

Pan-Slavism, State, and Society: Responses to the Balkan Crises on the Eve of the Russo-Turkish War, 1875-1877

"There has taken place and is taking place an unprecedented affair. War is being conducted apart from the government by the Russian people itself... and the Slavic Committee of Moscow which is treasury and commissariat. I began recruitment [of volunteers] without any Permission... Society won for itself this right." - Ivan Aksakov

As Ivan Aksakov penned these words in September 1876, he was at the center of a Pan-Slavist campaign to generate support, both humanitarian and military, for the "liberation" of the orthodox Slavs in Ottoman Europe.¹ In June of that year, Serbia and Montenegro had declared war on the Ottomans in response to their ruthless suppression of revolts in their Balkan provinces. When these revolts had broken out the previous summer, a host of civil societies in the Russian Empire began raising money and supplies for refugees and insurgents. Among those societies, the undisputed leader was the Slavic Benevolent Committee chaired by Aksakov himself.

Founded in Moscow in 1858, the committee opened new offices in the empire's provincial capitals in the wake of the Balkan revolts. From those offices, it dispatched representatives tasked with soliciting donations from the countryside. These representatives met with groups from all social estates (*soslovie*), hoping to persuade them that it was their duty to aid their oppressed Slavic brethren. With the donations they collected, committee directors arranged transportation for doctors, nurses, and other aid workers to the rebelling Ottoman provinces. Eventually, they accrued enough to play an active military role in the region and, throughout the summer of 1876, sent regiments of volunteers to fight alongside the Serbian and Montenegrin armies.

¹ Serbia and Montenegro were autonomous principalities within the Ottoman Empire. They had their own governments and militaries, but had to tolerate Ottoman garrisons within their borders.

For Aksakov, the committee's achievements constituted a watershed in Russian history. "The Russian people," he insisted, were waging war "apart from the government." In his view, the Slavic cause had united the Russian people, giving them the strength to advance Russia's destiny.² When Tsar Alexander II declared war on the Ottoman Empire on April 24th 1877, Aksakov concluded that society had forced the state to come to the defense of the Balkan Slavs. At the time, many shared his reading of events and marveled at how the educated elite (*obshchestvo*), expressing the will of the people (*narod*), had commandeered Russia's foreign policy.³ Subsequently, historians have agreed with Aksakov's interpretation, attributing the state's decision to go to war to public pressure.⁴ The author of the seminal study of this era, B.H. Sumner contends that a "prolonged outburst of nationalist feelings" in Russia in 1876 and 1877 "impelled the Tsar and Gorchakov to an interventionist policy in Turkey."⁵ Others take this point further, concluding that the buildup to the war figured as a turning point in Russian history that marked the appearance of a nationally-conscious civil society strong enough both to mobilize the Russian people and challenge the tsarist autocracy.⁶

² See I.S. Aksakov to General M.A. Cherniaev, September 7/19, 1876. Translated in David Mackenzie, *The Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism, 1875 - 1878* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967) 124. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

³ The *obshchestvo* were the small number of educated and politically engaged individuals in Imperial Russia, while the *narod* were the common "people" (i.e. peasants, townspeople, merchants, workers, etc) that 19th century Slavophiles idealized and considered the heart of the Russian nation.

⁴ Here I am referring primarily to Anglo-American historians. See Karel Durman, *The Time of the Thunderer: Mikhail Katkov, Russian Nationalist Extremism and the Failure of the Bismarckian System, 1871-1887* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1988); David MacKenzie, *The Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism, 1875 - 1878* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967); and B.H. Sumner's *Russia and the Balkans, 1870-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937).

⁵ Sumner, *Russia and the Balkans*, 196-197.

⁶ A few observers have criticized this now standard narrative, but only two - Dietrich Geyer and Richard Weeks, writing over two decades ago, examined the period in any depth. Geyer argues that "a groundswell of sympathy among the Russian people for their suffering co-religionists...fuelled a strong desire for active involvement," but concludes that this sympathy did not in and of itself cause the Russo-Turkish War. Richard Weeks takes this line of thinking further, arguing that tsarist officials declared war on the Ottoman empire because it wanted to, not because it felt pressured by society. In making these arguments, both, however, make the same assumptions about Russian politics that this essay seeks to challenge. See Dietrich Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: the Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860-1914*, 70; and Richard Weeks, "Russia's Decision for War with Turkey, May 1876 - April 1877," *East European Quarterly*, 24:3 (Fall 1990).

