

# **THE EASTERN QUESTION REVISITED: GREEK-TURKISH RELATIONS IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GREAT POWER POLICY MAKING**

**S. Victor Papacosma**

---

## **Abstract**

*As the new millenium begins to dawn on us, the old heritage of the 'Eastern Question' seems to remain as prevalent as ever. This paper aims to chart a historical path of this important issue and how the continued presence of main factors throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century have shaped and led to Greek & Turkish political posturing in the region.*

---

Europe's diplomatic history in the nineteenth century and through World War I cannot be discussed without significant attention being placed on the Eastern Question. Over the years analysts have advanced many short definitions to capulize the entangled dimensions of this thorny issue, but all essentially emphasize the problematic situation and uncertainty that emerged with the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the resulting political vacuum created in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Balance of power considerations on the part of the great powers and rising nationalism among the subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire became the prime forces in the unfolding drama. Although today the changes in the diplomatic environment from this earlier era are considerable, it is nonetheless of some benefit to refer to the nineteenth century for a clearer understanding of contemporary Greek-Turkish relations and the role of these states in the policy making of stronger powers with interests in the eastern Mediterranean.

The term, "Eastern Question" as a commonly used term, did not become popular until the 1820s during the Greek War of Independence, although, as a problematic situation, an Eastern question can be said to have existed for decades. Some historians point to 1699, with the Ottoman Empire's defeat by the Habsburg Empire and the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz, as an important turning point. Europe would not be threatened again by Ottoman power as it had been in the previous three centuries. The new, quite opposite problem confronting Europe would be the

recession of Ottoman power, the Eastern Question.

The proceedings of the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), which marked the end of the Napoleonic era, did not touch on the Ottoman Empire in Europe but did reveal that the victorious great powers and defeated France did have conflicting interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, Britain deemed the eastern Mediterranean as a critical link to its imperial holdings in India and further east. Tsarist Russia held to longstanding aspirations to acquire Constantinople and control of the Straits. And as the strongest Orthodox state, it had served itself as a protector of Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman Empire. For its part, France, from the period of the Crusades, had established strong commercial and cultural interests in the area. Austria, as the architect of the conservative order arranged at Vienna, sought to maintain the status quo as tightly as possible.

When the Greeks rose in rebellion in the spring of 1821, the powers, despite nurturing ambitions in the region and despite concern over the barbarous treatment of Christian subjects by the Turks, neither welcomed its outbreak nor the prospect of intervention. The powers shared concerns over the disturbance to the status quo and uncertainty over the consequences if they became involved. While public opinion throughout Europe came out in strong support for the Greek cause, governments resisted pressures for intervention. Ultimately, Britain, France and Russia did act on Greece's behalf, but it was essentially mutual suspicions among them about one power gaining exclusive influence over the Greeks, rather than a sincere desire for Greek success, that drew them into the struggle. Not to act together meant that they might end up fighting each other, a situation they then wished to avoid.

Although Greece emerged independent by 1830, subsequent events revealed that the circumstances of its creation delineated Greece's future international position. Seeking to maintain the original status quo as much as possible, the great powers carved out a diminutive Greece, which included barely one-quarter of all Greeks living in the eastern Mediterranean. The new state also found itself with three guarantor powers – Great Britain, France and Russia. The Greeks were to focus their efforts in subsequent decades on the pursuit of the Megali Idea (Great Idea) and the liberation of their brethren still under Ottoman overlordship. The three guarantor powers assured that Greece's territorial integrity would not be threatened; concurrently, rivalries among the powers and balance of power considerations prevented Greece from advancing its own interests against the Ottoman Empire. The basic diplomatic pattern that emerged had Tsarist Russia seeking by various means to extend its influence southward towards the Mediterranean at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, an objective opposed by Britain, France and Austria. The Sublime Porte regularly sought to exploit the rivalries among the powers, a tactic long and successfully pursued by the Turks since their arrival on the European continent in the fourteenth century. Because of its strategic positioning as a barrier to Russian expansion southward, the Ottoman Empire successfully played on the fears of the

British, in particular, and also of the French and Austrians, to acquire their diplomatic and military support in warding off Russian and other threats to its territory. In its attempts to advance the Megali Idea, Greece, much smaller in size and with scant resources, would try but could not succeed in playing this diplomatic game of manipulating great power rivalries. Moreover, on several occasions when Greece sought to advance its own interests, it found itself checked by the dominant naval powers in the Mediterranean.

