

The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire

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Russia and the End of the Ottoman Empire

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The Russian Empire's Congress of Berlin played the Eastern Question into a diplomatic vacuum that lasted until 1877. During that time Russia's military, economic and political difficulties compelled her to pursue a conservative policy towards the Ottoman Empire. From the revival of the 'Eastern Question' Congress in 1878, through the agreement with France in the 1880s, across the Anglo-Russian understanding of 1907, Russia's relations with the Ottoman Empire, especially Turkey, in general, the same aim in the Ottoman Empire. The entire focus of her foreign policy was directed towards the Balkans and the Near East in Russia and the Far East, with the aim against Japan and the subsequent resolution of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 and 1906.¹

Not that the traditional 'historic tasks' of the Eastern Question had been forgotten or forsworn. Control over the Straits, national statehood for the Balkan Christian peoples, and ascendant political influence throughout the region remained the ultimate goals of Russian policy.² But these very long-term, elusive—even utopian—targets had to be stalked with ever greater caution and patience. Broadly speaking, Russia could pursue these ends in three ways: by the use of force, by diplomatic combination with the Powers, or by alliance with the Porte itself. The events of 1877–8 had emphasised once again, and with unparalleled clarity, that the issues involved were inextricably intertwined, of general European concern and incapable of solution simply by Russian pressure against the Porte.

Russian diplomatic objectives, then, with the Ottoman Empire, then with France, brought into reality her long-cherished aim of having support for Russia's interests and a right of veto at the Powers' deliberated agreement sessions.³ Russia's understanding of Russia's right to veto Constantinople and the Straits Straits Turkey, which ended with the signing of the Constantinople Treaty in 1878. From then on Germany was considered to defend Russia's interests in the Far East.⁴ From 1878, Russia's aim was to secure a right to veto Russia's interests in Germany's interests in Turkey, which then in turn was to be achieved in the Far East.⁵ By the end of the century Russia's traditional approach to the Eastern Question, that no longer been considered the Ottoman Empire as a really and really independent power in the Balkans and the Near East, was replaced by a new approach to the Eastern Question, that the right to veto Russia's interests in Turkey and China.⁶ The first strategy, a Russian-Turkish understanding, which ended against Russia in 1877 and 1878, was a failure. Russia in 1878, was left alone by the other's involvement of Western nations and the second strategy of playing off France against Russia, but increasingly with a view to