From responses of Russians, elite and common folk, to the Balkan crises, it emerges that the prevailing approach is problematic.⁷ By treating the empire's move toward war as the result of a dualistic struggle between state and society, scholarship obscures more than it reveals about the processes that underlay politics and shaped political culture in late Imperial Russia.

Essentially it assumes that state and society in the Russian Empire were discrete institutions locked in a perpetual struggle for power. Police reports, newspaper articles, and correspondence, both private and official, reveal that a more subtle dynamic was at play. Connected by a web of private organizations, personal ties, and cultural exchanges, state and society were heterogeneous entities in constant flux.

Only in light of their interplay can one fully understand why the empire intervened in the Balkan crisis and the working of politics in post-Emancipation Russia. From the winter of 1875 to the fall of 1876, the Slavic cause garnered the sympathy of Russians from almost all strata. Of the three million rubles amassed by the committees, reportedly two-thirds came from the "poor, burdened, simple people [*narod*]."⁸ Yet, these donations were not, as Aksakov suggested, proof that Russia as a whole supported official intervention in the Balkans. Even within the committees, few agreed on the objectives and significance of their efforts. Moreover, support for the "liberation" of the Slavs varied by region and estate. It was strongest in cities among the educated elite (*obshchestvo*), weakest among the merchant classes and in the empire's diverse borderlands. At the height of the crisis, Russian society was not united or uniform in purpose.

⁷ The continued influence of Pan-Slavist accounts on scholarship stems perhaps from neglect. Since access to Russian archives remained limited for much of the 20th century, the first historians to examine the period, such as Sumner, drew heavily on the records of other European countries. At the time of the Balkan crisis, foreign officials attributed to the Russian "bear" sentiments that were far more bellicose than its actions warranted. Unsurprisingly, they and those relying on their reports gave great credence to Pan-Slavists, who, though few in number, were remarkably prolific and whose stance seemed to prove the empire's aggressive bent. See M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966).

⁸ No other sources corroborate this data. See Aksakov, Speech to the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee, October 24/ November 6, 1876, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii I.S. Aksakova*, Vol. I (Moscow 1886) 223-224.

Calls for state action came from a vocal contingent that had a less direct impact on official policy than they supposed. As the Balkan crisis unfolded, the tsar and his ministers never made foreign policy decisions based solely on public opinion. They sought first and foremost to secure the Empire's well-being and preserve its spheres of influence. Nevertheless, they too were a part of society and, like their contemporaries, read newspapers and privately supported civic and cultural organizations. The tsar declared war on the Ottoman Empire because he and his ministers believed that inaction endangered Russian prestige. However, they became convinced that this prestige was in jeopardy because of contemporary, Pan-Slavist discourse. Over the summer of 1876, a subtle shift occurred; discourse effectively redefined Russian prestige, linking it to defense of the Balkan Slavs. Once this occurred, the regime embarked on a path toward war, a path from which it did not deviate even when general sympathy for the Balkan Slavs waned.

Post-Emancipation Politics and Visions of Slavic Unity

During the so-called long nineteenth century, the Russian Empire fought five wars in the Balkans, only one of which it won decisively.⁹ It had held a stake in the region since Peter the Great campaigned there in his wars with the Ottoman Empire. For the most part, Peter treated the Balkan principalities as a staging ground to gain control of the Black Sea littoral.¹⁰ Peter's operations achieved little, but Catherine the Great won several major concessions from the Ottomans in the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji in 1774.¹¹ That treaty gave the Russian Empire access to the Black Sea and the Dardanelles, enabling it to construct its first warm water port and

⁹ The last of these wars was World War I. See Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements, 1806-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) ix.

¹⁰ Acquiring this region was a long-cherished objective of Imperial foreign policy. Because Russian ports were iced in for a significant part of the year, most of its grain exports went through the Black Sea and the Dardanelle Straits, which were under Ottoman suzerainty.