Even when Russia was in the position militarily to advance towards Constantinople, as in the fighting during 1829, balance of power considerations restrained St. Petersburg and worked in Constantinople's favor. A special Tsarist commission resolved that maintenance of the Ottoman Empire was more to the Russian advantage than any possible alternative. It concluded that partition of the empire would create a "labyrinth of difficulties and complications" with the other great powers and would also enable the other powers to seize various parts of the Balkan peninsula, and thus "Russia would be called on to meet dangerous enemies in southern Europe instead of indifferent Turks." St. Petersburg was determined to follow a program of increasing its influence within the Ottoman Empire for the time being by more diplomatic means.

An opportunity surfaced when Sultan Mahmud II, unable to defeat his rebellious Egyptian vassal, Mehemet Ali, found that he could not draw on the aid of Britain and France because of other preoccupations. With no other alternative and with the explanation that "a drowning man in his despair will clutch at a serpent," the Sultan, in 1833, agreed to the presence of Russian soldiers and sailors at the Straits. The resulting Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi (July 6, 1833) between the two empires essentially made Russia the guarantor of the Ottoman Empire and marked the apogee of Russian influence in Constantinople. These developments indicated an interesting shift from Russia's earlier military attempts to extend its influence southward at the expense of the Ottomans – the two empires had fought six major wars since the reign of Peter the Great. But Russia was concerned that a dynamic Mehemet Ali, (if he soundly defeated the Ottomans), would be a much stronger foe than the existing regime. Temporarily saved by a traditional enemy from a major threat to Constantinople by Mehemet Ali, the Ottomans well recognized the obviously short-term dimensions of this uncomfortable relationship.

The British, always wary of Russian policy and potential threats to London's regional interests, resented these gains. During the 1830s British leaders and the public found their anti-Russian sentiments heightening to the extent that the term "Russophobia" was coined. To counter Russian threats to British imperial interests, London commenced a policy of bolstering the power of the Ottoman Empire so that it could maintain its position as an effective buffer against pressures from Russia and other neighbors, such as Mehemet Ali. Concurrently, Britain pressed for reforms within the Empire to strengthen its military capabilities and to improve con-

ditions for its subject nationalities. For the remainder of the 1830s and in the 1840s, London and St. Petersburg, for divergent reasons, would pursue related policies of sustaining the Ottoman Empire. The Russians well recognized that any unilateral attempt to subdue the Turks militarily would meet with the opposition of the British, French and Austrians.

Greece, by contrast, suffered a fate similar to that of other small, economically weak nations in strategic geographical locations: it found itself precluded from independent action by the overriding concerns and rivalries of the great powers. Greece's maritime location further intensified its vulnerability as dominant naval powers in the Mediterranean could easily exert pressure on Greek governments. A first example came with the inglorious Don Pacifico incident. When Athens did not respond favorably to London's demands for compensation to one of its citizens and for several other grievances, Lord Palmerston in a demonstration of gunboat diplomacy ordered the blockade of Piraeus in January 1850. Threatened next by a bombardment of Piraeus, the Greek government had to yield to London's demands in April 1850.

A more serious episode occurred with the outbreak of war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in 1853. Although no major crises involving the Turkish realm had occurred during the 1840s, mutual suspicions among the powers remained and heightened by the beginning of the new decade. A number of complex and not always major disputes (not to be dealt with here) led nonetheless to a breakdown of relations between St. Petersburg and Constantinople, which would be backed by the British and French. London did not respond positively when its ambassador in St. Petersburg reported that Tsar Nicholas I had remarked: "We have a sick man on our hands, a man gravely ill, it will be a great misfortune if one of these days he slips through our hands, especially before the necessary arrangements are made." Britain and France sought the propping and maintenance of the "sick man of Europe" and not his dismemberment.

The Greeks, sentimentally drawn to the Russian side, sought also to take *advantage* of Turkish problems by launching their own campaign against Constantinople. Greek guerrilla bands in Epirus, Thessaly, and Macedonia began a campaign against Turkish positions. In March 1854 the British and French, having first signed an alliance with Turkey, declared war on Russia, concurrently pressing the Greeks to terminate their aggression against the Turks. To demonstrate their opposition to Greek policy, the Anglo-French allies blockaded Piraeus and landed 3000 troops in the port in May 1854. King Othon's government was thereby forced to declare Greece's neutrality in the Crimean War. The troops remained in Piraeus until February 1857, well after the war's end the previous March, to reinforce Anglo-French displeasure at Greek attempts to act contrary to their wishes.

