remembered that Nikolai very likely did not speak French as fluently as Metternich, and that while the Tsar was revered in a manner second to God in his own country and whose will was slavishly obeyed by his subjects and ministers, Metternich owed the Tsar neither reverence nor submission. These two factors may have played a role in shaking the Tsar's natural confidence and set him up to be browbeaten by the Austrian minister. Even if this were not so, considering that it was Metternich who had come to Münchengratz as an aggrieved party, Nikolai would have regardless found himself in role of supplicant. In other words, the onus was on him to win over Metternich and not the other way around, as it was highly unlikely that Russia would not come to the aid of the legitimate conservative regime in Austria if it were threatened by its mutual ideological enemies. Nikolai may have feared that had he not accepted a passive role in the negotiations, he may have alienated Austria further, causing a diplomatic rupture and an Austrian reconciliation with his Western rivals, which would have resulted in Russia's diplomatic isolation.

There is also evidence that Metternich had deliberately manipulated the Münchengratz conference as a means of gaining satisfaction for his humiliation at the Tsar's hands. He did not do it out of a desire for petty revenge. Metternich's humiliation did not merely wound his pride, but his

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<sup>155</sup> Bolsover 120

standing in Vienna. Already he had come under attack by Russophobic aristocrats who accused him of having become a Russian puppet. After browbeating the Tsar himself Metternich could genuinely declare to them that “ When Russia started out in a different way, I let it go. Today I go with Russia because it goes with me. A few years ago I did not cooperate with it on the Greek question and I was criticised for it. I am not bound to anybody but I follow my own path that I consider to be correct. Whoever I find on this path, I will take with me.”<sup>156</sup> Russia went with Metternich because he forced them to. If Fiquelmont was correct in his observations regarding Nikolai's plans for an Ottoman partition, Metternich wisely kept Nikolai from even proposing any idea that would run counter to his own agenda while reestablishing his credibility as a masterful diplomat and statesman. This was also the first instance in Nikolai's reign where he and Nesselrode were outmatched in diplomacy and political maneuvering in regards to the Eastern Question. However, 1834 saw Nikolai largely victorious in his ambitions toward the Ottoman Empire. The entire Ottoman Empire was more or less under his protectorate. Britain and France were outmatched, and Austria remained a loyal ally, though not one without a will of its own. Unfortunately for Russia, it was not a dominance Nikolai could long maintain.

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<sup>156</sup> The record of the conversation between Metternich and Prokesch on 25 Dec. 1833, Prokesch-Osten, Tagebuchern, 1 found in Sedivy “ Adrianople to Münchengratz” 224

## CHAPTER FOUR: 1833-1844

### 4.1 A Lull in Conflict: The Uneasy Peace with Egypt and Great Britain

The signing of Hünkâr Iskelesi convinced the British that Russia was set on destroying the Ottoman Empire and that their purpose at Münchengratz was to attain Austrian consent.<sup>157</sup> “No reasonable doubt can be entertained that the Russian Govt. is intently engaged in...schemes of aggrandizement towards the South,” Palmerston wrote to Lord Ponsonby in December 1833.<sup>158</sup> Ponsonby and Urquhart would even collaborate in 1834 to convince the British government to sail through the Straits and assist the Circassians rebelling against Russia. When this failed, Urquhart tried to smuggle weapons to the rebels in what Anderson argues was an attempt to incite a war between Britain and Russia.<sup>159</sup> Palmerston disapproved of such an extreme solution, but kept a fleet in the Mediterranean to discourage potential Russian aggression toward the Straits.<sup>160</sup> Lamb states the United Kingdom's apprehension was due to the fear of Russia upending the European balance of power and threatening its commerce. David Gillard agrees, but whereas Lamb implies the British were merely paranoid, Gillard argues that Hünkâr Iskelesi made a potential Russian conquest of the Ottoman Empire objectively easier and even if Nikolai had benevolent intentions, no one could guarantee Russia would remain benign.<sup>161</sup>

Russia was aware of Britain's consternation. It was impossible for them not to be. It was not only Urquhart and Ponsonby who called for action against Russia. The British press by and large was almost unanimously Russophobic, and Pozzo di Borgo often reported their hostile rhetoric to Nikolai<sup>162</sup>. Nesselrode argued that Austria, France and Britain may collectively resolve to preserve the Ottomans, “...!a combination which, under the pretext of being conceived in the Porte's favour, would be in reality directed against us”. Hünkâr Iskelesi may have secured Russia's southern flank,

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<sup>157</sup> Rendall 61

<sup>158</sup> Baker and Palmerston 86

<sup>159</sup> Anderson 92

<sup>160</sup> Lamb 243

<sup>161</sup> David Gillard, *Struggle for Asia, 1828-1914: A Study in British and Russian Imperialism*, University Paperbacks. p. 78-86, Lamb 242

<sup>162</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 55-6

but at the unacceptable cost of risking diplomatic isolation. And Hünkâr Iskelesi would expire in 1841, which Nesselrode did not believe would be renewed “with any likelihood of success...the Porte...would never have the courage to maintain in the face of the remonstrances and threats of the maritime powers.”<sup>163</sup> It was clear Russia had to break the Franco-British threat by coming to terms with Britain, turning the tables on France in the process. Russia made the best of a small window of opportunity in 1834, when the Tories under Peel briefly gained power. Pozzo di Borgo worked to improve Russo-British relations, and the Tories reciprocated, allowing for a detente that the Whigs permitted to continue when they regained control of the government the following year. To accelerate this thaw, Palmerston dispatched Lord Durham, who reported that the Tsar had made no preparations for war against the Ottomans and lacked the ability to do so. Durham went on to proclaim that the Russian ministers by and large dreaded the idea of occupying Constantinople.<sup>164</sup>

However, Durham was undermined by Ponsonby in Constantinople, who was certain Russia was manipulating him. It seems that Palmerston did not completely trust Durham either, considering he gave Ponsonby the right to summon the Mediterranean fleet if the ambassador felt a Russian invasion was imminent. He also refused, despite protests from both Durham and Nesselrode, to stop Ponsonby from attempting to drive a wedge between Russia and the Ottomans by pressing Mahmud to issue a *firman* in December 1835 ordering Muhammad Ali to end trade restrictions that violated rights the Porte had given British merchantmen, which Russia viewed as an unnecessary stoking of tensions between the Sultan and his nominal vassal, as this threatened Muhammad Ali's monopoly on the sale of Egyptian staple products. Nesselrode, in his formal protest to the Porte, stated that the *firman* “will serve to legitimate an (English) attack on (Muhammad Ali)” and that if this came to pass, “Russia could not remain a passive spectator of so unequal a conflict, and...might render the continuation of the present friendly relations (with the Ottomans) no longer possible.”<sup>165</sup> In truth, an Ottoman offensive war against Egypt would indeed render Russia a passive spectator. Citing an

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<sup>163</sup> Rendall 52-3.

<sup>164</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian* 45-7

<sup>165</sup> Anderson 93-5, Rodkey *Turco-Egyptian* 51-2

1839 dispatch from Fiquelmont to Metternich, de Grunwald points out that even with permission to cross the Straits, Russia's Black Sea fleet had no real ability to project force in the open seas of the Eastern Mediterranean. Only the United Kingdom had a fleet with that kind of power. As this situation would expose Russia's strengths and Britain's greatest advantage, it was bound to humiliate Russia and convince the Ottomans to side with the United Kingdom to Russia's disadvantage.<sup>166</sup>

Ponsonby's gambit was reinforced in August 1838 with the signing of a commercial treaty at Balta Limani permitting British merchants to trade anywhere within Ottoman territory and limiting duties on Ottoman exports. As a result of the treaty, British commerce to the Ottoman Empire increased tenfold, undercutting Muhammad Ali's state-owned enterprise and weakening his position. Palmerston had hoped to use the treaty as leverage to pressure Russia into relinquishing its unilateral protectorate and join a multiparty convention for the preservation of the Ottoman Empire. However, Russia resisted this proposal.<sup>167</sup> While it was becoming apparent that Russia could not long hold on to its protectorate and Nikolai himself seemed to have believed Palmerston's desire for Europe to collectively preserve the Ottoman Empire as the most peaceful way to solve his most difficult foreign relation, the Tsar refused to treat equitably with France. While Pozzo di Borgo had argued that France was an optimal ally against Britain's dominating presence on the seas, he could have never convinced his master to treat equitably with Louis-Phillipe, whom Nikolai regarded as a scarcely legitimate usurper, or with France in general considering their support for Muhammad Ali.<sup>168</sup> By the end of the 1830s there existed in France a faction that went so far as to advocate Muhammad Ali replace the Ottomans as the preeminent power of the Near East.<sup>169</sup> This naturally conflicted with Russia's policy for obvious reasons and with the United Kingdom's, as their support of the Ottomans and antagonistic policy against Muhammad Ali planted a wedge between the two

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<sup>166</sup> De Grunwald 195

<sup>167</sup> Anderson 93-5, Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 51-2

<sup>168</sup> Puryear 27, Riasanovksy, *Nicholas I* 241

<sup>169</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 37



Western Powers. Furthermore, it seems Napoleon's famed campaign in Egypt had not been forgotten. As diplomat Sir Henry Bulwer wrote to Palmerston: "...the mistress of India cannot permit France to be mistress directly or indirectly of the road to her Indian dominions". Palmerston went so far as to value the Ottomans' survival over the Franco-British alliance: "We ought to support the Sultan...with France if France will act with us; without her if she should decline."<sup>170</sup>

It seems Palmerston was wary of both France and Russia, the former even more than the latter, but most of all was the combination of the two. In an 1838 letter to Queen Victoria's representative in Paris, Palmerston wrote "one great danger to Europe is the possibility of a combination between France and Russia, which though prevented at present by the personal feelings of the Emperor, may not always be as impossible as it is now."<sup>171</sup> The Turco-Egyptian Question was thus deadlocked, with neither of the interested Great Powers able to align with the other. Russia's grip on the Ottomans isolated it as much as France was isolated by its support of Muhammad Ali, while Great Britain, though clearly pro-Ottoman, could not wrest the tottering state from Russia nor could it make a move toward or against Egypt without isolating itself.

#### **4.2 The Second Oriental Crisis**

This diplomatic gridlock would be dislodged by the Ottomans themselves. Egypt ruled Syria with an iron fist, which sparked rebellions forcing Egypt to dispatch soldiers to quell the uprisings. Ottoman centralization efforts in the Kurdish regions of the Empire sparked similar revolts and similar massing of troops in the region, which had the added effect of forcing the Ottoman and Egyptian armies to amass troops at each other's frontiers. Furthermore, the Ottomans found itself in a darkly farcical crisis in which they conscripted Kurds from formerly rebellious villages to crush Kurdish rebels from presently rebelling villages while losing up to half of their conscripts to disease. Despite this perverse state of affairs, the Ottoman forces could not be disbanded. Not only did the rebellions demand their attention, by 1839 Egypt had 60,000 men stationed between Aleppo

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<sup>170</sup> Palmerston to Granville, June 5 1839, found in Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 70

<sup>171</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 71

and Antep and 20,000 more were en route. Yet Egypt was in even worse shape than the Ottomans. As mentioned before, their own subjects in Syria were in revolt. However, while the Ottomans' Prussian military advisor Helmuth Von Moltke reported that the Sultan's army was in an unfortunate situation, it was sufficiently supplied and financed, whereas Egypt's soldiers went unpaid and underfed. However, the Egyptian army was commanded by the able Ibrahim Pasha whereas the Ottoman commander Hafiz Pasha preferred the counsel of religious officials over his advisor Von Moltke. This bullheadedness was echoed in Constantinople. Not only did Mahmud fail to gain the support of any of the Great Powers in his drive to avenge himself on Egypt, he refused to listen to their warnings *not* to attack. Mahmud passed away before he could be informed of his folly. At the battle of Nizib on 24 June 1839, the ably led Egyptian army quite literally disintegrated the Ottoman army. According to Von Molke, 5 out of 6 of its soldiers not only routed, they simply threw off their uniforms and went home.<sup>172</sup> The calamity was compounded by the defection of the Ottoman Navy. The *Kapudan Pasha* feared Grand Vizier Husrev Pasha would place the fleet under Russian control and opted instead to sail for Alexandria. Finally, the powerless Empire was placed in the hands of Abdülmecid, a sixteen year old boy who could do nothing but offer Muhammad Ali hereditary rule of Egypt. At this point this almost seemed a laughable concession to the Khedive, who demanded hereditary possession of Syria and Adana as well as well as the dismissal of Husrev. Britain and Russia were thus compelled to unite to preserve what remained of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>173</sup> Once again, Britain's commercial partnership with the Ottoman Empire and by extension its influence on Near Eastern commerce was threatened by an Egyptian victory, but an Ottoman demise at the hands of Egypt threatened Russia's commercial and territorial integrity. If the Straits were under the control of Muhammad Ali, the growing Black Sea trade would be threatened, as the Kapudan Pasha's defection gave the Khedive a navy around half the size of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Furthermore, many ships in the Black Sea Fleet were designed for safeguarding merchant

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<sup>172</sup> Aksan 384-91

<sup>173</sup> Anderson 95-6

ships rather than do battle on the high seas. Russia still possessed more capital ships, but its Egypt threatened to overtake Russia in the long term, as it had the will and resources to expand its fleet further, whereas Russia had to expend its resources toward quelling rebellions in Poland and the Caucasus. Russia feared an Egyptian victory would revitalize the rebels in the latter region. Georg Von Rosen, viceroy in the Caucasus, described Russia's concerns: "If (Muhammad Ali) does not turn his main strength against us, then it will be hostile relations with us, the consequences of which will be invasions of our frontiers by militant border peoples....arising disorder in the mountains...whose populations are largely Sunni..."<sup>174</sup> Russia was able to dissuade Egypt before with an expeditionary force, but it was the largest force the Tsar could easily produce. He could not stop a determined attack on Constantinople, particularly as Nizib rendered it a *de facto* open city. Nikolai would need an army to dislodge them, and even if the greatly distracted Russian Empire could muster such a force, the 1828-9 war proved such a large force would likely be bogged down<sup>175</sup>. Russia was thus unable to protect the Ottomans by itself and needed to come to an agreement with the Great Powers to ensure the Sick Man's survival.

Again, a diplomatic solution to this crisis was not a straightforward affair. Palmerston retained a desire to maintain Britain's *entente* with France and while Nikolai was more than willing to allow Hünkâr Iskelesi to come to an end, he did not wish for the Ottomans to regain freedom of action regarding the Straits or for Russia to participate in a conference gathered to arrange a treaty for a collective guarantee of Ottoman independence, fearing that this would encourage the Western Powers to insist on the admission of their navies into the Sea of Marmara. He was reluctant to act even as the Battle of Nazib and the death of Mahmud threw Constantinople into disarray. Russia attempted to compromise. On 25 July 1839 Baron Meyendorff, acting as Russian ambassador to Prussia, informed his British counterpart that Russia was willing to sign a collective Note guaranteeing that no Great Power would attempt to profit from the Ottomans' misfortune, but would

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<sup>174</sup> Daly 87

<sup>175</sup> Daly 182

continue to guarantee their independence unilaterally. This was unacceptable to any of the interested Powers. Even Metternich had grown “uneasy”, as Marshal Soult reported. “The Cabinet of St. Petersburg, far from continuing the assurances, otherwise sufficiently vague, which it had first proffered of its desire to act in concert with the other Powers, now recedes, under frivolous pretexts, from all that might substantiate or reduce them to formal acts.” In St. Petersburg, Nesselrode warned Nikolai that Austria, France and Britain could guarantee Ottoman independence without Russia, isolating the latter against a “combination which....would be in reality against us.”<sup>176</sup>

However, it would turn out that Russia was in a stronger position than Soult had perceived. As it turned out, it was France who was in a position of weakness. Austria remained Russia's faithful ally. All Metternich needed was for its ally, along with representatives of the other Great Powers to sign a collective Note on 27 July 1839 “to inform the Sublime Porte, that agreement among the Five Great Powers on the Question of the East is secured, and to invite it to suspend any definitive resolution without their concurrence.”<sup>177</sup> This ran counter to Nikolai's desire not to attach Russia to any such collective agreement but the benefits were too difficult to ignore. Not only did this Note quell Metternich's apprehension, Russia removed itself as the common adversary of the Western Powers, who began to turn on each other. Britain demanded the return of the Ottoman fleet, and when Muhammad Ali refused France was reluctant to coerce the Khedive. Palmerston threatened to lay an embargo upon Egypt and to seize its merchant ships if it did not comply. Naturally, these threats were poorly received by the French. Russia now had a perfect opportunity to make widen the rift between the two Western Powers and align Britain with itself, and in late August Nikolai dispatched Baron de Brunnow on a special mission to London.<sup>178</sup>

Once again Nikolai had managed to successfully maneuver Russia out of a position of weakness into one of strength. When Hünkâr Iskelesi started to degenerate into a liability for

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<sup>176</sup> Rendall 52, Rodkey 110

<sup>177</sup> *Collective Note of the Five Powers*. Found in *The Annual Register: Or a View of the History, Politics and Literature, for the Year 1840, Volume 12*, London: J. Dodsley, 1841, p.468

<sup>178</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 102

Russia, Nikolai, with no small thanks to Nesselrode and the able diplomats in his service, was able to dig a way out by aligning itself with Britain, driving a wedge between them and the French while maintaining the support of Austria.