¹¹ Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements*, 1-6.

expand its navy. It also granted the autocracy the right to safeguard the interests of the Ottoman Empire's orthodox subjects and religious sites.¹² With this treaty, Catherine the Great made the defense of the Balkan Slavs the purview of the tsarist state. Barbara Jelavich was not far off the mark when she described the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji as "the most important document for the subsequent history of Russian-Balkan relations."¹³

Throughout the nineteenth century, Russian tsars used the clauses of the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji to justify infringements on Ottoman sovereignty, but their efforts had mixed results. The Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829 enabled the empire to extend its influence in the Balkans, but its defeat in the Crimean War reversed all its previous achievements, demonstrating that the Russian army has become obsolete. After the war, the Treaty of Paris formally ended the Russian protectorate over the Danubian principalities, demilitarized the Black Sea, returned Bessarabia to Moldavia, and replaced the Russian with an all-European guarantee for Ottoman Christians. Its prestige diminished and its fleet neutralized, the Russian Empire faced international isolation at a time when its internal problems had become painfully apparent.¹⁴ Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the impact of the Crimean War on the tsarist regime and Russian society.

When Alexander II emancipated the serfs in 1861, beginning the era of Great Reforms, he did so in part because of the Crimean War. Scholars have long debated the influence of the war on emancipation, and no consensus exists. Nevertheless, few would deny that this war convinced many "enlightened" bureaucrats that the existing order could no longer guarantee the

¹² This article of the treaty was left purposefully vague. It states, "the Sublime Porte promises to protect constantly the Christian religion and its churches, and it also allows the Ministers of the Imperial Court of Russia to make, upon all occasions, representations...of the new church at Constantinople'."

¹³ Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements* 3.

¹⁴ Ibid, 140-141. See also Hugh Ragsdale, *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (New York: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1993) 159-192.

empire's stability and prestige.¹⁵ It shook public confidence in the military system and called into question the social hierarchy that underpinned it. In the words of Dietrich Geyer, "defeat laid bare the discrepancy between Russia's traditional claim to great-power status and the backwardness of an Empire that had as yet scarcely felt the 'industrial revolution'."¹⁶ A few years separated defeat and the Great Reforms, but created space for the reform-minded to criticize the existing order.

Inspiring hopes and fueling deep anxieties, the Great Reforms transformed the empire's political and social landscape.¹⁷ Some members of the gentry fought reform, hoping to maintain their property and dynastic privileges. Others heralded the birth of a new progressive liberal order. With censorship loosened, public opinion was no longer the monopoly of state officials, and educated elites (*obshchestvo*) began to perceive themselves as a part of a cohesive civil society integral to the modernization of the empire.¹⁸ As a result, Nathaniel Knight points out, this public began "generating and spreading ideas and opinion through the media of journalism, literature, public organizations, voluntary societies, charity groups, and private social networks."¹⁹ New schools gradually broadened the reading public and encouraged the empire's poorer subjects to become more engaged and patriotic.²⁰ The emancipation process itself had

¹⁵ Gregory Freeze sees a direct line between military defeat and reform, but Daniel Fields contends that its impact was more subtle. Bruce Lincoln agrees with the latter, pointing out that the war did not appear much in the dialog about reform. He posits that a new generation of enlightened bureaucrats - a generation whose loyalty to the state eclipsed their social ties, who saw fundamental change as necessary, and who possessed the necessary technical knowledge - authored the reforms. See Gregory Freeze, "Reform and Counter-Reform, 1801-1855," in *Russia: a History*; Daniel Fields, *The End of Serfdom: Nobility and Bureaucracy in Russia, 1855-1861* (1976); and Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (1982).

¹⁶ Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: the Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy*, 17-19.

¹⁷ Edith Clowes, "Introduction," in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) 4.

¹⁸ Clowes, "Introduction," 7.

¹⁹ Nathaniel Knight, "Was the Intelligentsia Part of the Nation? Visions of Society in Post Emancipation Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 7:4 (Fall 2006) 735.