Although on the side of the multinational coalition that defeated Russia, the

Ottoman Empire did not emerge completely unscathed from the war and, for example, had to agree, along with Russia, to the complete demilitarization of their Black Sea coasts. In formally admitting the Ottoman Empire to the Concert of Europe, the signatory powers to the Peace of Paris (March 30, 1856) agreed to respect and guarantee the empire's independence and territorial integrity. Once again and despite major divisions among them, great powers sought the maintenance of "the sick man", out of concern that his demise would lead to major disputes among them over the disposition of the deceased's property. Aspirations for a healthy recovery rode on assurances from Ottoman authorities that they would honor the terms of the reform edict, Hatt-i Humayun, promulgated one week before the Paris treaty's signing. By reforming itself and by providing better conditions for the empire's subject nationalities, it was believed that their impulse to rise against the Turks would be blunted. The British, maintaining their role as Constantinople's principal friend and ally, placed special emphasis on the prospects for reform. But the years that followed indicated that hopes for reformed Turkish governance and a rejuvenated empire were misplaced.

Greek pursuit of the Megali Idea remained stalled. Greece did receive the Ionian Islands in 1864 from Britain as a sign of support for the Greek choice of its new monarch, George I, from the Danish dynasty. But uprisings by the Greeks on Crete demanding enosis (union) with the Greek mainland in 1841, 1856, and then 1866-69 regularly revealed the inherent inability of Athens to act effectively in their support. In part out of concern over Russian inroads, the powers diplomatically involved themselves in the last revolt to pacify conditions on the island and pressured Constantinople to offer some voice to the Cretan Christians in the island's administration and to lighten the tax burden. But by the 1870s Tsarist Russia's role for Greece experienced change. No longer seeking to extend its influence in the Balkans under the general banner of Orthodoxy, St. Petersburg now advanced the cause of Pan Slavism, making the Bulgarians, a historical rival of the Greeks, their favored group.

Britain's positioning toward the Ottoman Empire also showed some modification. Increasingly, influential segments of the British population came to view the Ottoman social and political system with a more critical eye. The Liberal Party's William Gladstone was particularly outspoken in this respect. Thus, developments after an uprising in Bosnia Herzegovina in 1875, which encouraged resistance to Ottoman authorities elsewhere in the Balkans, divided the British political world. In the spring of 1876 Turkish irregulars in Bulgaria massacred well over 10,000 Christians and destroyed several dozen villages. Gladstone passionately condemned the Turks in his pamphlet, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, stating "Let the Turks now carry away their abuses in the only possible manner, namely by carrying off themselves." The Liberal leader, then in the political opposition, called not for outright partitioning but demanded autonomy for the subject

Christians. Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli would not yield to public pressure and pursued a forceful foreign policy that sought to disrupt cooperation by the conservative powers of the recently formed Dreikaiserbund (Three Emperors League) - Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. In the process he forged a British policy sympathetic to the Turks that hindered peaceful resolution to the spreading Balkan conflict and stiffened Turkish obstinacy.

With the breakdown of negotiations, Russia declared war on the Ottomans in April 1877. After initial defeats, the Russian army advanced quickly toward Constantinople, and in late January an armistice was signed. But, as in 1829, St. Petersburg had to establish how far it could extend its power without creating a hostile coalition against it and fomenting a major war. Disraeli dispatched British warships into the Straits and anchored them on the Asiatic side of the Sea of Marmara. The resulting Treaty of San Stefano on March 3, 1878 brought heavy losses for Turkey in the Balkans and in the Caucasus region. The most controversial dimension of the treaty was the creation of a Greater Bulgaria as an autonomous principality. Excluding Constantinople, Adrianople, and Thessaloniki, it incorporated virtually all the territory between the Danube in the north, the Black Sea in the east, the Aegean Sea in the south, and Lake Ohrid and beyond in the west. Opposition to the San Stefano treaty came from many directions. London and Vienna were particularly concerned that this large Bulgaria would significantly upset the regional balance by becoming a Russian satellite and providing Russia with access to the Aegean and a threatening proximity to the Turkish capital. Confronted by a coalition of great powers against it, St. Petersburg yielded, and the Congress of Berlin, meeting in June 1878, rewrote the earlier settlement in terms less favorable to Russian interests. Among the major adjustments, an autonomous Bulgaria emerged but significantly reduced from its San Stefano size. It was also at this point in time (June 4) that Britain pressed the Porte to agree to the Cyprus Convention as compensation for Russian gains in the war. In return for acquiring the right to occupy and administer Cyprus, London committed itself to resist any further Russian expansion in Asia Minor.