### **4.3 The Convention of London**

On 15 June, as the battle of Nizib was imminent, Nesselrode sent Palmerston a Note requesting that Britain take the lead in compelling Muhammad Ali to “confine himself to the...arrangement of Kütahya”, promising that Russia would support a British-led diplomatic coalition calling for peace between the Sultan and his vassal. This was a maneuver reminiscent of Nikolai and Nesselrode's gambit in the wake of Navarino in which Russia manipulated the British into serving Russia's interests by allowing them to take a symbolic lead. Palmerston was not so easily fooled, and on 18 July Admiral Stopford was given instructions to ask the Porte for passage through the Dardanelles if Russia sailed through the Bosphorus.<sup>179</sup>

However, Nizib forced Britain to be more receptive. At London, Brunnow assured Palmerston Nikolai was willing to allow Hünkâr Iskelesi to lapse for the Straits to be closed to all warships in perpetuity, if the Western Powers would cease their demands for a convention to guarantee the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and their plans to enter the Straits if Russia came to the assistance of its Ottoman ally. Brunnow implied that France did not have to be part of the bargain and the Tsar in fact would prefer it so. Palmerston considered this “entirely satisfactory.” However, he was no Tsar himself and many in his Cabinet refused to trade their French ally for a Russian one. They were, however, able to offer Brunnow a compromise: “the military intervention of Russia...for the protection and defense of Constantinople...ought...be combined with...the naval forces of England...Each of the two Straits would be placed under the protection of the respective Powers.”<sup>180</sup> Brunnow, ever dependent on the specific instructions of his master, requested time to consult Nikolai, whom Nesselrode reported was “well pleased” by Palmerston's plan, well aware

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<sup>179</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian* 102-4

<sup>180</sup> *Annual Register* 482-3

that the sacrifice of its grip on the Ottomans was well worth the undoing of the Western alliance and an Anglo-Russian accord.<sup>181</sup> Nikolai had once again played the British brilliantly.

Brunnow returned to London in January 1840 proposing Europe settle the Oriental Crisis, giving Muhammad Ali Egypt and Syria as a hereditary possession and restore all other land under his control to the Sultan. Egypt would acquiesce or European intervention. The Ottomans would close the Straits to all European fleets. Russia's diplomatic victory was signified when Palmerston invited France to join this coalition, implying that it would proceed with or without them. The French steadfastly refused, as public opinion reviled at the idea of joining with Russia to coerce their Egyptian allies. Palmerston also invited the Ottomans to send their own representative.<sup>182</sup>

On 7 April 1840, Nouri announced that the Sultan expected Muhammad Ali to return his fleet and to accept Egypt-and apparently only Egypt-as his hereditary possession. While four Powers found this to be an acceptable demand, France continued to hold out and the German states would not endorse an agreement without France's assent. Metternich pointed out that Palmerston didn't seem to even consider having to go to war against Egypt, and while Nikolai may be willing to go to that extreme, he lacked the ability to wage war on Egypt and France thus needed to be a part of the negotiations<sup>183</sup>.

In May 1840, upheaval in the Porte manipulated the diplomatic situation. The pro-Russian anti-Egyptian hardliner Husrev Pasha was dismissed as grand vizier thanks to court intrigues and the Ottomans implored Europe to come to a solution to their crisis. The German powers were prepared to concede Syria to Muhammad Ali so long as the Khedive relinquished Adana and Crete in order to procure France's assent. Brunnow declared his willingness to treat with France along the basis of his early agreement with Palmerston, but "we are sure of nothing with (Muhammad Ali)". Surely enough, Muhammad Ali refused peace along these lines and France continued to support its

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<sup>181</sup> Karl Nesselrode, *Lettres et papiers du chancelier comte de Nesselrode, 1760-1886*, Paris, 1904-1912. Vol. VII. Nesselrode to Meyendorff, Oct. 8 1839., p. 288-89

<sup>182</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 130-8

<sup>183</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 141-5

Arab ally. However, Palmerston's priorities were shifting.<sup>184</sup> While France's assent was preferable, he feared spurning Russia all the more:

The immediate result of our declining to go on with the three Powers because France does not join us, will be, that Russia will withdraw her efforts to unite herself with the other Powers for a settlement of the affairs of Turkey...you will have the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi renewed...re-establish that separate protectorship of Russia over Turkey...division of the Turkish Empire into two...states, whereof one will be the dependency of France, and the other the satellite of Russia; and in both of which our political influence will be annulled, and our commercial interests will be sacrificed...<sup>185</sup>

Clearly Palmerston was convinced Russia was a more important ally than France and would rather lose the goodwill of Paris and Alexandria than Petersburg and Constantinople. This immersed him into fierce conflict with his Cabinet, many of whom were adamant that their alliance with France was sacrosanct. However, in July 1840, Palmerston's born-again Russophilism was vindicated when a Syrian revolt against Muhammad Ali weakened his position, rendering him effectively unable to go on the offensive. This news caused Palmerston's cabinet to submit to his wisdom and call for a treaty along the Brunnow-Palmerston proposal, which was finally codified with the Convention of London on 15 July 1840. France was not a signatory. The Convention agreed to demand that Muhammad Ali submit to the Sultan's will and to compel him by force if necessary, agreeing further to defend the Straits from attack, but to evacuate them at the conclusion of hostilities and on the Sultan's demand. However, the most important article of the Convention was its Separate Act, which conceded Egypt to its Khedive as his hereditary possession and Syria to be his for life so long as he withdrew from all other Ottoman territories within ten days. If he did not, "the Sultan will then withdraw the offer of the life administration of (Syria)".<sup>186</sup>

The Concert of Europe, led by Russia and Great Britain, had decided their assent was not necessary and Russia's partners in the Holy Alliance were content to fall in line. France was swept

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<sup>184</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 148-52

<sup>185</sup> Anthony Evelyn M. Ashley, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston, Volume 1*. Cornell University Library, 1879. p. 372.

<sup>186</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 160-1

up in an uproar. Their newspapers bellowed for war with Britain and Louis-Phillipe's ministers made impotent threats that were effectively laughed off by Britain and Russia. However, there remained the matter of actually compelling Muhammad Ali to abide by the Concert's deliberations. On 9 September 1840 an Anglo-Austrian fleet fired on Egyptian forces in Beirut when they refused to withdraw. And as the ultimatum made in the Separate Act of the Convention of London had been ignored, the Sultan issued a *firman* deposing Muhammad Ali and ordering a blockade of his territories. In response, France's foreign ministry threatened to mobilize its armed forces and escalate the situation. These threats were vetoed by Louis-Phillipe, who feared revolutionary sentiments destabilizing France and believed warmongering would push his people further toward rebellion. The hawkish Louis Thiers resigned in protest and was replaced by a more conciliatory Francois Guizot. However, Palmerston's patience seemed to be at an end, siding entirely with the Sultan even when his own cabinet urged moderation. He ordered a diplomat be sent to Alexandria demanding the evacuation of all occupied territories outside of Egypt, and then and only then would he ask the Porte to allow Muhammad Ali to keep Egypt as his hereditary fiefdom. To further compel the Khedive, the British attacked the Egyptian-held coasts, even capturing Acre and sailing six ships of the line to the Alexandrian harbor. These two actions seem to have convinced Muhammad Ali further resistance was useless, as on 27 November 1840 he signed an agreement with the British to evacuate Syria and return the Ottoman fleet on the condition he be granted hereditary rights over Egypt, to be insured by the Concert. Meanwhile in France, the fall of Acre convinced Guizot Egypt could not be given a better terms than those dictated by the Convention of London and that it was more important to reenter the Concert of Europe than to offer a vain and stubborn resistance to their combined might.<sup>187</sup>

Nikolai had thus achieved his end. He formed an entente with Great Britain, preserved the Ottoman Empire and its utility to Russia as the shield on his southern flank, cut Egypt down to an acceptable size and humbled France. There was no longer any need to keep the French isolated. In

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<sup>187</sup> Rodkey, *Turco-Egyptian*, 170-201



fact, Nesselrode and Brunnow were desirous to allow France back into the Concert now that Russia held, as Brunnow boasted, an “*advantage indubitable*”.<sup>188</sup> There was little doubt that Guizot would accept a total closure of the Straits, and on 13 February 1841 he pledged that France would abide by the Convention of London, officially reconciling with the Concert exactly four months later. Nikolai's diplomatic triumph was complete. He only had to ensure that the Anglo-French *entente* not be resurrected, and his *de facto* domination of the Ottoman Empire remain secure.<sup>189</sup>

#### 4.4 “Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility”

The 1840's saw Russia take a more proactive approach toward influencing the *zimmi* of the Ottoman Empire. In 1842, Nesselrode dispatched Porfiriy Uspenskii, a clergyman who doubled as an ecclesiastical diplomat to the Levant, with the intent of establishing ties with Orthodox clergy there, with mixed results.<sup>190</sup> There was also a suspicious increase in Russian influence in Ottoman Christian prayer books around this period. Whereas before Orthodox *zimmi* of the region made nondescript prayers for “our most pious kings,” they now commemorated Nikolai and prominent members of the Romanov dynasty. By the end of the decade, British ambassador Stratford Canning accused the Russians of sowing religious dissent with decidedly Islamophobic prayer books. According to Reverend William Palmer, who visited Canning in Constantinople in mid-1850, Canning showed him a book ostensibly printed in Moscow which calls for divine intervention: “The infidel and abominable Empire of the Hagarenes do Thou o God speedily destroy, and transfer it to the Orthodox sovereign...” Interestingly, Turks were invited to renounce “the impious Koran of Mahomet”. “What could be plainer?” Canning asked.<sup>191</sup>

Except the situation may not have been quite as plain as one may believe. Palmer, more knowledgeable of Orthodox rhetoric, pointed out that these were variations of ancient prayers, no more incendiary than what could be found in many a Anglican prayer book. While there certainly is

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<sup>188</sup> *Levant Correspondence, III*, “Nesselrode to Brunnow, Dec. 1840.” pp. 121-122. Found in Rodkey *Turco-Egyptian* 212

<sup>189</sup> Rodkey *Turco-Egyptian* 225-6

<sup>190</sup> Curtiss, 42

<sup>191</sup> Jack Fairey, “Russia's Quest for the Holy Grail.” in *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered*. ed. Lucien J. Frary. University of Wisconsin Press, 2014, p. 144-5

reason to believe Nikolai was working to turn Ottoman *zimmi* against their Sultan, there is also evidence to the contrary. An arch-Legitimist, Nikolai would never encourage an Orthodox rebellion against their rightful sovereign. It must be remembered that he did not initially support the Greek Revolution, only interceding when the Ottomans seized Russian merchant ships and otherwise damaged Russian commerce. He was a devout Russian Orthodox Christian but did not see Ottoman Orthodox as co-religionists. He certainly did not want them as subjects. "It is a Russian empire which I want to preserve and leave to my son," he would tell Ficquelmont in 1843.<sup>192</sup>

Nikolai may have felt himself to merely be exercising his rights provided him under the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which granted him a protectorate over Ottoman Christians. The ambiguous nature of Article VII in which "upon all occasions, representations...as on behalf of its officiating ministers" Nikolai was given the responsibility of taking "such representations into due consideration, as being made by a confidential functionary of a neighbouring and sincerely friendly Power" can easily be interpreted as the Tsar being given a leadership role within the Ottoman Christian community. Naturally, a leader must assert his authority, which was likely Nikolai's intention when he disseminated those prayer books.<sup>193</sup>

One may wonder why such an important treaty would not contain more precise language. However, Roderic Davison makes the argument that the treaty was in fact adequately written but was distorted by Russian manipulation and the pessimism of Franz Thugut, the Austrian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during the treaty's negotiations:

The whole accumulation of the stipulations of the treaty of Kainardji is a model of skill on the part of the Russian diplomats and...imbecility on the part of the Turkish negotiators By the dexterous combination of the articles of the treaty, the Ottoman Empire becomes from today onward a sort of Russian province. Since for the future Russia is in a position to dictate laws to it, she will perhaps content herself, for some years more, with reigning in the name of the Grand Seigneur, until she judges the moment favorable to take possession of it indefinitely...<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Bolsover 127

<sup>193</sup> Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, Art. VII

<sup>194</sup> Roderic Davison, "Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility: The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered." *Slavic*

However in this instance Hanlon's Razor must be turned on its head. We must not attribute to Ottoman incompetence to what we can attribute to Russian malevolence. It was true that Catherine was said to have been ecstatic when she had learned of the immensely lopsided terms her diplomats had managed to negotiate on her behalf. But she was pleased in regards to the genuinely devastating temporal impositions it laid at the Ottomans' feet.<sup>195</sup> Its religious demands were less severe. Article VII, for instance, only gives Russia the right to act as protector for a single church, "in favour of the new church at Constantinople, of which mention will be made in Article XIV". The ambiguity, of course, comes in the preceding statement: "The Sublime Porte promises to protect constantly the Christian religion and its churches, and it also allows...Russia to make, upon all occasions, representations, as well in favour of the new church at Constantinople, in favour of the new church at Constantinople...".<sup>196</sup> So reads the English version. Davison points out English was not an official language of the treaty, nor was French, though most diplomats, politicians and historians outside of Russia and Turkey who have analyzed this treaty have relied on either English or French translations. The Treaty was officially written in three languages; Russian, Ottoman Turkish, and Italian. A literal translation of the Italian version reads:

The Sublime Porte promises a firm protection to the Christian Religion and to its Churches; it further permits...Russia to make in every circumstance various representations to the Porte in favor of the below-mentioned Church erected at Constantinople, cited in Art. Xiv, no less than those who serve it, and promises to receive those remonstrances with attention, as made by a respected person of a neighboring and sincerely friendly power.<sup>197</sup>

This translation more explicitly gives Russia a protectorate over a single church and leaves all others in the protection of the Ottomans. Perhaps Russia has an implied right to intercede if the Ottomans abuse the Christian Religion or its Churches but even that would be a stretch in logic. However, this stretch in logic indeed took place and successfully so. Articles XVI, XVII and XXIII

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*Review*, vol. 36, no. 3, Sept. 1976, pp. 463-483. p. 467

<sup>195</sup> Davison 464, 475

<sup>196</sup> Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, Art. VII

<sup>197</sup> Davison 468-9

restored the Principalities, occupied Ottoman islands and Georgia and Mingrelia to the Ottomans on the condition that the Ottomans protect the Christian religion in all the aforementioned regions, with Russia receiving in regards to the Principalities an explicit right to “remonstrate in their favor”.<sup>198</sup> It seems rather clear that Russia's right to make representations was clearly delineated but Catherine, ever the cunning politician, grossly amplified her claims of protectorate with public manifestos proclaiming “Our orthodoxy is henceforth under Our Imperial Guardianship in the places of its upspringing, protected from all oppression and violence.”<sup>199</sup> Europe took this at face value because Catherine's boasts sounded exactly like the Draconian peace they had all feared Russia would levy upon the Ottoman Empire, a fear that survived into Nikolai's reign, a fear which was reinforced by Catherine's issuance of a French version of the treaty, naturally translated to amplify the concessions to Russia, and a fear which was perhaps cemented by the gloomy suppositions of Ambassador Thugut, who, as it turns out, had not yet seen a copy of the treaty. He merely assumed that Catherine's negotiator in Constantinople had outfoxed the Ottomans when he demanded “moderate representations by the Russian ministers on behalf of the Christian *churches* (emphasis mine) be favorably received,” apparently believing the Ottomans would accept this out of weakness or stupidity, holding on to his belief even when he witnessed the Ottoman negotiators immediately realize the Russians' intentions. His predictions were repeatedly echoed in Europe as factual observations.<sup>200</sup> And it seems that 60 years afterwards Nikolai opted to believe the misinterpretation of Küçük Kaynarca promoted by his grandmother. While acting in accordance to this more imperialistic interpretation initially played to his advantage, it would ultimately bungle him into the Crimean War, during which he conceded that he did not properly understand the treaty. Ever the unassailable autocrat, he blamed his error on Nesselrode.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, Articles XVI, XVII and XXIII

<sup>199</sup> Davison 475

<sup>200</sup> Davison 477

<sup>201</sup> Seymour to Clarendon, Feb. 21 1854, Public Record Office, FO 65/445. Found in Davison 481

#### 4.5 Ten Years After Münchengratz

Though the Convention of London had again preserved the Ottoman Empire, it hardly inspired confidence in the Empire's long-term survival in the eyes of the Great Powers, considering its impotence throughout the Oriental Crises. The Tsar's attitude toward the Ottomans was fundamentally unchanged, as he continued to support their continued status as a weak yet stable dominion while hoping to secure an agreement governing its partition in the event of its collapse. Nikolai saw an opportunity in Britain, for in 1841 the Whig government had fallen and was replaced by the less Russophobic Tories under Robert Peel as Prime Minister and Aberdeen as Foreign Minister. However, before moving forward with any partition proposals with Britain, Nikolai felt the need to shore up his relationship with Austria and Prussia, the latter of which had crowned a new King and whose leanings remained somewhat of a wild card, and the former of which Nikolai wished to bring along as the third partner of an unofficial entente that would act as the Ottomans' protectors and heirs, if the Sick Man should perish. Austria, after all, was on good terms with Britain, given that they had even sailed with the British in their expedition against Egypt.<sup>202</sup>

Nesselrode initiated the first maneuver in May 1843, proposing to Metternich that they both reveal their agreement at Münchengratz to the British, not to bring them into the Convention, but to convince them of their pacific intentions. Metternich was resistant, considering the Tories had been in power for two years and revealing Münchengratz to them so late in their administration would appear suspicious. Nikolai decided to try again, proposing a summit between the sovereigns of the Holy Alliance, which the German Powers agreed would take place in 1844. However, prior to this summit, he would meet both Powers separately. He first visited Friedrich Wilhelm and revealed to him his partition proposal, which met with the King's approval. Having apparently achieved his end, Nikolai asked the King not to discuss it with Austria until the Tsar had brought it up itself. He later traveled to Warsaw, meeting with Count Ficquelmont in September 1843. Ficquelmont was taking