²⁰ See Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Stephen Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity, 1812-1945* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

accustomed many to formulating petitions and appealing directly to the authorities, and participation in zemstvos - new organs of local self-government - gave people from all-strata experience in administrative organization and planning.²¹ At the same time, improvements in technology enabled a nascent mass circulation press to blossom. In effect, the Great Reforms facilitated what Geyer aptly describes as "the politicization of society."²²

In this politicized environment, ideas about the Russian Empire - its nature, international role, and future - proliferated, and nationalist programs gained wide currency. Since the empire was multiethnic, nationalism often ran counter to state interests, fomenting separatism among minorities and discontent amongst ethnic Russians.²³ Nevertheless, many within the educated elite (*obshchestvo*) sponsored nation-building among the Slav and Orthodox peoples. At the time, Pan-Slavism, a movement that originated in the early 19th century, also became more nationalist and political in tenor. In its earliest iterations, it figured primarily as a cultural program whose advocates focused on demonstrating the shared ancestry of the Slavic peoples. In the words of Hans Kohn, Pan-Slavism initially promoted "the affinity of various peoples, in spite of differences of political citizenship and historical background, of civilization and religion, solely on the strength of an affinity of a language."²⁴

Among the Russian intelligentsia, Slavophiles were the first to seize on Pan-Slavism and transform it into a nationalist, political program. In their view, European secularism and materialism had corrupted civilization. The means of restoring it lay in Russia, in its peasantry

²¹ Peasants had their own forms of self-government (the mir and the volost), but they too nominated and sent representatives to the zemstvos.

²² Geyer, *Russian Imperialism*, 27.

²³ See Theodore Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863 -1914* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); and Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire : a Multiethnic History* (Harlow: Longman, 2001).

²⁴ See Frank Fadner, *Seventy Years of Pan-Slavism in Russia: Karazin to Danilevskii, 1800-1870*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1962); Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: its History and Ideology*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953); and Michael Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism, 1856-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

and their innate purity.²⁵ They acknowledged that Europe was technologically advanced, but, as Andrzej Walicki notes, they maintained that "what really counted was spiritual strength."²⁶ As they saw it, their task was to return the empire to its pre-Petrine Orthodox roots. The Crimean War shook their confidence, but some found an explanation for Russia's dramatic defeat in Pan-Slavism. According to renowned Slavophile, Fyodor Dostoevsky, civilization could only be purified once "Slavdom" had been united. That task, he argued, fell to Russia because "Slavdom as a whole, without Russia, would exhaust itself in struggling."²⁷ Only under the aegis of Russia could the Slavs rediscover their virtue and strength.

By the 1870s, Pan-Slavism had eclipsed Slavophilism in popularity, although it remained a marginal movement. The new generation, however, "had none of the religious interests of the older Slavophiles."²⁸ For them, Slavic strength lay less in the peasantry and Orthodoxy than in race and nationality. In *Russia and Europe*, Nikolai Danilevskii claimed that the world contained several "cultural-historical types" that stood in constant competition with each other, and that Slavs were the type destined to predominate.²⁹ Although many various, sometimes contradictory, forms of Pan-Slavism existed in Russia by the 1870s, this rendition was the most prevalent among military and state officials because it not only affirmed Russia's superiority, but also justified its territorial expansion at the expense of Germany, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire. If Russia had an obligation to unite the Slavs, then the regime had a legitimate reason to extend its borders and spheres of influence.

²⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, Translated by Kenneth Lantz (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993) 524-531.

²⁶ Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, Tr. by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)

²⁷ Dostoevsky, *Writer's Diary*, 524.

²⁸ Kohn, *Pan-Slavism*, 152.

²⁹ Robert MacMaster, *Danilevsky: a Russian Totalitarian Philosopher*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967) 181-186.

Nevertheless, tsarist foreign policy in the 1860s and early 1870s remained subordinate to domestic concerns. Many statesmen believed that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was imminent and hoped to claim a share of the spoils. Whoever controlled the Balkans would stand in the best position to achieve that end, and thus it remained central to Great Power plans. Yet ten years after the emancipation of the serfs, the Russian Empire's military and finances remained in disarray, and the aged Prince Gorchakov, the foreign minister, found very little room to maneuver in the international arena since the empire had focused all of its resources inward. As a result, Gorchakov could not do much to extend Russian influence in the Balkan principalities or reverse the Treaty of Paris. In Geyer's estimation, Gorchakov's policy in essence entailed, "appearing to be involved while planning for the future."³⁰