During the hostilities between the Turks and Slavs in 1877, Greek leaders were divided on whether to intervene militarily. Pressured by the powers not to act, the Greeks nonetheless mobilized but by then the warring parties had signed the armistice. The Greeks joined the chorus of opposition to San Stefano. Athens was not formally represented at Berlin, but it did present its claims to Crete (where the Greeks had once again risen in rebellion) Epirus and Thessaly – for which it received assurances from the powers that they would seek to influence Turkey in yielding territory. It was only in 1881 that the powers, led by the British, came through with their promise (albeit in lesser proportion) and convinced Turkey to cede most of Thessaly and the Arta district of Epirus to Greece.

The diplomatic situation had altered. Serbia and particularly Bulgaria now joined

the Ottoman Empire as regional rivals to Greek expansionist interests. Russia sought out the Slavs as regional clients and could no longer be utilized by the Greeks as a potential foil to Anglo-French pressures. More than ever, the British and, secondarily, the French had to be considered before undertaking any diplomatic initiatives. Consequently, with no regional allies and confronted by Anglo-French pressures, Greece had little choice but to deal with these very same powers and to seek rewards for "good behavior".

Greece's vulnerability again became apparent in 1885. When Bulgaria announced the annexation of Eastern Rumelia, Greece and Serbia demanded territorial compensation in light of Bulgaria's breach of the Treaty of Berlin and out of concern for the revamped regional balance of power. Prime Minister Theodoros Deligiannis ordered mobilization of the Greek army in late September and maintained it despite strong warnings from the powers not to intervene against the Turks. In late December the powers called for the Greek army's demobilization. When repeated calls for demobilization met with unsatisfactory responses from the Greek government, the powers imposed a blockade of the Greek coasts on May 8, 1886. After a change in government and the implementation of demobilization, the powers lifted the blockade on June 7. The heavy costs of mobilization added to the spiraling national debt of Greece, which received nothing in return for the effort.

In 1897 the powers could not unite in common policy to prevent a Greco-Turkish conflict in response to the Cretan uprising that had begun the previous year. On March 18 they established a blockade of Crete, but the Greeks blundered into a war that resulted in a quick, decisive defeat at the hands of the Turks, who had their army recently reorganized by the Germans. The influence of the powers tempered the peace terms for Athens, and the Turks extended autonomy to the island. Britain, France, Russia and Italy arranged to keep detachments on Crete to ensure peace; Austria-Hungary and Germany, not wishing to alienate the Sultan, with whom relations were improving, did not add their forces. Additionally, Greece's finances were subsequently to fall under the stern supervision of an International Finance Commission.

As the nineteenth century ended and the new century commenced, some evident changes in the Eastern Question's dimensions had become apparent. Two new powers, Germany and Italy, made their presence felt in the Eastern Mediterranean and the former, in particular, had made significant economic and other inroads in the Ottoman Empire. After its takeover of the Suez Canal and the subsequent occupation of Egypt in 1882, Britain became more concerned about Turkey in Asia rather than in Europe, as London sought to secure its control of India against pressures, notably Russian, in Central Asia. Although the policy of Russia had contributed to the liberation of all four Balkan regimes, not one of them assumed the role of pliable client, as had originally been feared by the other powers. Nonetheless, all powers remained concerned about the Ottoman Empire's condi-

tion, because, as one historian has stated: "Though admittedly sick, it was more convenient alive than dead." Its sudden demise or threatened demise could, release great shock waves in the sensitive balance of power as it had done for decades. Constantinople would continue to play on the insecurities of the powers in order to maintain the Empire's integrity. The signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907 - as part of the pre-1914 alliance developments that were dividing Europe into hostile camps - resolved some but not all problems that had contributed to the longstanding rivalry between London and St. Petersburg. The uncertainties of the Eastern Question persisted.