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<sup>202</sup> Bolsover 122-5

the place of Metternich, who was preoccupied with affairs in Italy. “The world needs to be convinced that the bonds that unite us are unbreakable,” he told Fiquelmont, but he feared “we are only two,” indicating his desire to bring Prussia back into the fold. He insisted that “catastrophe” was “inevitable”, and that Ottoman collapse could only be controlled, not avoided, but a reasonable plan could not be put forth, as while such an agreement needed Russian assent, none of the Powers trusted Russia's intentions. He again declared that he no desire to extend his dominion beyond the Danube. Ficquelmont reported his rather succinct approach to the situation: “Is it not better to anticipate events and assume the direction of them?” This was almost certainly honest, for Nikolai had never been partial to pan-Slavism or expansion for expansion's sake. While he desired control of the Straits, there was a less intrusive way to ensure this outcome. “Everything between this river and the Adriatic ought to be yours...This combination is the only one which can save us from a frightful upheaval; it has preoccupied me daily for a long time ; I find no other which can take its place.” If Nikolai had his way, apparently it was to be Austria, not Russia, who would be the Ottomans' heir in the Balkans.<sup>203</sup>

Far from being receptive to Nikolai's suggestions that Austria expand in the Balkans, Ficquelmont interpreted it as a “sort of ultimatum”, considering that he reported to Metternich that Nikolai seemed to have followed up his suggestion with a veiled threat: “I cannot go on with a system', he said, 'which you see is not leading to anything good because it is merely negative ; I cannot in this way abandon such grave matters to influences to which I do not wish to leave the advantage of the initiative.” Ficquelmont then asked the Tsar to explain what he would do if Austria refused to collude with Russia. Nikolai told him his next move would be “simple”. Rather than tell Ficquelmont what he wanted, he told him what he did not want: “I do not want the re-establishment of a Byzantine empire; I will never permit it. I do not want the French or the English, either together or separately, to occupy Constantinople or give it material protection. I shall resist these three

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<sup>203</sup> Bolsover 125-832, *W.S.A., Berichte aus Russland*. Ficquelmont to Metternich Oct./43, sec. Vienna. pp. 278. Found in Bolsover 127

combinations with all my forces.”<sup>204</sup>

Nikolai then said he would voice no protest to the British occupying Egypt or the French taking the Aegean Islands.<sup>205</sup> One can see the Tsar's mind at work. It would be best, in the event of an Ottoman collapse, to leave Austria to deal with the Balkan powder keg and leave Constantinople in the control of his surest ally. Britain's control of Egypt would keep a strong Muslim power from ever threatening his frontiers with rebellion and internecine strife and France would be given a largely symbolic concession that would prevent them from threatening the Straits, so long as a friendly power occupied them. It's less clear as to why Fiquelmont felt threatened by Nikolai. Nikolai had presented a similar agenda at Münchengratz, after all. However, considering that in the decade since Münchengratz the Ottoman Empire had only advanced in its decay, Fiquelmont could have grounds to suspect Russia would act with or without its allies. This would perhaps be a foolish assumption considering it was a direct violation of the Convention of London and would have turned all of Europe against Russia but Europe's suspicion of Russia's aggressive intentions did often veer on the irrational. Perhaps it would have been better had Nikolai left diplomacy to Nesselrode. As at Münchengratz, it's possible that Nikolai's relatively poor command of foreign languages and his infamously blunt manner may have sabotaged their talks. It's also likely that Fiquelmont was also suspicious of Nikolai having revealed his plans to Prussia first, given that Nikolai apparently approached people he did not trust before speaking with the ones he supposedly did. Perhaps this incident was reminiscent of Russia's failure to inform Austria of the Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi. Austria's suspicions could only have deepened in October, when it came clear that Nikolai exaggerated Prussian approval to Fiquelmont. The Prussian Foreign Minister revealed to the Austrian ambassador in October that Prussia was not entirely pleased that Nikolai was willing to bestow all of the Balkans to the Austrians, or how their upcoming summit was bound to trigger the

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<sup>204</sup> W.S.A., *Berichte aus Preussen*. Trautmansdorff; a Metternich 22 oct./43 Lett, partic. and 5 dec/43, Lett, partic. Found in Bolsover 128

<sup>205</sup> W.S.A., *Berichte aus Preussen*. Trautmansdorff; a Metternich 22 oct./43 Lett, partic. and 5 dec/43, Lett, partic. Found in Bolsover 128

suspensions of the Western Powers.<sup>206</sup>

At Warsaw, Ficquelmont refused to make any committed endorsement or rejection of Russian ambitions. However, in November Metternich informed Prussia that the Tsar's proposal was "valueless" and "We are convinced that the attempt to bring about the overthrow of the Porte would turn against those who conceived the plan and would inevitably cause a tremendous political upheaval in Europe." Bolsover also makes an excellent point regarding Austria's own ambitions. Plagued with internal issues and concerned with developments in Prussia, the last thing Austria needed was to absorb nearly the whole of the Balkans.<sup>207</sup> He went on to report that the Tsar's proposal ran counter to his previous approaches. This was a half-truth, for while at Münchengratz Nikolai did not desire to dismantle the Ottoman Empire and seemed less resistant to the idea now, he had for the last decade at least sought to have a partition agreement in place, and it was Metternich himself who had browbeat the Tsar into dropping the subject. He also came out against having a formal summit, fearing they would either be pressed into an undesirable agreement with Russia or be forced to refuse them and possibly suffer a blow to their relations. Metternich did not make his opinion known to Nikolai, but his silence on the matter was indication enough. Possibly realizing that he was no charming presence to the Austrians, in March 1844 he dispatched his advisor Count Orlov to Vienna while personally speaking with Austrian ambassador Count Colloredo, but achieved little progress.<sup>208</sup> Apparently unwilling to wait longer, Nikolai made his move on Great Britain without the firm support of the German Powers.

#### **4.6 The Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1844**

By the time the Tories took power in 1842, Anglo-Russian relations were at a high point. Not only were Peel and Aberdeen less Russophobic than their predecessors, Britain's imperial contests with France had overshadowed Russia's own. In July 1842 Aberdeen announced his government's desire to sign a commercial treaty "on a footing of liberal reciprocity" with Russia,

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<sup>206</sup> Bolsover 129-30

<sup>207</sup> Bolsover 129

<sup>208</sup> Bolsover 131



and finalized an agreement the next year.<sup>209</sup> However, this friendly *detente* contrasted with Canning's fearmongering, who warned that “the Porte's adoption of a policy of enforcing at every risk its authority where it has fallen into decay...might suffice to overthrow even a better consolidated empire than Turkey”. He proposed a convention among the Concert of Europe regarding the Ottomans' religious policies. Aberdeen, however, did not regard the Ottoman Empire as a “well organized European State” and did not believe Europe could make the Sick Man much healthier.<sup>210</sup>

Nikolai, meanwhile, waited for his opportunity to approach the British. In September 1843, Queen Victoria traveled to Paris to repair the United Kingdom's decaying relationship with France, but apparently did not achieve much during her stay. When Britain invited Nikolai to London, he pounced on the opportunity with alacrity. The Tsar intended to win Britain's friendship and assure them that while he wanted a protocol to partition the Ottoman Empire, it was not out of avarice that he wished to see such a plan prepared.<sup>211</sup>

Arriving in London at the beginning of June 1844, he was received with great fanfare. The public welcomed him, despite having slandered him so severely hardly a decade before. He wasted little time with pleasantries and within a couple days of his arrival he was openly declaring his animus toward Louis-Phillipe to Peel and Aberdeen.<sup>212</sup> This was an intentional show of anger toward what Nikolai saw as their mutual rival, whom he went on to portray as the unlikely yet existential threat to the Ottomans' survival:

Turkey is a dying man. We may endeavor to keep him alive, but we shall not succeed...I foresee that I shall have to put my armies into movement, and Austria must do the same. I fear nobody in the matter, but France. What will she require? I fear, much: in Africa, in the Mediterranean, in the East itself...in such a case, must not England be on the spot with the whole of her maritime forces? Thus a Russian Army, an Austrian Army, and a great English fleet, all congregated together in those parts. So many powder barrels close to the fire, how

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<sup>209</sup> Puryear 37

<sup>210</sup> Foreign Office 78 Turkey 552, 18. Found in Puryear 38

<sup>211</sup> Puryear 40-1

<sup>212</sup> Bolsover 132-3, Puryear 44-5

shall one prevent sparks from catching?<sup>213</sup>

No longer speaking of the Ottomans' collapse as a possibility, probability or even as an eventuality, Nikolai speaks as if the collapse shall be imminent when he speaks of putting his armies into movement. Interestingly, he also is again willing to mislead one Great Power into thinking the others are committed to his plans. Austria, of course, never felt it “must do the same” as Nikolai foresaw. He is also probably lying when he talks of his fears of French aggression. Only a couple years before he assumed the French would assent to a partition for little more than the Aegean Islands. He also drops a veiled threat to the British when he speaks of powder kegs, subtly warning them that without a partition plan, their intervention in the collapse of the Empire would be met with hostility. Before the 1840's Nikolai never appeared eager to see the Empire's demise. Here, he pushes for a partition plan with a gusto not seen before. It would almost certainly be an overreach to argue that he truly wised to put his armies into movement post haste, but his language here is certainly less reluctant. To sweeten the deal, Nikolai even offered his armies to fight Louis-Phillipe upon request.<sup>214</sup> It would be a tempting offer for any Power, but the Tsar wanted commitment to a fully laid out partition plan that excluded France. Nikolai again bluntly spoke his mind regarding Ottoman fragility:

Turkey must fall to pieces. Nesselrode denies this, but I for my part am fully convinced of it. We cannot preserve its existence no matter how hard we try...I do not want Constantinople, but if the Ottoman throne falls...never shall I permit Constantinople to fall into the hands of England for France. Nor would I favor the reconstruction of the Byzantine Empire. It is Austria which, in the general interest, must fall heir to European Turkey. If...others wish to take Constantinople, I will expel them...once in Constantinople, I shall never leave!<sup>215</sup>

Nikolai's statement reveals that Nesselrode may have somewhat moderated the Tsar's pessimism regarding the Ottomans' chances of long-term survival, but it is unlikely Nesselrode would have had the power to shape the Tsar's fundamental policy. Perhaps Nesselrode had

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<sup>213</sup> Puryear 46

<sup>214</sup> Puryear 46-7

<sup>215</sup> Puryear 48-9

persuaded the Tsar that with care the Ottomans had some decades left, but the Oriental Crises convinced Nikolai even that was impossible. In any case, it appears to be in the mid-1840s that Nikolai begins to see the Ottomans' collapse as imminent and desires an agreement with the Powers that treat its collapse as imminent. It could no longer be propped up with defensive alliances such as Hünkâr Iskelesi and international agreements like the Convention of London. Nikolai's mind was made up. His goal now was to get the other Great Powers to see sense.

Unfortunately for his ambitions, Nikolai made for a poor herald. Once Aberdeen heard his rant, Nikolai later recalled “(Aberdeen) *a ouvert grande yeux*”.<sup>216</sup> The Tsar had wished to impress upon the British the apparent urgency of the catastrophe brewing in the Near East and wished to not “act in a manner opposed to the views of the British government”, which would be much easier to achieve if a partition plan was put in place.<sup>217</sup> Naturally the British did not desire unnecessary conflict with Russia over the Ottomans' spoils but even Nikolai himself observed how a formal convention to partition its remnants was problematic, stating that “such a treaty would only hasten its demise. I shall do everything I can to preserve the *status quo*. But we must honestly and rationally consider the disintegration of Turkey.”<sup>218</sup>

Britain could agree to act in unison with Austria and Russia in their relations with the Ottomans to keep the Porte from manipulating one Power against the other and ensure it offered suitable protections to their Christian population, and Nikolai in turn agreed not to intervene in Ottoman affairs unless Austria summoned the Tsar's forces or Britain gave its approval for such an intervention. Britain, likewise, would act in concert with Russia if they felt the need to intervene in Ottoman affairs. The two Powers further agreed to preserve the Ottoman Empire as it was, and to begin a discussion regarding its partition if and only if that *status quo* was truly untenable, but at the same time they resolved that they would not wait for its actual collapse to put together a partition

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<sup>216</sup> *Nesselrode Memorandum*. Appendix E, found in Puryear 49

<sup>217</sup> Nicholas to Sir Hamilton Seymour, January 14, 1853. F.O 65 Russia 424, 24. *Eastern Papers V*, 4-5. Found in Puryear 49

<sup>218</sup> Puryear 50

agreement that would involve Austria and exclude France. This last part of what was to be known as the “Nesselrode Memorandum” sounds muddled. Russia and Britain agree to preserve the *status quo* but to have a partition plan ready before their actual collapse. However, Nikolai and Peel do not appear to agree how far decayed the Ottomans are. If Nikolai were to be taken at his word, Britain and Russia should have made a partition plan. However, none was made<sup>219</sup>.

Perhaps both parties assumed too much from each other. Russia laid out its view of the future, and as Britain did not openly protest it, perhaps Nikolai took their silence as tacit approval. The evidence is against it, as Nikolai was aware that his ideas shocked Aberdeen, but one cannot rule out his mistaking Aberdeen's apparent surprise for another emotion. That said, it is possible that Britain believed Russia's acceptance of the terms of their agreement was also a tacit acceptance on Russia's behalf that the Ottoman Empire was not untenably decayed.

In any case, both Peel and Nikolai had an informal understanding backed by their word of honor. Both parties understood that this was not a binding agreement and the Whigs would not necessarily acknowledge the agreements of their opponents. And again, as Puryear writes, “The precise point which was never treated in detail was the degree of imminence of the admittedly forthcoming dissolution of Turkey.<sup>220</sup>” This would turn out to be a catastrophic error in Nikolai's handling of the Eastern Question, but the magnitude of this blunder was not immediately apparent. The United Kingdom was effectively an ally of Russia and Austria, and they were united against France and in relative concert on Ottoman affairs. Brunnow would report that Victoria, Peel and Aberdeen were all favorable to Nikolai and their agreement.

20 years after taking the throne of Russia, Nikolai had successfully placed himself as suzerain and kingmaker of the Near East and the “Policeman of Europe”. The Ottoman Empire lay at his mercy, and two, if not three of the Great Powers could be counted as allies, if not unconditionally so. His success could be attributed to his lack of desire to expand his territories and

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<sup>219</sup> *Nesselrode Memorandum*. Found in Puryear Appendix E, 439-443 Puryear 50-4

<sup>220</sup> Puryear 53

a largely defensive imperialism that focused on expanding Russia's commercial privileges and soft power, as well as able and occasionally brilliant diplomatic manipulation of foreign ministers and the base luck of being the head of an archconservative regime in a European Concert largely dedicated to anti-liberal politics. The Turkish Straits were sealed off to foreign warships, the Ottoman Empire under his thumb. Had he died of illness in 1850, perhaps Nikolai's Near Eastern policy would have been considered by historians to be an almost unqualified success. However, the very beliefs, preconceptions and motivations that raised Nikolai up would be the very traits that would knock him down in the last years of his reign.

## CHAPTER FIVE: 1848-1853

### 5.1 Cracks at the Seams: The 1848 Revolutions and the Canning Incident

The fall of Tsar Nikolai's foreign policy and overall legacy was the result of the Crimean War. But what precipitated the war? There were three main roots of this conflict, which were commercial, political, and religious respectively, and the religious conflict was arguably political. I shall first review what Puryear calls the “Commercial Preliminaries” of the Crimean War.<sup>221</sup>

Before 1846, Britain controlled the amount of grain they imported. The repeal of the Grain Laws caused Britain's grain trade with the Ottomans to increase sixfold by 1849.<sup>222</sup> Canning saw an opportunity to both dominate Ottoman commerce and press them into a commercial treaty that would also wrest them away from Russian influence and put the Ottomans in their own pocket.<sup>223</sup> Canning's proposal was not accepted by the Ottoman Empire, but the fact that it was considered at all displays the Porte's pro-British bent. As Canning's *charge d'affairs* Hugh Rose declared, “Turkey allows Great Britain to trade with her on more advantageous terms than does any other Power.”<sup>224</sup> This certainly included Russia, whose protectionist policies passed heavy tariffs on British manufactures. That said, commerce with the Ottomans indeed increased rapidly. By 1851, Britain bought as much grain from the Ottomans as it did from Russia, and Britain in turn sold twice as many manufactured goods to the Ottomans as it did from Russia. As Russia was also reliant on British import of its grain crops, this development could not have been well-received in St. Petersburg.<sup>225</sup>

The growing economic tensions with Britain only compounded Russia's existing economic concerns. Russia's main trade route passed through the Turkish Straits, but it lacked Britain's industrial base and their attempts to build up their own by levying tariffs on British manufactures led to the latter expanding its commerce with the Ottomans to the point of mutual inseparability. As

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<sup>221</sup> Puryear 75

<sup>222</sup> Puryear 122-3

<sup>223</sup> Puryear 124

<sup>224</sup> FO 78 Turkey 930, 98, found in Puryear 127

<sup>225</sup> Puryear 125-8

Rose pointed out, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would result in “the ruin of British trade and interests,” meaning the United Kingdom was now as invested in the Empire's future as Russia was.<sup>226</sup>

The political preliminaries are much more complex, but can be dated to 1846, when the Tory government fell, with the Whigs taking power under Lord John Russell with Palmerston as his foreign minister. Brunnow pressed Aberdeen to tell Palmerston and Russell to keep the 1844 Nesselrode Memorandum between themselves, but Aberdeen could make no promises. Though Brunnow and Aberdeen were quite cordial in their personal relations, Palmerston had no desire to maintain such a friendship. That said, Palmerston didn't publicize the Nesselrode Memorandum. Puryear makes a good argument that Palmerston saw it as a binding document on Russia, given his previous suspicion of Nikolai's intentions in the Near East.<sup>227</sup> If he assumed that Russia were to partition the Ottoman Empire, he was bound not to do it without Britain's approval—an approval Britain would never give and if Rose's words are any indication, Britain would much rather go to war in the Ottomans' defense. On the other hand, Britain would never attack the Ottomans, so they were effectively bound to nothing. In any case, the brief era of good feeling between Russia and Britain was on the wane, and the stage was set for Stratford Canning's machinations to nearly blot them out completely.