After German unification in 1871, Gorchakov's policy of restraint - known as *recueillement* - bore some fruit. The foreign minister pointed out that unification had made many articles of the Treaty obsolete and won international support for demilitarization of the Black Sea. Unfortunately, this modest victory did little to satisfy those with Pan-Slavist and nationalist agendas. Moreover, disillusionment with the Great Reforms had set in; radical movements, though they remained small, began to appear with more frequency. In the shifting political climate of the post-reform era, tsarist officials found it difficult to assuage growing dissatisfaction with the tsarist regime.

The Beginning of the Balkan Crisis, July 1875 - February 1876

When Herzegovinians rebelled against their Ottoman governors in the summer of 1875, Bosnians quickly followed suit. In the ensuing months, the Russian public reacted sluggishly. Outside official circles, newspapers did not initially dilate at great length on the Balkan revolts.

³⁰ Geyer, 66-67.

At first, editors were convinced that the revolts were a part of an Austro-Hungarian plot to trick the Russian Empire into a war it could little afford. In October, the Socialist newspaper *Vpered!* published a report from one of its correspondents in the region, which sought to clarify the situation. The rebellion, it claimed, was not a typical "revolutionary struggle," but rather an uprising of "slaves...against their eternal tyrants and implacable exploiters."³¹ Because Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants were among the rebels, it was not "a display of religious fanaticism," but rather a response to economic and administrative grievances.³²

Only when the autonomous principalities of Serbia and Montenegro began to edge toward war did the educated elite become convinced a substantive insurrection against Ottoman rule was underway in the Balkans.³³ During the winter of 1875 and the spring of 1876, interest in the South Slavs' struggle for liberation grew, and by March, every daily newspaper had a correspondent in Bosnia or Herzegovina.³⁴ Competing with each other for subscribers, editors expressed much sympathy for the South Slav struggle, but few agreed on what course the state should take. While the Pan-Slavist *Russkii Mir* advocated the liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the more popular *Golos*, which strove for unbiased reporting, merely called for internationally-sponsored reforms within Ottoman territories.³⁵

³¹ Historians of the Balkans concur with the report's assessment. See Frederick Anscombe, "The Balkan Revolutionary Age," *The Journal of Modern History* 84:3 (Sept. 2012) 572-60; and Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 1983.

³² Nevertheless, he encouraged his audience to support their efforts, asking "when the slave frees himself from oppressive landowners and military and judicial tyrants, is it not possible to say that it is a revolutionary and national war? Is this not a genuine socialist, revolutionary struggle, a struggle for political and, at the same time, economic liberation?" In his view, the revolts were simultaneously economic, political, national, and revolutionary. Over the course of the Balkan crises, most socialists nonetheless remained divided about what course to adopt. See "From Serbia," an anonymous correspondence in *Vpered!*, No. 54 in *Osvobozhdenie Bolgarii ot Turetskogo Iga*, Vol. I (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1961) 130-131.

³³ See MacKenzie, *The Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism*, 41-60.

³⁴ Secret Note from the Third Section, March 12, 1876, No. 90 in *Osvobozhdenie Bolgarii ot Turetskogo Iga*, Vol. I, 190. Hereafter cited as *OBoTI*.

³⁵ Unsurprisingly, as Louise McReynolds notes, most papers, tended to sacrifice strictly accurate reporting to the desire for profit – a tendency that made some quite effective in disseminating Pan-Slavist and nationalist ideas. See Louise McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime: the Development of a Mass-Circulation Press*

As public interest intensified, Aksakov and other Pan-Slavists began to see the Balkan crisis as an opportunity to advance the interests of Slavdom. Writing to V.A. Cherkasskii, the author of the 1870 municipal reforms and a disciple of the well-known Slavophile Mikhail Pogodin, Aksakov maintained:

The cup of patience is brim full so that the slightest drop will cause it to overflow. What then? Can Russia allow Austria to occupy Serbia with her armies? That would be the beginning of Russia's fall. So unless diplomacy can maintain the status quo, there will be thunder and lightning. Now it is very essential to excite public opinion here in Russia.