Greece remained a secondary factor in the considerations of the powers. Athens would be reminded again of this status when, in October 1908, the Greek government, in the aftermath of Austria's annexation of Bosnia Herzegovina, belatedly sought to achieve Crete's union. Athens found no support from the powers for this proposed elimination of, Turkey's by then, (largely symbolic) suzerainty over the island. Thus, London, which, the previous autumn, had urged the Turks to yield to Austrian and Bulgarian demands (the latter for independence), glaringly revealed these sentiments in a July 1909 report:

*It would...be reducing our sympathy and good will toward Turkey to a farce if, after the Turks had accepted in these two cases [i.e., Bulgarian independence and the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria] our advice, disagreeable though it was, we went on to put pressure upon the Turks to give way to Greece in a manner which they considered humiliating... The Turkish flag still flies there [i.e., Crete], and it would be very humiliating for Turkey for the flag to be hauled down and replaced by that of Greece, a Power not only much weaker than Austria or Bulgaria, but also one which the Turks knew quite well they could defeat so easily again as they did in fact [twelve years ago].*

Ottoman-controlled Macedonia had since the 1890s become the scene of considerable violence and guerrilla band activity as the Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs hotly contested for influence in a region that they saw falling from Turkish control. Sensitive to the threats to the status quo, the powers sought to pacify the region with reform measures. Nothing really worked. And the powers, now divided into definable rival alliances, were establishing other priorities.

Russia sought to align Serbia and Bulgaria in the Balkans as a unified front against an Austrian *Orang nach Osten*, but once they signed a pact in March 1912, Belgrade, Sofia, and then Athens, set their sights on eliminating the Turkish presence in their midst. The Balkan League, seeking to take advantage of the Ottoman Empire's involvement in a war with Italy, determined to launch its own campaign against Constantinople in the fall of 1912. The powers unsuccessfully and belatedly sought to prevent the outbreak of war in October 1912. In quick and surprising

fashion, the Balkan allies succeeded almost completely in ousting the Turks from the European continent. Resulting disputes over the division of Turkish territory among them and Bulgarian opposition, in particular, led to another round of fighting in the early summer of 1913 that had Bulgaria battling against all its neighbors. Greece came out of the Balkan Wars a big winner, annexing Crete, Southern Epirus, the largest section of Macedonia, and occupying many Aegean islands.

The Turks, who had succumbed to Greek naval dominance during the Balkan Wars, refused to accept the loss of the Aegean islands, whose final disposition was to be left to the European powers. In December 1913, to strengthen its inferior navy, Turkey purchased the British-built Rio de Janeiro, originally constructed for Brazil, and actively sought other large vessels. The Greeks hastened to find capital ships in order to meet the impending threat of Turkish naval superiority and to secure their hold on the islands. The very tight market forced the Greeks to search far and wide for sellers. Athens finally found two 13,000 ton pre-dreadnought battleships in the United States. Through diplomatic channels in Washington the Turks loudly protested this proposed transaction. From Athens Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos persuasively communicated to President Woodrow Wilson that these two ships would be used by Greece only to assure the maintenance of peace and the preservation of the balance of power in the Aegean. Unwittingly, the United States had become directly involved in a distant region where it then had quite marginal interests. Having brought Greece and Turkey to the brink of war, the Aegean islands issue receded into the background only with the outbreak of World War I.

That Germany's interest and involvement in the Ottoman Empire had increased substantially while the position of Britain had receded became apparent several days after the outbreak of fighting in World War I when Constantinople signed, on August 2, 1914, a secret agreement to side with Germany. For a period, the Porte duplicitously continued to negotiate with Britain and France and maintained a status of armed neutrality before entering into the fighting in early November.

Eleftherios Venizelos, the architect of Greece's Balkan War gains, saw a prime opportunity for acquiring more territory during the First World War. With minor variations Venizelos pursued a policy of maintaining a "good behavior" position vis-à-vis Greece's powerful patrons. After a long hiatus, Greece's guarantor powers – Britain, France, and Russia – had come together once again within the Triple Entente for larger balance of power considerations. Bearing in mind Greece's positioning in a Mediterranean dominated by Anglo-French warships and historical patterns, it seemed apparent from the beginning of the war that Greece would have to consider some accommodation with the Triple Entente. But although most Greeks united in their desire to extend their frontiers, they were divided as to how and under whose leadership. While King Constantine I spoke out for continued neutrality, a policy basically beneficial to German strategic interests in the southern Balkans, Venizelos pressed for Greece's entry into the war on the side of the Entente. Greek

society became polarized - and Greece suffered. Exploiting the political disarray to their advantage and despite Greece's professed neutrality, the Entente landed troops in Thessaloniki in the early autumn of 1915. The following autumn Venizelos formed a provisional government in the northern city, and in June 1917 an Anglo-French ultimatum forced the allegedly pro-German Constantine to leave Greece. Venizelos returned to Athens as Prime Minister and brought Greece formally into the war on the victorious Entente's side.