In 1848, Liberal revolutions swept through Europe, causing Nikolai to send soldiers into the Principalities to suppress revolutionary activity. Puryear, citing Dimitiri Bukharov, theorizes this might have been a Russian effort to reassert its waning influence in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>228</sup> By May 1849, the situation in central Europe was complicated by Russia's intervention in Hungary, which led Palmerston to believe Nikolai was attempting to force Austria into a client relationship with Russia.<sup>229</sup> In other words, Palmerston was increasingly concerned Russia was attempting to expand

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<sup>226</sup> Puryear 125-8

<sup>227</sup> Puryear 143-5

<sup>228</sup> Puryear 149-50

<sup>229</sup> Puryear 152

its hegemony and found himself increasingly distrustful of Nikolai. Russia's relations with Britain and the Ottomans were further tested when, in the aftermath of the failed Hungarian revolt, Hungarian and Polish refugees flooded into Ottoman territory in August. Among them were a multitude of revolutionary leaders, men hunted by both Russia and Austria. They demanded the Ottomans extradite them, but Abdülmecid refused, even when both powers broke off diplomatic relations on 17 September. It is unclear why Abdülmecid refused to do so. Anderson implies it was a matter of honor, and whether or not this was so, Abdülmecid was likely emboldened to defy the Austro-Russian alliance by Palmerston and Canning.<sup>230</sup>

In any case, Nikolai had made another error. Canning had been sewing distrust among the Ottomans toward the Russians since the beginning of the year and were alarmed at the Tsar's actions. Palmerston's suspicions had compelled him to send warships into the Dardanelles as a “bottle of salts to the nose of a lady who has been frightened”, the Porte being the lady of his analogy.<sup>231</sup> Palmerston took the extra step of lobbying the French to join Britain in its demonstration, a sign of the United Kingdom's reversion to its former *entente* with France. The French agreed, committing a fleet to the venture. Palmerston then permitted Canning the power to summon the fleet at his discretion. Canning's Turcophile and Russophobic political beliefs must have been known to Palmerston, considering the former's constant lobbying along those lines throughout the 1840s, so it is likely he was aware Canning would summon the fleet at the flimsiest of pretexts, suggesting that Russia's anti-revolutionary countermeasures had dismantled all of Nikolai's diplomatic efforts of 1844 and was once again regarded as a rival power.<sup>232</sup>

In October 1849, Canning summoned the fleet and took up such an aggressive position the Russophobic Ponsonby, now in Vienna, urged the ambassador to take a less provocative stance. Canning simply dismissed these concerns, leaving Brunnow to explain Russia's actions to Palmerston. Brunnow insisted the breaking of relations with the Ottomans was a protest, not a

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<sup>230</sup> Anderson 113

<sup>231</sup> Puryear 153

<sup>232</sup> Puryear 156



signal for war, and that the Convention of London would continue to be observed by Russia. At the same time, Brunnow communicated his suspicion of Britain's naval movements, all but accusing Palmerston of permitting the fleet to violate the Convention, to which Palmerston was compelled to assure him that Britain would never enter the Straits. Clearly the British distrust of Russia was beginning to be reciprocated.

Canning, in a scheme to win over the Ottomans as a British client in same manner Russia had done in 1833, would further stoke the flames of conflict in late October 1849 by manipulating the British fleet's admiral into anchoring within the Dardanelles in direct violation of the Convention of London, hoping the Ottomans would look to the British to protect them against Russia and Austria. He justified his actions to Palmerston, arguing that “Neither the land defenses of the Bosphorus nor the available Turkish navy would be sufficient to secure Constantinople against a successful attack by sea, were Russia determined to risk the enterprise by means of her squadron at Sevastopol.”<sup>233</sup> This was almost certainly a pretext for violating the Convention. While Canning was factually correct, his action, far from protecting Constantinople, risked dragging the Ottomans into a war neither it nor the Russians desired. Indeed, St. Petersburg had ordered the Black Sea Fleet commander to prepare for a British invasion of Constantinople. Russian ambassador V.P. Titov protested to both Canning and the Porte, but the British fleet did not withdraw even after Nikolai withdrew his demands to extradite the refugees on the first week of November, waiting until the middle of the month to pull out.<sup>234</sup> Anderson posits that this may have been an attempt to placate Britain. Nikolai's capitulations does not seem to have placated Canning, who went on to challenge Russia's exploitative quarantine measures in the Black Sea.<sup>235</sup> By 1850 he had become a figure of ire at St. Petersburg, with Nesselrode condemning Canning's Russophobic “perfidious suggestions” to the Porte.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Calvert to Canning, October 30 1849. FO 195 Dardanelles 300, found in Puryear 168

<sup>234</sup> Puryear 169

<sup>235</sup> Anderson 114

<sup>236</sup> Puryear 171

One may assume that because Nikolai had caved to British pressure that he was willing to absorb Canning's provocations to preserve his relationship with Britain. This was not entirely so. Nikolai was indignant and criticized Nesselrode's attempts to reconcile with London as “rose water language,” demanding a sterner protest. The British were initially dismissive of Nikolai's outrage, with Palmerston claiming Canning had not violated the Convention, to which Brunnow threatened to send the Black Sea Fleet into the Bosphorus. This seems to have had the desired effect on Palmerston, who ordered Canning to instruct the fleet to harbor in ports that further away from the Dardanelles, and argue that “The example of great Britain in disregarding the treaty would be followed readily by Russia”.<sup>237</sup>

Brunnow had successfully intimidated Palmerston, but St. Petersburg apparently had not attained satisfaction. Nesselrode declared that the United Kingdom had set a precedent that Russia would now follow, and Brunnow confronted Palmerston with his belief that the British admiral harbored in the Dardanelles in violation of the Convention despite knowing other, better ports could be found elsewhere. Titov then threatened the Porte, informing them St. Petersburg's belief that the Porte had resorted to “insidious interpretation of the means by which the Porte had attempted to justify the appearance of the British squadron in the Dardanelles could be admissible in justice and reason...” effectively accusing the Porte of colluding with Britain's violation of the Convention, and threatening them that “by analogous conjectures a Russian admiral might take our fleet to the very doors of Constantinople, and apply the same reasoning which the Porte applied here to the Dardanelles...the convention is obligatory, or it is not.”<sup>238</sup> I argue this fierce and threatening castigation of British and Ottoman actions were entirely a result of Nikolai's wounded pride. Brunnow's initial threat should have sufficed, but Nikolai's strong sense of honor and inability to absorb a diplomatic setback caused him to resort to excessive measures. While Palmerston was forced to apologize to satisfy the Tsar's ego, he instructed Canning to exhort the Ottomans to

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<sup>237</sup> F.O 78 Turley 771, 306. Puryear 171-4

<sup>238</sup> F.O 65 Russia 385, 13. Found in Puryear 175

reinforce their defenses, fearing that a Russian attack was possible, if not probable. Puryear claims the incident convinced Palmerston of Nikolai's sincere intent to preserve the Ottoman Empire. If anything, the evidence here suggests the opposite. Not only was any thought of an alliance between Russia and Great Britain now impossible, Canning had poisoned Russo-Ottoman relations and Nikolai's heavy-handed diplomacy only exacerbated tensions between the two empires to the point that by late 1849 the Ottomans were strongly considering Canning's proposal of an Anglo-Ottoman alliance despite the fact that Canning's terms would result in British domination of the Ottoman Empire on both political and economic terms. While the Porte ultimately rejected the terms of alliance, it is clear Constantinople was prepared to escape the Russian "serpent" if more equitable terms could be found.

## 5.2 The Holy Places Dispute

1850 is a notable year, as the Eastern Question was by this date further escalated by the growing tensions regarding the Holy Places of the Ottoman Empire, which in this work will refer to ancient Christian sites primarily found in the Levant, most of which are sacred to all Christian denominations. Zhomini puts forth the Greek Orthodox Church as the historical and rightful owners of the Holy Places, but whether this is true is second in importance to the treaties and decrees that granted one denomination or the other custodial rights over said Holy Places.<sup>239</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries France and the Ottomans enjoyed a favored status with each other, and in 1740 the Ottomans provided a capitulation to the French in which they were provided religious protection. Mariott suggests that neither the French nor the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire took the capitulation very seriously and allowed the Greeks to take custody of formerly Catholic-held churches.<sup>240</sup> According to Fowler, this is false. Serious conflicts between Catholics and Orthodox broke out in 1757 and 1808, and France and Russia got involved in a third conflict in 1819, acting

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<sup>239</sup> Aleksandr Genrikhovich Zhomini, *Diplomatic Study on the Crimean War (1852 to 1856)*. Vol. 1. London: W.H Allen & Co. 1882 p. 121-2

<sup>240</sup> J.A.R. Mariott, *The Eastern Question*. Oxford University Press, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1940. 253

as protectors for their respective co-religionists.<sup>241</sup> Fowler describes that in 1836 France persuaded the Ottomans to take keys to the “holy places” of Jerusalem from the Orthodox and give them to the Catholics, but the Ottoman *firman* was ignored by a corrupt *vali* bribed by unnamed forces. However, Fowler's account is not mentioned by any other source and is of dubious veracity.<sup>242</sup> By the 1840s, the French breathed life into the formerly symbolic Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and proselytized, while Russian pilgrims and donations to the Orthodox churches in the Holy Land increased as Russia worked to build ties with Orthodox clergy.

By 1850, Zhomini claims, “The Latin clergy became more and more aggressive. The conflict of interests and claims had not, however, gone beyond local limits, nor beyond those of an ardent polemic raised by the Catholic agent, General Aupick, who, in 1850...was instructed to support the Latin claims in virtue of the Treaty of 1740. This constituted for us a serious embarrassment.”<sup>243</sup> Fowler says more on this subject, quoting a dispatch from Canning to Palmerston: “General Aupick has assured me...(the dispute) is a mere matter of property, and of express treaty stipulation. The immediate point of difference is the right of possession to certain portions of the Holy Church at Jerusalem. The Greeks are accused of having usurped property which belongs of right to the Roman Catholics.” The Porte passed the buck off to a commission of Orthodox and Catholics. Curtiss claims this commission failed to come to an agreement, but Fowler writes that Nikolai interceded in the affair, demanding the Porte rule in favor of the Orthodox. Having just reconciled with Russia, the Porte did so, compensating the Catholics for the Orthodox Church's supposed theft of property.<sup>244</sup>

The Aupick incident was the result of France's new leader Louis Napoleon's efforts to win the support of the Catholic Church in France. Zhomini claims “The Cabinet of the Tuileries...declared that it had no intention to make an affair of this question,” but this was evidently

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<sup>241</sup> Fowler 4

<sup>242</sup> Fowler 7-8

<sup>243</sup> Zhomini 127

<sup>244</sup> Fowler 8, Curtiss 41

a falsehood, as in 1851 Napoleon dispatched the Marquis de Lavalette, whom Curtiss describes as “an ardent and aggressive Catholic,” to Constantinople, to which he demanded of the Porte the restoration to the Catholics the rights France believed the 1740 capitulation entitled them.<sup>245</sup> Titov, citing Küçük Kaynarca's stipulation permitting Russia to make representations on behalf of the Orthodox Church, informed Lavalette and the Porte that Nikolai would reject any decree stripping the Orthodox of their Holy Places.<sup>246</sup> The Tsar, Zhomini writes, “thought it necessary to intervene personally with the Sultan in order to reestablish the equilibrium which the partiality of the Turkish Ministers threatened to break,” and in September 1851 personally wrote to Abdülmecid protesting the very idea that Orthodox Church's custody was being disputed. Both Fowler and Zhomini report that the Porte essentially ruled in favor of the Orthodox after that point. Abdülmecid himself explicitly confirmed the Orthodox Church's rights in his response to Nikolai.<sup>247</sup> However, Curtiss adds that the Porte would vocally support Russia in Constantinople and more underhandedly favor the Catholics in Jerusalem, once again playing the diplomatic game that allowed the weakened Empire to survive.<sup>248</sup>

Zhomini claims that the French were decisively beaten in this dispute. A commission of *Ulema*, he writes, “reached a conclusion which tended to invalidate completely the claims derived by the Latins from the Treaty of 1740”. Furthermore, in January 1852 Titov was replaced by Mikhail Ozerov, who requested and received a *firman* which Zhomini claims “put aside...(all but two) Latin claims as *unjust*”.<sup>249</sup> That said, Lavalette violently protested the Porte's support of Russia and the Orthodox Church, and found Ottoman allies in Mehmet Ali Pasha and Fuat Efendi, who chafed under Russian domination and admired France. By autumn 1852 the Porte had made an about face and was now openly favoring the French in all Holy Place disputes, which bled over into their relations at large; Fuat openly called for alliance with France and disparaged Russia.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Zhomini 130-1, Curtiss 43

<sup>246</sup> Fowler 9

<sup>247</sup> Zhomini 131-2

<sup>248</sup> Curtiss 46-7

<sup>249</sup> Zhomini 134

<sup>250</sup> Curtiss 44-7

Zhomini quotes him as saying Russia was “too prudent...to have recourse to force in a question in which she rested on no treaty and had all Europe against her. He caused it to be looked upon at an immense advantage for Turkey to have the opportunity of disembarassing herself once for all from the influence exercised by Russia on the orthodox populations of the Empire.”<sup>251</sup> By the end of 1852, Abdülmecid had issued a *firman* delivering the keys to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to the Catholics, which Curtiss argues was a symbolic gesture placing the Catholics above the Orthodox, which Zhomini condemns as a strike against “the work of entire centuries accomplished by Russia in favour of her co-religionaries...all these measures excited the fanaticism of the Mussulman populations of Europe and Asia...the Emperor Nicholas considered that it must be dealt with by energetic measures.”<sup>252</sup>

But why? As mentioned before, Nikolai's devotion to religion was Russocentric in character, and refused to support Greek or Balkan Slavic Orthodox rebels against the Sultan, as they offended his Legitimist principles. He sought no territorial aggrandizement. He worked to gain influence with them, but he did not wish them to become his subjects. It would seem his interest in the Holy Places was borne out of pride and private morality, mixed with the rights he believed Küçük Kaynarca provided him. Of Nikolai's pride and the ambiguity of Küçük Kaynarca I have already spoken, but comparatively little on his religiousness. The Tsar could be a spiritual individual. He exhorted his soldiers to behave according to Christian principles even while at war. “Throughout his life Nicholas I was bent on improving himself morally and spiritually,” Riasanovsky writes. De Grunwald supports this: <sup>253</sup>

...Orthodox services bored him: he submitted to them through 'a high sense of moral decorum which was the basis of all his opinions...Evening and morning he would read a chapter of the Bible...a believer and pious, in short, 'capable of forgetting all worldly cares whilst kneeling at the altar'.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Zhomini 142

<sup>252</sup> Curtiss 47 Zhomini 145

<sup>253</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 86

<sup>254</sup> De Grunwald, 203

Perhaps he felt a moral responsibility to protect the Orthodox who, in his eyes at least, were being stripped of their rightful temples. Perhaps his pride as an Orthodox Christian made him desire to champion their entitlements. De Grunwald argues that Nikolai could have easily dismissed the problem and limited its scope, “but now Nicholas adopted quite a different method: he grasped at a trifling pretext to unfold suddenly to an astonished world, a most ambitious programme constituting of the liberation of Slav and Orthodox people from the yoke of infidels, the expulsion of Turks from Constantinople, the restoration of the Holy Cross on the dome of Saint Sophia.”<sup>255</sup> De Grunwald thus describes an abrupt and nearly inexplicable shift in attitude. However, one could make the argument that Nikolai's Legitimist principles did not apply only to temporal politics. Zhomini, a contemporary of Nikolai, seems to have aligned with the Tsar's belief in Legitimism, as he justifies Russia's policy during the Holy Places dispute as a rightful defense of Orthodox and their churches, which he repeatedly asserts historically belonged to them. It was the Orthodox who had negotiated and treated with Muslim kings, it was the Orthodox who since antiquity had been the legal owners and caretakers. The French-backed Catholics, by contrast, were illegitimate usurpers with flimsy claims. Nikolai was a man for whom honor was a compelling force. His morality, his personal ideology and his role as patriarchal figure demanded he exercise his supposed rights as protector of Orthodox Christians and attain satisfaction on their behalf. And it was this belief that led him to his downfall.

### **5.3 Nikolai's Final Solution**

Amidst Russia's growing tensions with the Ottomans, in late 1852 Austria was troubled with the Ottomans' invasion of Montenegro, fearing it would incite the Serbian and Bosnian Slavs in both the Ottoman and Austrian Empires to revolt. In January 1853 Austria sent a *de facto* ultimatum demanding the Ottomans end the invasion. Nikolai backed Austria wholeheartedly, even pledging himself to fight along Austria if the two empires went to war.<sup>256</sup> Not ten years before Russia

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<sup>255</sup> De Grunwald 258

<sup>256</sup> Puryear 210

marched to the Ottomans' defense and solved greater crises with diplomacy. Here, for a more minor dispute, Nikolai seems almost eager to go to war. It is notable that as Austria and the Ottomans faced off over Montenegro, Nikolai created a memorandum outlining his policy toward the Ottomans:

What should be our objective?

1. Reparation
2. Guarantees for the future. What form can they take?
3. Conservation of the position as it used to be. Is this probable?

What are the means of attaining our objective?

1. Negotiations...
2. Intimidation by recall of our mission...
3. By force...

...(If by force) Probable Results:

1. Turkey will give way.
2. She will not give way; destruction of Constantinople.
3. The defeated Turkish army retreats toward Gallipoli or Enos.
4. Occupation of the Dardanelles.
5. The French send a fleet and an expeditionary force. Conflicts with them.

Chances of success; possibility of setbacks.

6. We have the upper hand...the Turkish army is routed.
7. Fall of the Ottoman Empire.
8. Should we reestablish it and on what conditions?
9. Can we reestablish it with a chance of success?
10. With what should it be replaced?

