

The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire

Edited by

MARIAN KENT

Deakin University



FRANK CASS

LONDON

Russia's humiliating defeat by Japan was followed by the revolution of 1905, which compelled the Tsar to set up a consultative quasi-parliament, the Duma, and also dictated a radical realignment in foreign policy. The new Minister of Foreign Affairs, A.P. Izvolskii, insisted that Russia settle her rivalry with Britain and Japan for ascendancy in Central Asia and the Far East in order once again to devote her full attention to the area of real importance to Russia—the Near East, where the *status quo* seemed gravely imperilled by German expansion, by Austro-Serbian friction following the Karageorgevich coup in 1903 and by the upsurge of Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian terrorism in Macedonia.²⁷ An agreement with Japan settling spheres of influence in the Far East in July 1907 was followed in August by the convention with Britain covering Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet.²⁸ Izvolskii's move towards Britain, following the intensification of Franco-Russian relations by a big loan secured in 1906 to tide the government over the aftermath of revolution, was strongly resisted by influential circles in the court, the military and civil bureaucracy and the more conservative landowning nobility. These groups believed that a restoration of the alliance of the three east European monarchies would lead to a more effective suppression of revolutionary and liberal forces.²⁹ The sheer impossibility of carrying on the old struggle with Britain, however, the encroachments of the Central Powers on Russia's traditional interests, the need for French and British support if this menace were to be countered, and the increased financial dependence on France all carried the day for Izvolskii in the Special Conference set up to debate this decision.³⁰ The pro-Entente orientation was also strongly supported by public opinion, expressing the interests of the broad landowning nobility, the commercial, industrial and professional middle classes represented in the Duma by the moderate right Octobrist Party and the Constitutional Democrats.³¹