With the Ottoman Empire in the ranks of the defeated and because of his undisputed loyalty to the victorious coalition, Venizelos had placed Greece in a favorable position to receive considerable territorial gains at the Paris Peace Conference. Had the terms of the Treaty of Sevres (10 August, 1920) been ultimately fulfilled, many Greeks long under Ottoman rule, would have been incorporated into the Greek state. But the divisions in Greece, (which led to Venizelos's electoral defeat in November 1920 and Constantine's return in December), in addition to policy disputes between Greece's erstwhile patrons, Britain and France, and the rising Turkish nationalist forces of Mustafa Kemal led to the defeat of the Greek army and the destruction of Smyrna in September 1922.

The fragility of Venizelos's tactics had been revealed, in large because of the heavy dependency on the support of Britain and France. With the return of Constantine, the Entente's bugbear, France saw a ready opportunity to seek accommodation with the Turkish nationalists, as did Italy. The Bolshevik regime in Russia, on the premise that the Turks were also suffering from the intervention of foreign imperialists, signed a treaty of friendship with Kemal in March 1921. By not sustaining its original support of Greece, Britain contributed to Greece's inevitable defeat. As Venizelos had initially succeeded in exploiting allied differences for grand gains, so did Mustafa Kemal to defeat the Greeks and to make the Treaty of Sèvres an irrelevant document for altered conditions. The Treaty of Lausanne (24 July, 1923) registered Greece's defeat and Turkey's victory, supplanted the Treaty of Sevres, and redefined boundaries and terms of peace in the Eastern Mediterranean. The mandatory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey sought, among other objectives, to eliminate ethnic claims to territory.

In his campaign to remove the foreign presence and Christian minorities from Turkish soil, Kemal had largely succeeded in creating a "Turkey for the Turks." The Eastern Question, which should have ended formally with the Treaty of Sevres, had a last phase in the Greco-Turkish war and a definitive end with the Treaty of Lausanne – which also buried the Megali Idea with all of its historical and contemporary implications..

Relative detente characterized relations between Greece and Turkey after the signing of a treaty of friendship in 1930 and extended into the early Cold War era as both states became linked with the West and entered NATO concurrently in

1952. The security of their borders against possible aggression from the north was to be maintained by membership. The new alliance did not, however, preclude the reemergence of older historical paradigms and animosities when the issue of Cyprus and enosis surfaced in the 1950s.

Turkey's assigned role in NATO as a critical buffer state against Soviet expansionism and its positioning at the strategic Straits was not an unfamiliar one. And as in the previous century, the Turks once again drew on the insecurities of the Western powers to bolster their bargaining position in a number of areas, and quite often in their relations with Greece, which worsened in the decades since the mid-1950s. Because of its smaller size and location on a relatively softer front vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact, Greece's role within NATO, resulted in a more vulnerable status for its positions – again, reminiscent of nineteenth-century patterns.

As a result, Turkey has been able to assume more assertive policies without much concern about serious opposition from its allies. For example, the 1974 invasion of Cyprus with all of its barbaric implications and violations of international law and of moral norms supposedly shared by Turkey's NATO allies, is an ongoing reality. Pressure from the United States and European allies has been hardly significant or effective. For all the concern of Europe over the mistreatment and massacring of the Ottoman Empire's Christian subjects during the period of the Eastern Question, effective intervention on their behalf had occurred infrequently or not at all (for reasons already stated). Promises of Ottoman reform periodically assuaged the consciences and opportunism of Western political leaders. And so it is today, as Ankara seeks to divert attention from human rights violations with promises of reform to its Western friends. One prominent example preceded the December 1995 customs union agreement between Turkey and the European Union when the former gave explicit guarantees that it would take positive action on human rights, democratization, the status of divided Cyprus, and policy towards the Kurds. And as in the past, governing authorities have tended to level only moderate criticism toward the Turkish leadership, while public opinion has generally been much more critical. Thus, the European Parliament has advocated a harsher policy toward Ankara, but the European Commission has balked at antagonizing Turkish sentiments.