A: Keep all its European territory: impossible.

B: Keep Constantinople and the Dardanelles-disadvantages.

C: Constantinople alone-an impossibility.

D: Division into independent provinces.

E: Reestablishment of the Byzantine Empire.

F: Reunion with Greece.

Impossibility of both.

...

I: The least bad of all bad solutions.

A: The Principalities and Bulgaria as far as Kistendji to Russia.

B: Serbia and Bulgaria independent.

C: The coasts of the Archipelago and the Adriatic to Austria.



- D: Egypt to England: perhaps Cyprus and Rhodes.
- E : Crete to France.
- F: The islands of the Archipelago to Greece.
- G: Constantinople a free city; the Bosphorus Russian garrison: the Dardanelles Austrian garrison.
- H: Complete freedom of trade.
- I: The Turkish Empire in Asia Minor.<sup>257</sup>

Here, Nikolai finally begins to resemble the warmongering predator his enemies painted him as. Over the keys to some churches, Nikolai has indicated his willingness to destroy an Empire and throw Europe and the Near East into chaos. He acknowledges the impossibility of its partition and yet seems to believe it can be done on his terms, with the other Powers largely at peace with their spoils. He assumes Austria is willing to expand into the Balkans despite Metternich's insistence that it was not. He assumes Britain will have no objection to the fracturing of their economic client state despite Canning's recent provocations in the Straits. Nikolai seems to believe the United Kingdom would have no problem with Austria and Russia garrisoning those Straits, expecting resistance from France and they alone. It is an utterly unrealistic and naive plan for a future no other Great Power would ever accept, yet Nikolai apparently devised it in all seriousness. How could the “Policeman of Europe”, whose diplomacy had been adept and sometimes even brilliant, have come up with so asinine? The only possible explanation is that he believed Austria and Britain were his bosom allies. To have so much blind faith in Austria is understandable, considering the Holy Alliance had never faltered and the last couple of years had seen Austria and Russia as virtual partners in their diplomatic struggles with the Ottomans. Nikolai was wrong to assume Austria would back Russia in a scheme so brazen, but right to believe Austria to be his most secure ally. To have a similar faith in the United Kingdom, however was folly. Nesselrode must have been partially aware of how foolish the memorandum was, as he pleaded at length to his master not to discuss it with other Powers. He advised Nikolai that if they were to go to war with the Ottomans, they would be pariahs in Europe. Austria and Britain should not be considered compliant partners in any partition scheme and in fact would view it as “proof that we want, not the conservation, but the fall of the Ottoman Empire”,

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<sup>257</sup> Curtiss 62, “Nicholas I on Russian Policy in the Near East, 1853”, found in Macfie 104

using flimsy pretexts to finish it off.<sup>258</sup> Nesselrode was more realistic than his lord, but not by much. He believed Austria and Britain's trust could be earned by persuading them of Russia's peaceful intentions. Nesselrode appears quite naive here, considering that Russia had been attempting to persuade the Concert of Europe of its desire for peace throughout Nikolai's entire reign, with nothing more than mixed successes. But perhaps Brunnow gave him cause to be unrealistically optimistic.

#### **5.4 The Seymour Conversations**

Nikolai sought to attain satisfaction for the Orthodox in the Ottoman Empire, for Russia, and for himself. It seems the three in Nikolai's mind were synonymous. His folly was compounded by his continued faith in the British, who by this point had clearly rejected any alliance with Russia, but the Tsar continued to strive to shore up his relationship with London to enable Russia to impose their will on the Ottomans.

The United Kingdom and France's relations remained strained, but despite their disputes the Whigs under Russell and the British in Constantinople continued to favor France, which in turn enabled them to isolate and paralyze Russia's own diplomacy. Nesselrode presciently expressed his concern in a letter to Brunnow dated 5 January 1853 in which he predicted at the present course Napoleon would force Russia into war with the Ottomans, which in turn would compel France and Great Britain to wage war against Russia. An real alliance with the Ottomans was now impossible. "At Constantinople distrust and suspicion of Russia were so deep-seated that the latter would not be believed even if it disavowed the intention to ruin Turkey and alleged that France wanted it."<sup>259</sup> However, Britain had gained the Porte's favor. Nesselrode hoped that if Russia could regain Britain's favor, together they could impose their will on France and settle the Holy Places Dispute in Russia's favor. This seems a nearly impossible hope for an otherwise rational Nesselrode, but he himself had been misled by Brunnow, who reported that the British public and elite had turned

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<sup>258</sup> Curtiss 63-4

<sup>259</sup> Brunnow to Nesselrode, Dec. 8/20 1852, found in Curtiss 60-1.

Turcophobic. It seems he based his opinion on the Turcophobic views of his longtime friend Aberdeen, who as of December 1852 had emerged as the new Prime Minister. Brunnow reported to Nesselrode that Aberdeen had confessed “I hate the Turks, for I regard their government as the worst and most despotic in the world”. With that, Brunnow apparently assumed all British felt as his friend did. This seems an almost ludicrous jump to a conclusion, but perhaps Brunnow, as a servant of a despotic empire dominated by Nikolai's autocratic beliefs, simply could not truly comprehend plurality within a society. However, his positive reports, Curtiss suggests, convinced Nikolai his relations with Great Britain were still strong.<sup>260</sup>

At the beginning of 1853, Nikolai decided to win over Sir Hamilton Seymour, British ambassador to St. Petersburg. At a dinner he told Seymour the Ottoman Empire “is in a critical state...falling to pieces; that fall would be a great misfortune and it is very important England and Russia should come to a very good understanding upon these affairs, and that neither should take any decisive step of which the other is not apprised.”<sup>261</sup> There are a number of ways to interpret this remark. Perhaps Nikolai knew his 1844 agreement was null *de facto* and he wished to renew it. Perhaps he simply wished to have an agreement in place in the event of an undesirable war, but Nikolai's 1852 memorandum suggests that he was no longer willing to value the Ottomans' existence over what was effectively religious vanity. I believe Nikolai assumed Britain would support an Ottoman partition, considering his failure to account for British opposition in the 1852 memorandum and the inaccurate reports he was receiving regarding British attitudes toward Russia and the Ottoman Empire. I argue that he was attempting to subtly ascertain whether Britain was prepared and willing to execute their agreement in the near future.

Seymour agreed the two Powers should make no major decisions without consulting the other. This was nothing the British had not already agreed to in 1844, but Nikolai was apparently encouraged by this response, going on to tell Seymour “We have a sick man on our hands [he

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<sup>260</sup> Curtiss 61-2

<sup>261</sup> Seymour to Russell, Jan 11 1853. F.O. 65 Russia 424, 13; Eastern Papers, V, 1-3. Found in Puryear 211

insisted], a man who is seriously ill; it will be...a great misfortune if he escapes us one of these days, especially before all the necessary arrangements are made.” Again, Nikolai seems far more eager to proceed with finishing off the Empire than he had in the past. It apparently repelled Seymour, who suggested that the solution was to treat the Ottomans gently. Catching the hint, the Tsar retired for the moment, but similar dialogues would continue.<sup>262</sup> Meanwhile, Nesselrode revealed in a letter to Russell, who was now elevated to Foreign Minister, that Russia was also concerned of France's warming relationship with the Porte and suspected the French were out to peel Ottoman territories from Constantinople's grasp, a clue to Nikolai's growing sense of urgency regarding these affairs.<sup>263</sup>

The Tsar spoke more moderately to Seymour later that month, reassuring him he was no Catherine with grandiose dreams of conquest. But, as Seymour reported in a dispatch to Russell, Nikolai feared the Holy Places Dispute and the Montenegro Crisis would spell the end of the Empire, and even if it did not, internal divisions and Christian uprisings could collapse the Empire “at any moment.”<sup>264</sup> It is very clear that Nikolai was now certain Ottoman collapse was no longer merely something to plan for, but imminent and perhaps even ongoing. Perhaps to disarm Seymour's suspicions, the Tsar insisted he was “not so eager about what should be done when the bear dies”, but wished “to determine with England what shall not be done upon that event taking place...a general understanding is all I require-that between gentlemen is sufficient.”<sup>265</sup> Again, it may sound as if Nikolai believed their 1844 agreement was no longer accepted by the British. But if that were so, why would he try again along the exact same lines? It's more probable that Nikolai understood Britain's reluctance to discuss the fall of the Ottomans. Indeed, Seymour informed him as much. However, as if Seymour had said nothing, Nikolai went on to declare that together they could defy the protest of all Europe but “if England thinks of establishing herself one of these days at Constantinople, I will not allow it...it might happen that circumstances, if no previous provision

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<sup>262</sup> Parliamentary Papers, session 1854, Vol. LXXI, Eastern Papers, V. " Communications respecting Turkey made to Her Majesty's Government by the Emperor of Russia, with the Answers returned to them, January to April 1853". Found in Bolsover 138.

<sup>263</sup> Puryear 215

<sup>264</sup> Badem 59

<sup>265</sup> Seymour to Russell, Feb 9/21, 1853, Eastern Papers, V, 8-9. Found in Curtiss 70.

were made...might place me in the position of occupying Constantinople.”<sup>266</sup> Seymour repeated that ““Her Majesty’s Government will be indisposed to make certain arrangements connected with the downfall of Turkey, but it is possible that they be ready to pledge themselves against certain arrangements which might, in that event, be attempted.”<sup>267</sup> Seymour did relay this discussion to Russell, which was quickly followed with an additional communication from Nesselrode repeating Russia's commitment to peace and cooperation with the United Kingdom. There's no debating Russia's commitment to cooperation, but one wonders whether the avowed commitment to peace was Nesselrode's intention rather than Nikolai's.<sup>268</sup> In any case, Russell was dismissive of Nikolai's doomsaying. He disagreed on Nikolai's assertions that the Empire was in imminent collapse and to plot its partition was not only unethical, it could not long be kept secret. However, such an agreement already existed. Perhaps Russell was implying that the Nesselrode Memorandum was a dead letter and that Britain would not plan for the fall of its economic partner, particularly if the Empire's fall “can occur twenty, fifty, one hundred years from now.”<sup>269</sup> And despite Nikolai's continued insistence that the Ottoman crises were pushing the tottering Empire to a point of no return, Russell rejected any assertion that the Sultan “cannot maintain peace at home or keep friendly relations with its neighbors.”. Russell could assure Russia it would never attempt to possess Constantinople or seize Ottoman land without permission from Russia, but otherwise insisted that the Concert of Europe uphold the status quo regarding the Eastern Question. Interestingly, and likely by misinterpreting the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, he recognized the Tsar's right of protectorate over the Orthodox communities of the Ottoman Empire, a recognition which would be repudiated not long after by most of the British government and public. Russell also promised to encourage the Ottomans to rule its Christian subjects and enforce its laws in a manner more favorable to Russia. But this was meat to an angry dog, not a true gesture of friendship. Seymour

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<sup>266</sup> Karl Marx, “The Documents on the Partition of Turkey”, *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Volume 13 (pp.73-83) <https://marxengels.public-archive.net/en/ME1877en.html> Accessed 12/6/2020.

<sup>267</sup> Seymour to Russell, Feb 21 1853. *Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 71, part 5. Found in Macfie 102-3.

<sup>268</sup> Puryear 215

<sup>269</sup> Russell to Seymour, Feb 9 1853, found in Curtiss 70

expressed to Russell that the Tsar's proposals were “matter for most anxious reflection”, correctly assuming Nikolai wished “to engage H.M. government in conjunction with his own Cabinet and that of Vienna in some scheme for the ultimate partition of Turkey and for the exclusion of France from the arrangement.”<sup>270</sup>

Nikolai was clearly fixated on the Eastern Question. Perhaps he had his reasons. As a conservative Legitimist, he not only feared losing control of the Straits, he was concerned over Greece consuming the Ottomans' carcass to the point it could challenge Russia in the Balkans, and even more worried about the region becoming a breeding ground for the radical revolutionaries that threatened the established order. He was quite clear to Seymour on this subject: “Rather than submit to any of these arrangements [he said], I would go to war and as long as I have a man and a musket left would carry it on.” Furthermore, he had already given the post-Ottoman political situation much thought. He proposed forming Bulgaria and putting the Principalities and Serbia under his protection while granting the United Kingdom Egypt and Candia. Nikolai also declared to Seymour “When I speak of Russia, I speak of Austria as well; what suits the one suits the other ; our interests as regards Turkey are perfectly identical.”<sup>271</sup> As mentioned before, Austria had never endorsed such a plan, but whether the Tsar was attempting to fool Seymour or himself is irrelevant, as Seymour assumed Austria was indeed in Russia's pocket in regards to Nikolai's partition plan. With the amount of consideration Nikolai had evidently given the situation, it must have been unsettling for Seymour to hear Nikolai express his dismissal of Nesselrode's belief that the Ottoman Empire could be maintained, insisting that “the catastrophe will occur someday and take us all unawares.”<sup>272</sup>

After the conclusion of their meeting, Nesselrode repeated that Nikolai was quite pleased with its outcome, as he felt that at least he had established red lines with the United Kingdom. However, the fact that he then resorted to Goebbelsian tactics with Seymour by informing him that the Tsar had never proposed a partition arguably demonstrates that Nesselrode perceived that the

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<sup>270</sup> Marx

<sup>271</sup> P.R.O., F.O. 65/424. Seymour to Russell?22 Feb./53, No. 88, Sec. & Conf, Bolsover 142

<sup>272</sup> Seymour to Russell, Feb 25 1853, EP, V, 9.

Nikolai had blundered. However, it does not seem that neither Nesselrode nor Nikolai had perceived how gravely the Tsar had erred. They continued to overestimate the closeness of their ties, believing that Britain was supporting Russia against France in the Holy Places Dispute despite the fact that aside from Aberdeen, few members of Her Majesty's Government were pro-Russian. The public, who never had much love for Russia, was falling back into its former Russophobia.<sup>273</sup> Yet somehow Brunnow was convinced that Britain despised the Ottomans, seeing it as a vassal of Russia rather than a client of the United Kingdom and that their commercial interests could be better served by new Christian regimes rather than the irredeemably corrupt Ottoman Empire. These were the sentiments he communicated to Nikolai, who considered Brunnow's report "the most remarkable dispatch of all; it explains the unexpected successes of our first steps, and gives me cause to hope that we will be able to advance in the way I have laid down for myself."<sup>274</sup> The Tsar's mediocre language skills may have also been a factor. Russell was replaced by Lord Clarendon as Foreign Minister, who sent a message to Nikolai pleading with him to cease discussing the fall of the Ottoman Empire, for there could be no simple way to partition or occupy its territory. The only solution was to uphold the Empire as it was. This was a very loose and selective interpretation of their previous dialogues. Clarendon was acknowledging Nikolai's concerns regarding the partition of the Empire and Russia's supposed desire to maintain it without acknowledging Nikolai's very clear intent to split it between them. Clarendon, maintaining this fiction, announced his pleasure in observing that Ottoman rule was still sustainable and that "the interests of Russia and England in the East are completely identical...(we) hope that a similar policy there will prevail and tend to strengthen the alliance between two countries..."<sup>275</sup> It's clear that Clarendon, far from acting Russia's partner, was taking a stand as the Ottomans' protector and warning Nikolai to cease his aggressive schemes. Nikolai utterly misunderstood and understood Clarendon's declaration that "the interests of Russia and England in the East are completely identical" as an endorsement, and announced his

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<sup>273</sup> Curtiss 61-2

<sup>274</sup> Puryear 233

<sup>275</sup> EP V 19-20, found in Curtiss 78.

intent to press the Ottomans to pay reparations for the wrongs done to Russia and the Orthodox community, threatening that “if the Turks did not yield to reason, they would have to give way to the approach of danger.”<sup>276</sup> His confidence in Russia's relations with Britain were so great he felt he could openly announce his intention to bully and perhaps even deliver an ultimatum to the Porte without earning the ire of the Court of St. James. He could not have been more wrong.<sup>277</sup>

### **5.5 The Menshikov Mission**

Believing himself to have secured Britain's friendship, Nikolai decided to impose his will on the Porte. He sent a special ambassador, Prince Alexander Menshikov. This turned out to be a disastrous decision on Nikolai's part, but not an uncalculated one. Historians have given various hypotheses. He was not unanimously favored to act as the Tsar's emissary. Nesselrode actually favored Orlov, whom Curtiss refers to as “more moderate” than Menshikov, which is remarkable considering Orlov's jingoistic behavior during the events surrounding the signing of the Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi.<sup>278</sup> Kisilev, now ambassador to Paris, was also discussed as a candidate<sup>279</sup>. However, Nikolai personally selected Menshikov. Zhomini attributes the Tsar's decision to Menshikov's “high rank, together with the confidence place in him by the sovereign.”<sup>280</sup> Badem, citing Tarle, argues that the Tsar perceived Menshikov as incorruptible because of his great wealth, and because Menshikov was a soldier-aristocrat just like Nikolai, he was both trustworthy and able to “take immediate and direct military decisions if need be”. Zhomini writes that “the instructions given to (Menshikov) were not positive orders, but simply an indication of the points...desirable to obtain. The extent to which (Nikolai's) demands were to be pressed was left for him to decide,” which at least partially corroborates Badem's statement.

Menshikov's specific orders were to obtain:

#### **I. The formal promulgation of the firman of the 30th of January**

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<sup>276</sup> Seymour to Clarendon, April 20 1853. EP V p. 24, found in *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time, Vol. 204*. London: Published by Cornelius Buck, 1855. p. 1117.

<sup>277</sup> Curtiss 72

<sup>278</sup> Curtiss 85,

<sup>279</sup> Badem 71

<sup>280</sup> Zhomini 153



1852 , the execution of which , promised to the Emperor in a letter from the Sultan, had been prevented by a secret arrangement concluded with France.

II . Just reparation for the past, that is to say, the dismissal of Fuad Effendi, the publication of an explanatory firman proclaiming the right of possession of the Greeks over the Temple of Bethlehem... (and) revocation of all the other concessions made to the Latins outside the firman of the 30th of January 1852 .