Here Aksakov expresses his fear that Austria would step in first when the crisis escalated. If that happened, he believed that Russia would not only lose its international position, but perforce relinquish its leadership of the Slavic peoples. In a letter to the editor of the *Russkii Mir*, General M.G. Cherniaev, Aksakov expanded on this point; by exciting public opinion, he hoped that he could incite "official Russian involvement" and thus secure Russia's future.³⁶

In the spring entry of his semi-annual thick-journal publication, *A Writer's Diary*, Dostoevsky also painted the Balkan crisis as an opportunity that the empire could not afford to miss.³⁷ Although state intervention in the affair would be costly, he reasoned that "Russia's best interest is precisely to act even against her interest if necessary; to make a sacrifice, so as not to violate justice." He warned that if Russia did not involve itself, it would "betray a great idea which has been her legacy from past centuries...one of the unity of all the Slavs." Though Dostoevsky adhered to a more religious iteration of Pan-Slavism than Aksakov, he seconded his conclusion that Russia must act if it was to fulfill its mission to liberate and lead the Slavs.³⁸

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

³⁶ See I. S. Aksakov to V.A. Cherkasskii, *Slavianskii Sbornik* (1876) 145. Translated in Durman, *Time of the Thunderer*, 165.

³⁷ In Imperial Russia, thick-journals were bi and semi-annual publications, which printed anything from op-ed pieces to poetry and book chapters. They were popular in Russia because censors did not look as carefully at longer journals as at shorter mediums.

³⁸ Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, 524.

With Aksakov at the helm, the Slavic Benevolent Committees elicited aid for the refugees uprooted by the revolts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. From its main branches in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev and Odessa, it organized an empire-wide fundraising campaign. Its directors lacked the means and the personnel to open all the new branches that they wanted, but found supporters among local notables to work as proxies.³⁹ Both the Red Cross, directed by the Tsarina Maria Alexandrovna, and Orthodox churches actively solicited donations.⁴⁰ By the spring of 1876, the Moscow branch alone had received 360,000 rubles.⁴¹ With those donations, the branches bought weapons for insurgents and sent volunteers to the rebelling provinces to provide medical and humanitarian services.

The results of the committee's efforts suggest that by the beginning of 1876 sympathy for the South Slavs was growing in Russian society. According to a memo issued in March by the Third Section, the secret police created by Nicholas I in 1825, the uprising in the Balkans had "more and more excited sympathy in our society [*obshchestvo*]."⁴² This development was most marked among the young intelligentsia, many of whom wished to go to Bosnia and Herzegovina and join the "liberation struggle." Nevertheless, participation in the Slavic campaign remained restricted to a limited stratum. By and large, the merchant class did not share the feelings of the young intelligentsia and refused to assist in fund-raising.⁴³

³⁹ See Aksakov, Speech to the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee in a Meeting, October 24, 1876, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii I.S. Aksakova*, Vol. I (Moscow 1886) 224-226.

⁴⁰ In his October speech, Aksakov claims that two-thirds of donations made between 1875 and October of 1876 came from the lower classes, but does not break down the source of contributions within each phase. So, the exact origin of donations made in 1875 is difficult to distinguish. According to MacKenzie and Nikitin, the Slavic Benevolent Committee reports are the only sources on donations made for the "Slavic cause" on the eve of the Russo-Turkish war. See Aksakov, Speech to the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee, 224-226.

⁴¹ Durman miscalculates this figure, stating that the Committee received 750,000 rubles from September to November of 1875. Aksakov lists this number - 750,000 - as the total amount collected by the Moscow Slavic Committee from the spring of 1875 through October 1876. All the committees and relief organizations together collected around 3 and a half million rubles during the Balkan crisis. Ibid, 228.

⁴² Secret Note from the Third Section, March 12, 1876, No. 90 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 190.