Turkey's studied and continuing challenges to Greek sovereignty in the Aegean provide another example of Ankara's relatively unimpeded provocations. The initial and instinctive call of NATO allies in response to the winter 1996 Imia crisis was for the two disputants to negotiate their problems - the objective of Turkish tactics of more than two decades that seeks a political rather than legal solution. Eventually, a number of states acknowledged the appropriateness of Greece's position, which called for submission of the dispute to the International Court of Justice. But the general tendency of allies to assume what they consider an even-handed stance has usually worked in favor of the Turks, because it is they who are in violation of

the rule of law.

Where as some observers at first forecasted that the end of the Cold War would lead to a diminution of Turkey's significance for the West, this has not occurred because of a skilled policy by Turkey and its international supporters. Turkey redefined its mission as a buffer. It now served itself as a moderate Islamic model in the midst of aggressive and expansionist Islamic fundamentalism and as a pro-Western bastion in an inherently volatile region that included Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Its geostrategic positioning has thus redirected the concerns of the West and resurrected its importance.

As for Greece, it has steered with difficulty through these troubled waters and has too often ineffectively presented its cases to allies. In turn, it has had few options available to it – for established nineteenth-century reasons. Even when Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou sought to forge a more independent foreign policy for Greece, he had to acknowledge certain constraining realities. A falling out with NATO and the United States would have only improved Turkey's diplomatic and military muscle in the Aegean and Cyprus and accentuated Greek weaknesses. Moreover, the United States had consented to maintain a military balance between the two feuding allies, thereby providing the support that Greece could not expect to find from other sources. And, of course, NATO and the U.S. Sixth Fleet dominated Mediterranean waters. In many respects, then, Greece has been regularly reminded of an earlier subordinate role to stronger patrons that required "good behavior" in order to acquire diplomatic support and "rewards".

Lord Stratford de Radcliffe wrote in a letter to The Times (London) in 1875: "The Eastern Question is a fact, a reality of indefinite duration." The significance of Turkey's fate today and the policy of the powers toward it indeed constitute an ongoing "Eastern Question". In the contemporary context, though, the pre-1914 patterns have undergone a shift. Now one witnesses a Turkey not in territorial recession or trying to maintain the status quo, but one intent on pursuing a revisionist policy, seeking actively to expand its influence in the region against resistant neighbors. In December 1996 Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, addressing Turkish reporters, directed his comments at Europe to warn it that Turkey must be considered more as an equal: "Turkey is a powerful country at the center of the world. The European countries have to review their policies on world affairs and on Islam." Again, as in the past, the Turks are drawing on the concerns of the Western powers in the broader region and over Turkey's role within it, in this instance to advance Ankara's ambitious program in the eastern Mediterranean.

**NOTES**

1. Cited in Stavrianos, L. S. (1959) *The Balkans since 1453*. New York: Rinehart, p. 290.
2. Cited in Jelavich, J. (1964) *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1815-1914*. Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott.
3. Cited in Temperley, H. (1936) *England and the Near East: The Crinema*. London: Longman, Green and Co. p. 272.
4. Cited in Harris, D. (1939) *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press p. 235.
5. Clayton, G. D. (1971) *Britain and the Eastern Question: Missolonghi to Gallipoli*. London: University of London Press p. 10.
6. Papacosma, S. V. (1977) *The Military in Greek Politics: The 1909 Coup d' Etat*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press p. 57.
7. The U.S. Commission of Security and Cooperation in Europe regularly mentions problems of human rights in Turkey in its monthly newsletter and has page one articles with titles such as: 'Turkey: New Government, Same Old Repression,' *CSC Digest* 19, no. 9 (September 1996); 'Turkish Human Rights Abuses Continue Amid Promise of Reforms' 19, no. 11 (November 1996).
8. Cunningham, A. (1991) *Anglo-Ottoman Encounters in the Age of Revolution: Collected Essays*. Vol. 1. London: Frank Cass.
9. Kinzer, S. 'Empty Seat at Dinner Signals Turkey's Sensitivity over Role'. *New York Times*, 11 December 1996.