III . Guarantees for the future, as to the main tenance of the rights of the orthodox Church.<sup>281</sup>

With this aim the conclusion of a separate act, open or secret, convention or sened...embracing in one guarantee the whole of the measures and arrangements decided upon in reference to the integral maintenance of the status quo of the Eastern Church .

Moreover, in case the Sultan should need support against the threats of the French Government, Prince Menschikoff had orders to propose a conditional and secret defensive alliance, when our promised cooperation would impose on Turkey no obligation but the signature of the before-mentioned convention in reference to the status quo of the orthodox Church. If these demands were refused or evaded , he was to give the Porte three days for reflection , and then leave Constantinople with the whole of the Legation.<sup>282</sup>

Most of Menshikov's orders seem reasonable enough. The Porte had betrayed Russia in favor of France. The Porte had favored the Catholics over the Orthodox. Demanding Fuat Efendi's removal did infringe on the Porte's sovereignty, but he had agitated against Russia. However, the last paragraph, in which Menshikov is effectively instructed to demand an alliance with the Ottomans is troubling. It is another vassalizing proposal in the mold of Hünkâr İsklesi that took the further step of making Russia the kingmaker of the Ottoman Empire's Christian communities, a treaty Nikolai should have known would enrage the entire Concert of Europe. The fact that he was sending Menshikov, whom Meyendorff described as a man with “a negative attitude, a mistrustful character, and a talent for clever sayings” provide evidence that Nikolai was all but picking a fight with the Porte under the misconception that only France would come to its aid.<sup>283</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>281</sup> Zhomini 150

<sup>282</sup> Zhomini 151

<sup>283</sup> Curtiss 85

Menshikov began to behave provocatively even before he arrived in Constantinople with conspicuous inspections of military installations in Bessarabia and Sevastopol, arriving at Constantinople on 28 February 1853 with a retinue of military officers who made no secret of their intentions to observe the city's defenses. Arriving at the Porte, he paid proper respects to the Grand Vizier Mehmet Ali Pasha, but accused Fuat Effendi of showing “bad faith and duplicity”. “My declaration disturbed the vizier,” Menshikov boasted in his diary. “and on leaving him, wishing to confirm my words with actions and to show how little I value Fuad Efendi, I did not pay him the usual courtesy visit. This made a big impression and aroused the Porte’s displeasure, and Fuad resigned.”<sup>284</sup> Fuat was replaced as Foreign Minister by Rifat Pasha, whom Menshikov treated more appropriately.<sup>285</sup>

Menshikov then met with Abdülmecid sometime in late February-early March 1852, and presented to the Sultan a letter from Nikolai, writing as the Sultan's “friend and ally” who felt a “deep feeling of pain and surprise” that the Sultan could have been manipulated by “inexperienced or malevolent ministers” to slight Russia in the Holy Places Dispute. The letter asked for “the maintenance of rights consecrated by centuries...in favor of the Orthodox Church” and promised the Ottomans protection against France. This conciliatory tone was in stark contrast to Menshikov's boorish and high-handed behavior<sup>286</sup>. Disturbed by this, Napoleon in defiance of his own council dispatched a naval squadron to the Near East.<sup>287</sup> Zhomini condemns this as an overreaction. “We had made known (to France)...Prince Menshikoff's mission, and expressed a wish that the Ambassador of France at Constantinople would lend him his friendly aid...as for the courts of London and Vienna, they expressed their desire to see the negotiation which had been entrusted to Prince Menshikoff result in a satisfactory agreement.”<sup>288</sup> This is an obvious lie, considering that the true purpose of the mission was to secretly and effectively broaden Russia's protectorate bestowed

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<sup>284</sup> Badem 72-3

<sup>285</sup> Curtiss 93

<sup>286</sup> Curtiss 86-7

<sup>287</sup> Curtiss 95

<sup>288</sup> Zhomini 161

upon them by Küçük Kaynarca and reinforce the agreement with a reborn defensive alliance *a la* Hünkâr Iskelesi. The Great Powers obviously would not have been informed of that. However, whether Russia notified the other Powers or not pales in importance to how Menshikov went about his mission. It is unlikely Russia ever warned the other Powers they were planning on strongarming the Ottomans.

Clarendon remained reluctant to escalate the situation. He announced that he had reversed Rose's order to call the fleet, and Nesselrode reported the news was "more satisfactory than had been anticipated." The Tsar was pleased and continued to assume he had the full confidence of the British government. However, both Powers doubted each other to some degree. Nesselrode ordered Brunnow to dispel "idle rumors" regarding Menshikov's mission, and the British "had decided to hasten the return of Sir Stratford Canning to Constantinople, by way of satisfying public opinion."<sup>289</sup> Menshikov also seemed aware that his position was less than secure, as he threatened the Ottomans with breaking off relations if they revealed the details of their negotiations to the British. However, impotent as the Ottomans had become on the battlefield, their diplomacy had sharpened considerably since Mahmud's reign. Mehmet Ali subtly revealed to Rose what Menshikov was demanding and indicated the Porte's desire to resist Russia: "Nothing whatever should be added to the Treaty of Kaynarji; that he would ask to retire from office rather than agree to either of the two propositions made by Prince Menshikov, which would be fatal to Turkey."<sup>290</sup> Badem cited Lane-Poole, who argues that Mehmet Ali's strategy was to stall Menshikov and wait for the notoriously Russophobic Stratford Canning to once again champion the Ottoman cause. And indeed he did, advising the Porte "to keep the affair of the Holy Places separate from the ulterior proposals, whatever they may be, of Russia..." As for said ulterior proposals, Canning advised that "the Sultan, in making every reasonable concession for the sake of peace...would be careful to admit no innovation dangerous to his independence..."<sup>291</sup> It would seem that Canning did not care if

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<sup>289</sup> Puryear 239 Zhomini 167

<sup>290</sup> Badem 75-6

<sup>291</sup> Badem 76, Canning to Clarendon, Apr 6 1853, EP, I, 126-7. Found in Curtiss 102-3

the Ottomans decided the Holy Places Dispute in Russia's favor so long as the decision came from the Sultan and not from Russian pressure. By April Menshikov seems to have realized Canning's influence had taken an affect, for he ceased calling for the Porte to agree to an alliance. On 3 May Abdülmecid issued a *firman* that confirmed Russia's religious privileges. On 5 May the Porte sent a message to Menshikov granting “two firmans in conformity with his claims in regard to the Holy Places”. Zhomini explains that this was not satisfactory to Russia: “But in regard to the convention (proposal, Rifat Pasha) showed an invincible repugnance. Rifaat objected that a convention was impossible. It was...to alienate the sovereign independence of the Sultan, who would find himself in the hands of Russia.” However, Menshikov feared Russia's influence on the Porte was waning, and the Tsar apparently agreed: “According to the Emperor Nicholas's idea, the projected convention was the necessary component of the regulation of the question of the Holy Places. One could have no value without the other....it was necessary that we should be in a position to guarantees the interests of the Eastern Church more clearly than we had been able to do by the Treaty of Kainardgi.”<sup>292</sup>

In response to the Porte's note of 5 May, Menshikov sent the Ottomans an ultimatum and threatened to sever diplomatic relations if they were not accepted. The Ottomans' reply on 10 May was a polite rejection coated in a non-committal platitude promising Menshikov the Porte's sincere desire to justly rule and protect its Orthodox subjects while reminding Menshikov of their opinion that the *sened* he demanded “is not only completely contrary to the rights of governments...but destroys the foundation of sovereign independence.”<sup>293</sup>.

It is at this point Menshikov apparently realized his bullying tactics had only repelled the Ottomans. He gave another ultimatum on 11 May, still referring to the Ottomans as the Tsar's ally. Menshikov was stalling for time, but did not realize time was only against him. Canning persuaded Abdülmecid to grant the British fleet right of passage though the Straits, both deliberately violating

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<sup>292</sup> Badem 76, Curtiss 103-4 Fowler 12 Puryear 261

<sup>293</sup> Curtiss 125

the Straits Convention to prepare for war, if need be, against Russia.<sup>294</sup> The Ottomans were thus emboldened by Canning's counsel and assurances as well as by the fleet he commanded. Desperate for a diplomatic solution, Menshikov successfully petitioned for Reshid Pasha to be named Foreign Minister, but was unable to remove the Russophobes in the Porte, who by this point were either the majority or at the least passive supporters of the Russophobic faction.<sup>295</sup>

Reshid was useless as an ally in any case. Menshikov had hoped Reshid, who was said to have declared that he would sign Menshikov's *sened* if made Grand Vizier, would swing the Porte in Russia's favor, only for Reshid to impotently remain silent, dominated by Rifat and Mehmet Ali. On 18 May Reshid informed Menshikov his ultimatum was rejected by the Porte, and as a consolation offered:<sup>296</sup>

A supreme decision guaranteeing the *status quo* of the Holy Places, in which no future change should be introduced without the consent both of Russia and of France.

A *firman* to the Greek Patriarch...guaranteeing the maintenance of the Eastern worship.

A note to Prince Menschikoff, announcing these resolutions to him...<sup>297</sup>

Menshikov condemned the Ottomans as warmongers and captives of Canning's honeyed promises of protection, scoffed at the “evasive and deceptive assurances” of the Porte and accused them of working to undermine the Orthodox Church by protecting their spiritual immunities but not their civil immunities. Menshikov announced he would sever relations and threatened any violation of their current agreements would force the Tsar to take measures to attain satisfaction.<sup>298</sup> But even with this dramatic announcement, Menshikov tried one more time on 18 May to get a Note from the Sultan that informally promised to grant Russia's demands. Unfortunately for him, Canning was allowed to view the Note, and warned the Porte it would be seen as equivalent to a treaty in St.

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<sup>294</sup> Puryear 260

<sup>295</sup> Puryear 260

<sup>296</sup> Curtiss 131-3

<sup>297</sup> Zhomini 182

<sup>298</sup> Curtiss 134-5

Petersburg, forcing Menshikov to return to Odessa, his mission a disastrous failure.<sup>299</sup>

Zhomini acknowledges that Abdülmecid himself was “little inclined for war”, but blames the Porte for being seduced by “Western influences”, personified by Canning. Nesselrode said as much himself, complaining to Brunnow how Menshikov's failure was the fault of “the vehement opposition...chiefly on the part of the English Ambassador (Stratford Canning de) Redcliffe”<sup>300</sup>. However, considering Menshikov's outrageous conduct, the Porte followed Canning with little prompting. Badem considers Menshikov to be incompetent. Zhomini even calls him a “dupe”<sup>301</sup>. Perhaps he was. However, Nikolai had an opportunity to send Orlov or Kisilev, both of whom had experience dealing with the Porte. Orlov particularly had both experience and indomitability in his favor, but Nikolai deliberately chose the haughty and abrasive Menshikov, with the apparent aim of browbeating the Ottomans into compliance. This is in line with the Tsar's personality, whose reign began by crushing the Decembrist Coup, who led with an iron fist, and who had spent the last few years punishing revolutionaries in other countries. Believing himself to have gained the friendship of the only other Power that could oppose him, Nikolai sought to humiliate the Ottomans into knowing their place as a Russian client. So sure was he of his dominance of the Ottoman Empire and his friendship with the United Kingdom he evidently maintained his confidence in Menshikov and in his mission even after Rose called the fleet, and, inexplicably, after the notorious and despised Canning made his return to champion the Ottomans' cause.

But why resort to such extremes at all? Puryear, Curtiss and Zhomini all point out that Russia had heard empty promises from the Ottomans before and in that sense it is reasonable for them to have demanded a *sened* binding the Ottomans to respect the rights and entitlements of the Orthodox. But why go out on such a limb? Zhomini explains that the Holy Places Dispute had become a “serious check” to their political influence in the Near East, and had Russia suffered the Porte's insults it would be forced to:

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<sup>299</sup> Curtiss 134-5

<sup>300</sup> Curtiss 143

<sup>301</sup> Zhomini 178

put up with the check which lowered our *prestige* throughout the East, and either content ourselves with the incomplete guarantees offered to us by the Porte-guarantees which were ineffacious since they rested in reality on nothing but its good pleasure, and might be revoked at the first claim...manifesting our powerless discontent by a simple rupture of diplomatic relations;<sup>302</sup>

But this explanation does not explain why Nikolai put himself in a position in which his prestige was at risk. Furthermore, it dismisses the fair offer the Ottomans gave Russia, that being the *firman* protecting Orthodox clergy and the pledge to confer with both France and Russia before making future decisions regarding the Holy Places. Perhaps Nikolai was not concerned with finding an equitable agreement. The British were well aware the Holy Places Dispute was not a battle for churches, but for influence, an influence Russia been losing since they had pressed the Ottomans into Hünkâr Iskelesi, when Egypt was at the walls of Constantinople and the Porte needed a champion. But in the years since the Ottomans found a more benevolent and wealthy champion in Great Britain and in France a political and ideological role model. The Western Powers thus made living Russia's stifling and conservative shadow all the more unwelcome. Knowing this, Russia clung to the conservative elements of the British court and hoped they would support Russia's diplomatic subjugation of the Ottoman Empire. However, Nikolai's total misjudgment of British attitudes led the British under Canning to embolden the Ottomans and lead the Tsar into a corner his ambassador Menshikov could not hope to escape.

And yet at the last moment, Nikolai evidently did not wish to escalate the conflict to war just yet. Despite being a military man sent to impose Russia's will, once Menshikov's bluff was called his negotiations took on an almost pleading quality. And though Menshikov's failure angered Nikolai, he refused to take drastic measures to punish the Ottomans. He refused, for instance, to declare the Principalities, Serbia or Herzegovina independent, for not only would this dismember the Ottoman Empire in Europe, it was believed it would cause the Empire's total collapse. Though he had long anticipated the Empire's fall and had even planned for it extensively, he remained

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<sup>302</sup> Zhomini 184

unwilling to bring it about.

But perhaps it would be more accurate to state that he was unwilling to do it unilaterally. While Nikolai certainly would have preferred the Ottomans as a weak vassal state of Russia, it was slipping out of his grasp. One must ask what would have become of the Ottoman Empire had Britain not come to its relief. In other words, had the political situation been as Nikolai originally perceived it, with France as the Empire's only protector. What if France had come to the Ottomans' aid instead? Nikolai's memorandum holds the answers. Had the Ottomans not given way to Menshikov, he would have attacked even if it meant war with France. He would have arranged a partition with Austria and Britain and finished the Eastern Question once and for all. And until it became clear Britain was no friend of Russia's, this appears to have been the plan. Menshikov's swaggering arrogance can be perceived as an expression of Nikolai's arrogant ambivalence-but not indifference-to the future of the Near East. Either the Ottomans would choose a humble submission to a Russian suzerain or they would be dismantled and partitioned. But Britain's championing of the Ottomans forced Nikolai to scale back his aggression. He would never allow a slight to his pride go unpunished nor let the Ottomans slip out of his grasp, but could not make radical decisions that would drag Russia into war with the Concert of Europe or cause the Ottomans to collapse uncontrolled. Nikolai's approach to a middle ground solution was to occupy the Danubian Principalities in June 1853, holding them as hostage, and demanding the concessions Menshikov had requested as his ransom.<sup>303</sup>

## **5.6 The Vienna Note**

As Russia severed its relations with the Ottoman Empire, Nesselrode unwittingly composed Russia's apologia in a letter to Brunnow complaining of the purported disgrace Russia was made to suffer. I could not view the source material and while Curtiss summarizes Nesselrode's defense, Zhomini almost exactly echoes it in his own work, providing not only insight towards Russia's perspective but the uniformity of Russian opinion:

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<sup>303</sup> Curtiss 148



The Emperor wished absolutely nothing but the maintenance of the *status quo* in the East...(which) had just been severely attacked, it was necessary to establish the equilibrium...with new guarantees.

Our adhesion to the vague assurances of the Porte, or a simple diplomatic rupture, would not have replied to this necessity..

The Porte was not substantially opposed to our views...but it objected to the form...it would not bind itself on the subject to a foreign power by an official act. It was told that it would thus alienate its independence, and that Europe would not permit it.

Our adversaries went still further...they attacked the very rights which we wished to have confirmed.

They maintained that none of the treaties concluded between the Porte and ourselves, gave us the right to interfere in any manner on behalf of the orthodox Church in Turkey. Article VII of the Treaty of Kainardji...was deduced for us merely the right to see to the religious protection of *Russian subjects resideing in Turkey*, but in no way to that of the Orthodox *subjects of the Sultan*.

We could not evidently keep silent before such pretensions. To contest the patronage which by right, and in fact, we exercised over our co-religionaries in the East, was to deny all our history.<sup>304</sup>

Again, Zhomini largely echoes Nesselrode's justifications of Russian policy, which is clearly built on falsehoods. As explained before, Küçük Kaynarca did not entitle Russia to represent the Ottoman Orthodox community. Furthermore, Russia had never once imposed “the patronage which by right, and in fact, we exercised” over Ottoman Christians, at least not to such a scale. It could never have done so without alienating the Ottomans from their independence, making the Russian viewpoint self-contradictory. However, Nikolai believed he possessed this patronage, and as a Legitimist, he would have seen the Ottomans' supposed infringement of his rights and their subsequent refusal to bind themselves to a treaty acknowledging his rights as an insult to his honor and a violation of his own sovereignty. This is why, on 31 May-1 June he notified both London and Constantinople that if Abdülmecid did not sign the Menshikov Note, he would occupy the Principalities “not to make war upon a sovereign who had always been considered a faithful ally,

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<sup>304</sup> Zhomini 186-7

but in order to secure a material guarantee...”<sup>305</sup> This was, notably, a compromise “between the calm moderation of Count Nesselrode and the extreme irritation of the Emperor Nicholas.” Zhomini writes as if the invasion of his neighbor's protectorates with 35,000 men was an act of mercy. Considering the even more hawkish solution was a full-scale invasion with an army of 200,000 and this being the option Nikolai very likely would have taken if Nesselrode had not calmed his fury, one could make the argument that by this point Nikolai was barely concerned for the future of the Ottoman state and only Nesselrode's influence kept him from destroying it without reluctance. He also did not ask Britain for their endorsement of his actions. He merely informed them as a courtesy, indicating that he regarded the Nesselrode Memorandum as a dead letter and an agreement he was willing to ignore, which is notable when one realizes that Nikolai had always treated the United Kingdom as a check on his foreign policy and now he was willing to disregard even them in his vendetta against the Ottomans.<sup>306</sup>

To placate Russia, Reshid Pasha proclaiming that “any privilege granted to one class of Christians should not be refused to the Greek clergy” Abdülmecid issued a *firman* confirming the ancestral rights of the Orthodox clergy. This was not enough. Even Reshid's offer to send an emissary to St. Petersburg to reopen negotiations would not placate Nikolai, who demanded no less than complete acceptance of Menshikov's Note. This only greatly alarmed the Western Powers, who again prepared their fleets to come to Constantinople's defense. Brunnow had made the Tsar aware of Britain's alarm, informing Nesselrode that “English public opinion is in great anxiety...Aberdeen is in reality our only friend, but he begins to weaken...”<sup>307</sup>. Nikolai was aware that threatening the Ottoman Empire would be the quickest way to plunge Europe into war. Zhomini suggests he did not want it, at least not under these conditions, and may have even been receptive to Reshid's proposal to reopen negotiations, but “it is to be regretted that we were unable to accept this overture which

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<sup>305</sup> Chesney 233-6

<sup>306</sup> Puryear 267, 269, Zhomini 188-9

<sup>307</sup> Curtiss 145-6, *The Russian Review*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Eds. Bernard Pares, Maurice Baring, Samuel N. Harper, 1912. Vol. 1, p. 89

offered a chance of pacification”. He apparently felt he could not stop what he had started. As Zhomini writes, “we had gone too far to be able to step back; above all in presense of the threatening measure which the maritime Courts had just taken by sending their squadrons to the entrance of the Dardanelles.”<sup>308</sup> In other words, Nikolai's pride and his perception of Russia's national honor kept him from negotiating peace because he simply did not wish to look as if he had cracked under Western pressure. By 1 June, French and British fleets were docked at Besika Bay and Nikolai's army began its march into the Principalities.

But despite Russia's aggression and a clamoring for war in Constantinople, the Ottomans restrained themselves, opting to lodge a formal protest with St. Petersburg but took no action beyond that. The British government concluded that the occupation of the Principalities did not give the Ottomans a just *casus belli* against Russia, and Clarendon merely warned Russia not to menace Constantinople. France predictably condemned the action and did in fact argue it was a just *casus belli* for the Ottomans, but took no action beyond that. Prussia also protested the move, as did Austria, whose subsequent interactions with Russia I shall discuss shortly.<sup>309</sup> However, none of the Powers wished to go to war. Britain even proposed to mediate a convention between the Russians and Ottomans, which Nesselrode was very much in favor of. “The way remained open for negotiations,” Zhomini explains. “This was what we had been wanting. The Imperial Cabinet had openly declared its readiness to receive all such overtures as might be made, with a view to a peaceful solution.”<sup>310</sup>

Zhomini is either lying, or was lied to. While Nikolai publicly proclaimed he had no intent to begin a war, he had once again contracted Austria in August to discuss a partition scheme, claiming he feared an imminent uprising of Balkan Slavs that would inevitably tear apart the Ottoman Empire, and it would happen even without intervention from an outside Power. However, it is one thing to discuss such a plan during peacetime, but in the middle of a diplomatic crisis with

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<sup>308</sup> Zhomini 194

<sup>309</sup> Puryear 283, Curtiss 151

<sup>310</sup> Curtiss 151, Zhomini 202

Russian troops already in the Principalities, the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef must have understood Nikolai's overtures as an invitation to euthanize the Sick Man once and for all.<sup>311</sup>

Nikolai proposed that the emergent Balkan states come under a common Austro-Russian protectorate and that Constantinople be made “a free city under the guarantee of all the European Powers,” with its fortifications destroyed. Franz Josef, whom Puryear claims “understood that war was being inflamed,” categorically opposed Nikolai's plan, reasoning that the Balkan Slavs would effectively fall entirely under Russia's influence and Constantinople would become a hotbed of political intrigue. Nikolai then attempted to compromise with an even bolder scheme to split the Straits between them. Puryear argues this was a “result of Nicholas' conviction that Turkey had sold itself to England and France,” but this does not explain how Nikolai could be so utterly blind to the inclinations of those around him, nor his stubborn resolve to convince sovereigns who had long rejected his proposals to agree to unreasonable schemes that would undoubtedly aggrandize Russia's power and earn the hostility of its rivals. Indeed, while Zhomini observes that to “re-establish our relations with Turkey...Austria was more interested than any other power.” Far from wishing to be Russia's partner, Austria under Franz Josef acted as a mediator for peace, and Vienna the center of the negotiations.<sup>312</sup>

Ironically, by late June the French ambassador to Austria made a proposal aiming to satisfy Russia's demands, and it was apparently well received in St. Petersburg:<sup>313</sup>

The Porte was to accept Prince Menschikoff's note, or at least its substance...in return the Imperial Cabinet would give the Porte satisfactory assurances as to the meaning and extent of the guarantees which we had asked of her...This arrangement met with our entire approval...we would accept only that of Prince Menschikoff<sup>314</sup>

Not only was Russia's inflexibility holding up a final settlement, Russia also refused to evaluate the Principalities unless the Western Powers likewise agreed to evacuate the Straits.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Puryear 281

<sup>312</sup> Puryear 281-3 Zhomini 202

<sup>313</sup> Curtiss 155

<sup>314</sup> Zhomini 203-4

<sup>315</sup> Zhomini 203-4

Numerous other proposals were brought up and rejected, but at Vienna in mid-July, French ambassador Drouyn de Lhuys penned a Note that was further negotiated by representatives from Austria, Great Britain, Russia and France, resulting in what History now refers to as the Vienna

Note:

If the Emperors of Russia have at all times evinced their active solicitude for the maintenance of the immunities and privileges of the Orthodox Greek Church in the Ottoman Empire, the Sultans have never refused again to confirm them...

His Majesty the Sultan will remain faithful to the letter and the spirit of the Treaties of Kainardji and Adrianople relative to the protection of the Christian religion, and that His Majesty considers himself bound in honour to cause to be observed for ever, and to preserve...spiritual privileges which have been granted by His Majesty's august ancestors and the Orthodox Eastern Church...

The Sublime Porte, moreover, officially promises that the existing state of things shall in no wise be modified without previous understanding with the Governments of France and Russia and without prejudice to the different Christian communities...<sup>316</sup>

There were also a number of minor concessions in the Note. In any case, the Note seemed a great compromise. It gave Russia what it demanded and was backed by the Concert, while naming the Sultan and not the Tsar the arbiter of the rights and privileges of Ottoman Christians. “The Emperor Nicholas gave it his entire approval,” writes Zhomini. “The only condition that he attached to it was that the Porte should *give an acceptance pure and simple*, that we should not have to submit to *fresh discussions* raised at Constantinople by unfriendly influence, and that if the Porte refused *we should not be bound* by our present acceptance of the scheme.”<sup>317</sup>

Regrettably for the cause of peace, this would prove impossible. The Ottomans received the Note on 10 August, particularly the nationalist faction in the Porte, clung to Canning. He had been ordered to ask the Ottomans to accept the Note, but was less than persuasive.<sup>318</sup> The Ottomans demanded modifications, pleading that their sovereignty would still be violated by endorsing such a

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<sup>316</sup> “The Note of Vienna”, found in Curtiss 567-8

<sup>317</sup> Zhomini 207

<sup>318</sup> Chesney 246

note. The two main alterations they requested were to the first and second paragraphs listed above, both of which Nesselrode considered blatant attempts to weaken Russia's influence among the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. The first alteration, "If the Emperors of Russia have at all times evinced their active solicitude for the maintenance of the immunities and privileges of the Orthodox Greek Church..." was to be altered to "If at all times the Emperors of Russia have showed their active solicitude for the faith and the Greek Orthodox Church..." According to Nesselrode, this had the effect of reducing Russia's role in the protection of the Orthodox Church to an abstract generality instead of the very real "immunities and privileges" which Russia insisted were rights given to them by the Tsar. The second alteration changed "His Majesty the Sultan will remain faithful to the letter and the spirit of the Treaties of Kainardji and Adrianople relative to the protection of the Christian religion" to "His Majesty the Sultan will remain faithful to the Treaties of Kainardji and Adrianople..." Nesselrode argued that the first version bound the Sultan to respect the Treaties, as he was bound by both personal honor and ancestral duty to the "protection of the Christian religion", while the Ottoman revision binds the Sultan to nothing but his word and personal honor to respect the Treaties. The Ottomans would not accept a Note without these revisions, and as mentioned before, Russia would not accept a Note with any revisions. On 7 September, Russia formally rejected the Ottoman alterations.<sup>319</sup>

Zhomini almost exclusively blames Canning's undue influence on the Porte for the failure of the Vienna Note.<sup>320</sup> However, the inability for Russia and the Empire to compromise was due to more than just rhetorical disagreements. Firstly, the Tsar could not accept the Ottoman alterations not simply because they vowed they would not. In Nikolai's point of view, the Sultan had sullied his honor by allowing the Holy Places Dispute to have ever transpired. A Note built on nothing but the Sultan's promises to protect the Orthodox was for Nikolai a worthless dead letter no more binding than all of Abdülmecid's equally worthless *firman*s. And once again, the Ottoman revisions failed to

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<sup>319</sup> Badem 83 Curtiss 160-5

<sup>320</sup> Zhomini 211-2

acknowledge what the Tsar believed his rights per the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca.

However, while one cannot place all the blame on Russia for the breakdown in Russo-Ottoman relations, they are not blameless. In fact, Russia may have sabotaged its own hopes of getting Constantinople to accept the Vienna Note when they invaded the Principalities. As Russia occupied Wallachia and Moldavia, Canning warned Clarendon in early July that the occupation was fanning flames of discontent throughout the among the Ottoman Christians in the Balkans.<sup>321</sup> One might assume the restlessness among the *zimmi* would encourage the Porte to conclude peace sooner rather than later, but it actually emboldened not only them, but Muslims throughout the Empire tired of

the arrogant pretensions of the Tzar (and) prepared for resistance with the greatest energy and enthusiasm, which had not been so much excited for many years. Even in the most remote provinces...pilgrims...were ready to assist in the 'holy war'...religious fanaticism had not risen so high for centuries at Constantinople; the excitement of the population there against Russia was at its height.<sup>322</sup>

Nikolai instigated a religious conflict, now he was getting one. Ironically, this was a *jihad* reinforced by the Christian fleets docked near the Dardanelles, fleets which never would have been there had Russia not invaded the Principalities. Thus, it can be concluded that by attempting to strongarm the Ottomans into submitting to his demands, Nikolai ensured they would defy him to the point of war.

## **5.6 The Fall of Nikolai I**

Nesselrode's "violent interpretation" and Russia's rejection of the revised Vienna Note was a great blunder on Russia's part.<sup>323</sup> As the Ottomans dispatched the altered Note to St. Petersburg, Canning called ships from the combined Franco-British fleet at the mouth of the Dardanelles to come to Constantinople's aid on a flimsy pretext, once again violating the Straits Convention. Brunnow immediately protested, but Clarendon merely and summarily reversed Britain's former

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<sup>321</sup> Curtiss 158

<sup>322</sup> Fowler 24

<sup>323</sup> Curtiss 164-6

stance on Russia's occupation of the Principalities and informed Brunnow “that war has existed since the Principalities were occupied,” and as the Straits Convention did not apply in wartime, Brunnow had no recourse.<sup>324</sup> This diplomatic slap in the face could not be unexpected, as Clarendon perceived that Russia's rejection of the amended Note put Russia in the wrong in the eyes of the British public and he would lose their support if he did not throw his support behind the Ottomans.<sup>325</sup>

However, as a whole, the Great Powers remained desirous not to go to war and discussed multiple peace proposals at Olmutz in late September-October, but the Ottomans were now proving indomitable. In the streets of Constantinople, war furor was so high European diplomats expressed their fear that Christians would be massacred in a pogrom.<sup>326</sup> On 26 or 29 September the Porte advised Abdülmecid to declare war, and while the Sultan did not escalate the conflict to that extreme, he mobilized 40,000 men and prepared to initiate hostilities. On 4 October Abdülmecid formally declared war. Two days later, commander Omer Pasha ordered the Russian army to withdraw from the Principalities within two weeks.<sup>327</sup>

As this transpired, Nikolai tried and failed to gain support from Austria and Prussia, who maintained their stance of neutrality in this affair. By the beginning of October, Nikolai began to scale back his demands, abandoning even the demands made in the Vienna Note for a mere agreement for the Ottomans to maintain the Treaties and the Orthodox Church's rights and privileges. This was far too little a concession. Not only were the Ottomans no longer willing to negotiate, Nikolai must have known that the Ottomans had either already declared or war or that the declaration was imminent. Furthermore, the British public clamored to come to the Ottomans' defense, dramatically swinging the British government toward the Ottoman camp<sup>328</sup>. However, Nikolai still had an opportunity to deescalate tensions. He still had two weeks to evacuate Ottoman

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<sup>324</sup> Clarendon to Brunnow, October 1 1853. FO 65 Russia 438, 763; EP II, 126. Found in Puryear 292-7

<sup>325</sup> Curtiss 175

<sup>326</sup> Badem 94

<sup>327</sup> Badem 84, Aksan 443 Curtiss 183

<sup>328</sup> Curtiss 178-180, Puryear 304



territory. Certainly it would have been a diplomatic humiliation to withdraw, but that would have been preferable to the ultimate result. However, the Tsar instead opted to maintain the occupation even as Omer's army closed in. While his orders to Prince Gorchakov in the Principalities were to fight a defensive war, Nikolai maintained an air of religious fervor in his declaration of hostilities. "On thee, O Lord, have we put our trust, let us not be shamed forever." This was not an insincere invocation to liven his soldiers. In a letter to Friedrich Wilhelm, one can perceive how much war with the Ottomans had inflamed his spiritual pride:

Waging war *neither for worldly advantages nor for conquests* but for a solely Christian purpose, must I be left alone to fight under the banner of the Holy Cross and to see the others, *who call themselves Christians, all unite around the Crescent to combat Christendom?*...now nothing is left to me but to fight, to win, or to perish with honor, *as a martyr of our holy faith*, and when I say this I declare it *in the name of all of Russia.*<sup>329</sup>

There remained opportunities for Nikolai to turn back from calamity. The Concert continued to attempt to negotiate peace even after the Ottomans declared war, but these efforts were severely hampered by Russia's attack on the Ottoman fleet at Sinop on 30 November, which outraged all Britain and France, as Russia had clearly gone back on its pledge to only fight defensively. In London, Brunnow argued that since the Ottomans declared war on Russia, Russia had the right to counterattack, but his remonstrations fell on deaf ears, causing Brunnow to complain to Nesselrode that "Sinope has turned their heads completely". He was not exaggerating. Russia's Pyrrhic victory even turned the notoriously Russophilic Aberdeen against them.<sup>330</sup> Desperate to salvage their relationship, the Tsar wrote Queen Victoria in a last ditch effort to win over Britain's diplomatic support. Her reply, though influenced by Clarendon and Aberdeen, is a strong example of how deeply Nikolai's reputation had fallen:

Whatever the purity of the motives guiding the actions of a sovereign, however distinguished in character, his personal qualities are of no avail in those international transactions by which one State binds itself to another...and the true intentions of Your Majesty have been

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<sup>329</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 265

<sup>330</sup> Curtiss 208.

disregarded and badly interpreted by the form given to the demands addressed to the Porte.<sup>331</sup>

Victoria followed this condemnation with a blunt refusal to acknowledge Nikolai's supposed privileges granted to him by Küçük Kaynarca.<sup>332</sup> Nikolai could do more than stress that those privileges were vital “for the existence and honor of Russia”.<sup>333</sup>

However, diplomats from the United Kingdom, France, Austria and Prussia still managed to put forth a Protocol for peace on 5 December, wherein the Great Powers sent a Note assuring the Porte that Russia had no desire to annex territory or demand anything but enforcement of their existing treaties. However, Russia's attack at Sinop undermined the negotiations as the outraged Western Powers prepared to push their fleets into the Black Sea to order the Russians to stand down or be destroyed.<sup>334</sup>

However, Europe found itself in the awkward position of negotiating peace on Russia's behalf. “The Protocol was signed; this had been done without our knowledge,” Zhomini writes. “we could not submit to a discussion with the Porte, as between equals, before a European tribunal...”<sup>335</sup> Here is found a clue as to why Nikolai was setting himself up for disaster. By 5 December the Tsar could not have been aware that Great Britain was now openly hostile and prepared to go to war, yet he acts as if the Ottomans are without allies. His pride is so great that he cannot bring himself to extract Russia from a needless conflict simply because the Ottomans had offended him with their intransigence.

It should then come as no surprise that when the Concert invited the Tsar to accept the Protocol of 5<sup>th</sup> December, also known as the Vienna Protocol or Collective Note, Nikolai shattered the peace negotiations by making additional and unreasonable, and unnecessary demands such as recognition of Russia's protectorate over the Principalities and the regulation over the right of asylum. These were demands the other Powers could not accept, much less the Ottomans

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<sup>331</sup> *Letters of Queen Victoria*, vol. II, p. 561-5. Found in Puryear 307-8

<sup>332</sup> Puryear 308

<sup>333</sup> Curtiss 209

<sup>334</sup> Zhomini 228-9

<sup>335</sup> Zhomini 231-2

themselves.<sup>336</sup> In any case, there is evidence Nikolai was no longer interested in coming to any kind of peaceful solution. As the Franco-British fleet filled the Black Sea, the Tsar, unable to capture Constantinople by sea, informed Nesselrode and Marshal Paskevich of his desire to shatter the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, “to establish the actual independence of the Moldo-Wallachians, the Serbs, the Bulgars, the Bosnians, and the Greeks; that each of these nations shall receive the land where it has lived for centuries that each of them should be ruled by a person of their own choice...”<sup>337</sup>

Peace proposals continued into 1854, but were no longer seriously considered by any Power. Russia would not negotiate peace with the Ottomans so long as Britain and France proclaimed themselves mediators. Unable to negotiate, in April 1854 the reconstituted *entente* issued Russia an ultimatum to evacuate the Principalities within six days. “The Emperor does not judge it proper to give (the ultimatum) any reply,” Nesselrode answered in response. On 13 April, the United Kingdom and France declared war on Russia.<sup>338</sup> And so, for propriety's sake, Nikolai plunged his country into an unwinnable war, shattering his legacy and weakening the Russian Empire in the Near East for decades.

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<sup>336</sup> Curtiss 217, Zhomini 239-40

<sup>337</sup> Curtiss 218

<sup>338</sup> Zhomini 245

## CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

After Muraviev returned from his 1833 mission to Constantinople, Nikolai revealed to him his desire for the the future of the Ottoman Empire and Russia's role in said future:

It is strange, that the general opinion attributes to me the desire to conquer Constantinople and the Turkish empire; I could have already done this twice, had I wished...this belief has survived from the time of the Empress Catherine, and become so ingrained that the most intelligent politicians in Europe cannot disabuse themselves of it. What would I gain from the conquest of Turkey? To station forces there?...What advantages would there be from that for our Mother Russia...? Thus, it is in my interest to maintain Turkey in the weak condition in which she is at present; that must be preserved...<sup>339</sup>

If there is one thing this work should make clear, it is that Nikolai had at no point ever wished to expand his territory at the Ottomans' expense. It went against the “nationality” principles of Nikolai's *de facto* doctrine of Official Nationality. The Russophilism promoted by Nikolai and his court did not make room to entertain Pan-Slavist ideas. And while Nikolai believed he had a duty to protect non-Russian Orthodox, even as he fought the Ottomans in a fit of pious fury, he insisted as late as 1854 that he was “waging war *neither for worldly advantages nor for conquests*”. He did not possess Catherine's grandiose ambitions. “The Road to Byzantium” not only meant nothing to him, he dreaded taking an inch of land in the Balkans, wanting no land that was inhabited by the Russian nation. Further expansion was unnecessary in any case, as the 1792 Treaty of Jassy secured Russia's economic and strategic interests along the Black Sea littoral. His choice in ministers also show insight into his anti-expansionist if not pacifistic attitude. His choice of the conciliatory Anglophile Karl Nesselrode as his foreign minister is certainly a reflection of Nikolai's desire to maintain the friendship of the Great Powers, particularly the friendship of the United Kingdom. However, he was far from the only anti-expansionist at Nikolai's court. At the Kochubey Conference, Capo D'Istria's expansionist attitudes were explicitly mentioned as a token voice of dissent towards the Tsar's policy. During the First Oriental Crisis, while the Tsar dispatched the strong-willed Lazarev and

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<sup>339</sup> Rendall 50

Orlov to strongarm the Ottomans into agreeing to an alliance and to bully the French out of the Straits, the Russians had come as the Ottomans' supposed protectors and continued to espouse that premise with the signing of the Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi and the Convention of London, up until the Holy Places Dispute. While he did send aggressive military men like Prince Menshikov to bully and threaten the Ottomans, it should be noted that when Menshikov's bluff was called, he was forced into adopting a far more conciliatory attitude, indicating that even at the nadir of Russo-Ottoman relations Nikolai had hoped not to resort to arms unilaterally, which is not to say he was altogether unwilling to resort to arms.

The two exceptions to Nikolai's non-aggressive stance came at the beginning and end of his reign, and both centered around his dissatisfaction with the Ottomans' willingness to uphold commercial rights Nikolai believed Russia was entitled to and the religious protectorate over the Ottoman Orthodox community he believed he held. In the first case, Nikolai let the Ottomans off easy with the relatively lenient Treaty of Adrianople, which took nothing for spoil except a few strategic areas and commercial concessions. In the second case, the Tsar was far more willing to punish the Ottomans and even evict them from Europe, but again, he would not do so without a collaborator from the Concert of Europe. I thus concur with Rendall's paraphrase of Henry Kissinger's thesis:

...peace during the Vienna system rested on both a balance of power and the great powers' contentment with the status quo. Russia knew that if it reached too far, the other powers would unite to contain it. The tendency of states to balance against an aspiring hegemon, and the self-restraint that the threat imposes, is said to be characteristic of a balance-of-power system. The threat need not be carried out; the knowledge that aggression will be resisted may be sufficient to deter it.<sup>340</sup>

Nikolai was never intent on forcing the end of the Ottoman Empire, which is not to say he was not unwilling to use force to strongarm the Porte into submitting to his will. However, he would, under normal circumstances, only upset the balance of power if the Concert would allow it.

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<sup>340</sup> Rendall 38-9

This Nikolai was able to accomplish brilliantly on two occasions. The first of his diplomatic coups involved the violent resolution of the Greek Question, in which Russia manipulated Great Britain and France into giving their diplomatic support toward the signing of the St. Petersburg Protocol, their military support in the Battle of Navarino and their non-interference in Russia's invasion of Ottoman lands in 1828-9. The second centered on the 1840 Convention of London, in which Russia protected the Ottomans while turning all of Europe against France and its Egyptian ally, ending the latter's threat to the Ottomans' reign. Notably, during the 1849 incident regarding the Austro-Russian demand for the Sultan to extradite the revolutionaries that had sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire, Nikolai caved to British pressure rather than risk armed conflict by pressing his demands. It is true that Russia acted unilaterally during the First Oriental Crisis and from the Holy Places Dispute onto the Crimean War. However, both cases were extraordinary in that the Tsar felt his interests were under attack. In the former case, Constantinople was at the Egyptians' mercy and Nikolai feared Great Britain and France would partition the remnants of the Ottoman state. The subsequent signing of the Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi was a unilateral *de facto* vassalization of the Ottoman Empire, but in Nikolai's perspective it would have been a necessary remedy to this threat. As for the Holy Places Dispute, Nikolai's motives are obvious. He believed his rights as religious protector of the *Millet-i Rum* were being encroached upon and reacted accordingly. One could ask why Nikolai took this duty seriously, if he did not wish to expand at the Ottomans' expense. Were he following Catherine's ambitions to absorb Ottoman lands into the Russian Empire, it would be to his practical advantage to use his supposed rights bestowed upon him by Küçük Kaynarca as the diplomatic bludgeon Catherine intended it to be. However, Nikolai's foreign policy did not desire territorial expansion and even rejected absorbing Ottoman Christians into his own realm. Nikolai's concern over his treaty rights were less than practical. As a Legitimist, he believed he had a right of protectorate over Ottoman Christians. As a Legitimist, he was outraged that his rights were not properly respected. Catherine's schemes were designed to convince Europe Russia had a right to

bully the Ottoman Empire and euthanize it if it would not comply. Unfortunately for Russia, she was so convincing she hoodwinked a Tsar who wanted no part in her scheme, and compelled him to severely damage Russia by pledging it into an unwinnable war to fight for Catherine's fictional privileges.

This brings up a second point. Nikolai's cunning appears to wax when the political situation is at its most stable, and wanes when he fears the anticipated Ottoman collapse is imminent *and* when he is unable to impose his will on the Ottomans. To put it bluntly, Nikolai had a habit of folding under pressure and giving way to rage and rashness in a position of strength and shock and even pusillanimity in a position of weakness. For instance, one can consider his adept, even Machiavellian handling of the Greek Question and his quick and decisive victory over the Ottomans in the 1828-9 war as well as during the Oriental Crises and contrast it with his blundering during the Münchengratz negotiations and his general conduct as a diplomat from 1844 on. Up to his decisive victory in the 1828-9 war, Nikolai considered the Ottomans to be weak, but not on the verge of collapse. In other words, they were stable, yet willing to submit to Russian demands. During the Oriental Crises the Ottomans were on the verge of collapse, yet remained willing to submit to Russian demands. Even during the 1849 Refugee Crisis, Holy Places Dispute and Menshikov's mission, Nikolai maintained his diplomatic relations ably until interference from the Great Powers shifted circumstances against him, to which he reacted poorly. It was when he feared the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was imminent and the Porte was unwilling to submit to the Tsar's will that his ability to negotiate was at its weakest, possibly because he was so accustomed to being the "Tsar-Father", the pinnacle of an authoritarian society whose foundation was almost unswerving obedience. It was almost unthinkable to deny him any request he would have deemed reasonable. One only need consider his aggressive behavior in 1849, in which he was likely behind Titov's fierce castigation of the British and the Ottomans' conduct surrounding the Canning incident, very nearly driving the Ottomans firmly into the British camp, thus giving Canning exactly what he was

hoping to accomplish, as well as his willingness to go to war in 1853 after the failure of the Menshikov Mission, being restrained only by Nesselrode's prudent counsel. In the latter case, even his middle-ground solution to occupy the Principalities was a tremendous mistake that all but permanently destroyed Russia's standing in London as well as in Constantinople. Indeed, Nikolai was unable to suffer even the slightest insolence. For example, when Metternich responded sarcastically to the Tsar's attempt to discuss what Russia and Austria ought to do with “*un homme malade*”, the Tsar was so taken aback it may have sabotaged the entire negotiation.

The Tsar was thus weakened when agitated, and perhaps nothing agitated him more than the political upheaval that fell over Europe from 1848 to the end of his reign. In Prussia, Austria and France lay unwelcome developments. In Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm was moving his country uncomfortably toward constitutional monarchy, which offended the Tsar personally. Though Nikolai despised Louis-Phillipe, he despised republicanism even more, marshaling hundreds of thousands of men to prepare for an anti-liberal invasion of France only to be sidetracked with helping his German allies and the Danubian Hospodars crush Liberal revolutionaries in their own countries.<sup>341</sup> And while the arch-Legitimist Nikolai would always come to the aid of the *ancien regimes* against those who would overthrow them, it was not only for Legitimism did he marshal his troops. De Grunwald reminds us of “the haunting problem of Poland”.<sup>342</sup> To allow a rebirth of Hungary or foundation of Romania would risk the rebirth of Poland as well. Keeping this in mind, one may understand why the Tsar resorted to brinksmanship in his aggressive attempts to force the Ottomans to extradite them. His failure to impose his will on the Ottomans may also explain his aggressive approach to the Holy Places Dispute. Agitated, the Tsar behaved as the warmongering octopus the Great Powers had feared he was.

The effects of this agitation can be seen when one compares Nikolai's partition schemes throughout his reign. However, one should not merely compare the plans themselves, but how

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<sup>341</sup> Riasanovsky 246-8

<sup>342</sup> De Grunwald 237



Nikolai proposed them to his potential collaborators, if he proposed them at all. During the Kochubey Conference, in the wake of a war in which the Ottomans were soundly beaten yet left standing and willing to accept Russia's will, the overall mood taken by most of the ministers deliberating on the subject appears to be that of distaste. It was a partition presented as an unlikely attempt to stop a great European war for the Ottomans' fragments in which Russia would lose out to “other powers, thanks to their geographic positions, (which) could make more advantageous acquisitions at the expense of the Porte than could Russia.”<sup>343</sup>. Furthermore:

*Le Comite apres avoir murement examine ces diverses hypotheses unanimement d'avis, que tant que subsistera un Souverain Musulman, avec lequel il seroit possible de traiter et de conclure la paix, le Commandant en Chef ne devoit point repousser une chance, que dans tout etat de cause il convient de regarder comme la plus heureuse et la plus conforme aux vrais interets de la Russie, que par consequent le depart du Sultan pour l'Asie ne decideroit pas irrevocablement encore du sort de l'Empire Turc en Europe;*<sup>344</sup>

St. Petersburg in later partition plots would never be so generous as to accept the Sultan as a legitimate ruler of the Balkans and Near East regardless of the circumstances, as Nikolai more or less declares in later years that if Constantinople were to fall, the Ottoman Empire would fall with it, at least in Europe.

It did not take long for Nikolai's pessimistic outlook toward the Ottomans to intensify. With the Sultan's armies defeated at Konya and Ibrahim Pasha marching on Constantinople and having not yet procured its alliance with the Ottomans, Nikolai invited Metternich to discuss “the imminent questions of the Orient” and pressed him to agree to a partition plan with Russia, but so long as the Ottomans were willing to become clients of the Tsar he wisely did not press the Austrians or even discuss specifics of the partition far beyond voicing his dislike for Catherine's Greek Plan at that instance.<sup>345</sup> It is true that Nikolai was behaving as if the Ottomans were in a state of collapse and executing the early stages of the Kochubey protocols, but once again, as the Ottomans were also

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<sup>343</sup> Kerner 283

<sup>344</sup> Kerner 287-8

<sup>345</sup> Bolsover 117

willing to accept Russian protection by signing the Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi, Nikolai was confident in his position and felt no need to attempt anything overly aggressive or radical while still securing and advancing Russia's interests in the region.

Thanks in part to Hünkâr Iskelesi, and perhaps thanks also to Prince Metternich's filibustering at Münchengratz, Nikolai made no serious attempt to partition the Ottoman Empire for another decade, by which point Russia was debatably at its strongest and most secure, with France diplomatically isolated, the Oriental Crises over and the Turkish Straits protected by the Convention of London. Bolsover claims the Tsar was anxious about unrest in the Balkans, but uprisings in Serbia could hardly have troubled Nikolai more than the invasions of Muhammad Ali.<sup>346</sup> However, he is right to point out that Nikolai's pessimism regarding the Ottomans' future could have hardly abated. That said, with the 1848 Revolutions still a half-decade away Nikolai was able to plot the Ottomans' murder with colder blood and exhibits knowledge, ability and cunning in his negotiations. He sells partition to Austria as well as he can, offering them practically all of the Ottoman Empire in Europe and discusses his plan to offer the Western Powers as much as they could reasonably absorb, asking nothing for himself but the absolvment of responsibility for the Ottomans' fragments. The negotiations failed not because of the inability of the Tsar or his diplomats. In fact, despite Nikolai being perhaps too eager to come to terms with Great Britain, they were at least able to agree to the Nesselrode Memorandum, which was about as good as the Tsar was ever going to get. With that in mind, Nikolai was unable to secure an agreement with Austria for he could offer nothing to Austria they could accept. The problem was, as Nikolai said himself, "a treaty would only hasten" the Ottomans' demise. A Memorandum, Note, or Protocol was a Treaty in all but name, and as no Great Power actually wished to see the Ottoman Empire collapse, it would be politically impossible to plot it out except in the event of an emergency in which its collapse was not only foreseen or even imminent, but actually in progress. This was repeated by Seymour in 1853, when he declared "“Her Majesty’s Government will be indisposed to make

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<sup>346</sup> Bolsover 124

certain arrangements connected with the downfall of Turkey, but it is possible that they be ready to pledge themselves against certain arrangements which might, in that event, be attempted.”

The Seymour Conversations, incidentally, were the next major round negotiations initiated by Nikolai, and the first in which his judgment can be called into question. By this point relations between Russia and the United Kingdom had declined considerably, yet the Tsar continues to propose partition as if the Canning incident and the Holy Places Dispute had changed nothing. I have shown that the Tsar was under the genuine impression that his relations with the United Kingdom were still good, but the fact that Nikolai trusted Brunnow's rosy testimony so completely can very likely be a result of the Tsar's own confirmation bias. Agitated as he was by the crises of 1848-9 and the Holy Places Dispute, the Tsar desperately needed to believe he still had allies among the Concert, leading him to make a horrible misjudgment. Furthermore, the fact that he was still attempting to charm Great Britain into collaborating in a partition conspiracy immediately before announcing his intention to impose his will on the Ottomans with the Menshikov Mission leads me to conclude that Nikolai had every intention of following his own Memorandum of February 1853 to the letter. In other words, he had decided the Ottomans would either submit to his will in regards to the Holy Places Dispute or he would make war on them, fully willing to accept their destruction as a consequence. He did so convinced that Austria and Great Britain would not intervene despite all evidence to the contrary because he misjudged his supposed allies to the point of delusion, having put far too much faith in the Nesselrode Memorandum and in his assumption that his willingness to go to bat for Austria in the Hungarian Revolt and the subsequent Refugee and Montenegro Crises ensured Austria would do so for him. His severe misjudgment caused him to overstep his boundaries with the Menshikov Mission, allowing Canning to embolden the Ottoman Porte into defying Menshikov's threats, agitating Nikolai into making the fatal blunder of occupying the Danubian Principalities, outraging both the Ottomans and the Western Powers to the point that the initiative was stripped from Nikolai and placed in the hands of the Porte, who with the backing

of Great Britain and France gave Russia the choice of accepting a humiliating peace or fighting an unwinnable war.

Therefore, I conclude that the Tsar considered the Ottoman Empire no longer inherently worthy of continued existence from early 1853 on. And while he believed it to be crumbling after the signing of the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople, certain of its eventual collapse after the signing the 1833 Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi and concerned enough to want to plan for it even in the absence of crisis circa 1844, the straw that broke the camel's back apparently came in the wake of the Holy Places Dispute and the Canning Incident, that being the relatively minor Montenegro Crisis, which even the aggrieved Austrians did not take too seriously, but which Nikolai had apparently come to believe was an existential threat to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>347</sup> Whether he was misled, mistaken or deluded cannot be known for sure, but it is more likely after having so long witnessed the life of *l'homme malade* hang on by a thread, by 1853 the Tsar was searching for a pretext to assume his role as its *heritier*.

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<sup>347</sup> Curtiss 70

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