⁴³ The merchant estate typically included any urban dwellers (*meschane*) engaged in commercial activities, ranging from banking to peddling. The report here refers to the leading members of the merchant estate, those with moderate

Official Russia's response to the Balkan crisis was understandably measured. Still following Gorchakov's policy of *recueillement*, the regime focused on "isolating and quelling the unrest" through diplomatic mediation.⁴⁴ At Vevey near Lausanne, Gorchakov met with the Russian ambassador to London, Count Peter Shuvalov, to make the regime's conciliatory stance clear. There the foreign minister conveyed his and the tsar's "complete agreement" with the other Great Powers over "the settlement of the current difficulties in the East."⁴⁵ Once it became clear that the Ottomans could not effectively suppress the revolts, the Three Emperors League - Prussia, Austria, and Russia - arbitrated between the rebels and the Porte. By the end of December, all three agreed to the Andrassy note, which promised Bosnia and Herzegovina autonomy and religious and economic reforms in return for the cessation of violence. For the regime, neither the "current difficulties" on the ground nor public sympathy for the South Slav rebels proved sufficient to significantly alter the trajectory of Imperial foreign policy.

Nevertheless, the tsar and Gorchakov did not intend to abandon their long-standing commitment to their Balkan coreligionists. Although Gorchakov instructed his subordinates to act in concert with the other Great Powers, he reminded them that Russia had a "moral responsibility" in the Balkan Crisis. The regime insisted that the Ottomans must promise not to take any "sanguinary Turkish reprisals" and to improve the South Slavs' situation.⁴⁶ After the ratification of the Andrassy note in February, the tsar approved Serbian rearmament, while affirming his commitment to Great Power mediation.⁴⁷ In short, the tsar and Gorchakov backed

to high incomes. See Dispatch of the chief of the provincial gendarme of Riazan, A.I. Bordiugov, to the Third Department, July 31, 1876, No. 187 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 317.

⁴⁴ Geyer, *Russian Imperialism*, 68; Durman, *Time of the Thunderer*, 159-164.

⁴⁵ Shuvalov to Jomini, Oct. 2/14. 1875, in "Unpublished Documents: Russo- British Relations during the Eastern Crisis," Edited R. W. Seton Watson, *Slavonic Review*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (December 1924) 423-434.

⁴⁶ Shuvalov to Jomini Oct. 2/14, in *Slavonic Review*.

⁴⁷ MacKenzie, *The Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism*, 72.

joint efforts and, at the same time, reaffirmed Russia's position as protector of the Ottoman Empire's orthodox subjects.

The regime's treatment of the Slavic committees' efforts reflected its dual aims. Soon after the crisis erupted, the tsar had granted the Slavic committees permission to launch its fund-raising campaign. He even went so far as to direct the Ministry of the Interior to assist the committees in safeguarding and transporting donations.⁴⁸ A few months later, however, he curtailed the committees' efforts, forbade them from collecting funds in churches and near government offices, and directed the Ministry of the Interior to place them under surveillance. Aksakov had to file periodic reports with the Asiatic Department of the Foreign Ministry, which oversaw the empire's Balkan activities.⁴⁹ The Foreign Ministry did not want the Slavic campaign to sour relations with its allies or exceed state control. So long as society's efforts to "liberate" the Balkan Slavs did not undermine policy, the regime tolerated them.

Shoring up Russia's image as protector of the Slavs and working with the Great Powers abroad were compatible activities but, in practice, proved somewhat difficult to balance. When Serbia and Montenegro edged toward mobilization, Russian agents in the region did not know whether to facilitate or discourage war preparations. Before finalization of the Andrassy note, Russia's Serbian consul, A.N. Kartsov, visited St. Petersburg to convince Gorchakov that it was "a powerless palliative." Gorchakov evidently told him that "this [the note] is our program." In private, Gorchakov's assistant, Baron Jomini, chastised Kartsov for daring to question the foreign minister. At the end of this dressing down, Jomini reportedly asked, "What do you want? There

⁴⁸ Letter of the Vice-Director of the Asiatic Department A.A. Melnikov to the Chairman of the St. Petersburg chapter of the Slavic Committee I.P. Kornilov, August 25, 1875, No. 25 in *OBoTI.*, Vol. I, 88.

⁴⁹ For the best Russian study of the committees, see S.A. Nikitin, *Slavianskie komitety v Rossii v 1858-1876 godakh*, (Moscow: Moskovskogo universiteta, 1960) 276-280.

is no program."⁵⁰ This anecdote conveys the confusion that the regime's balancing act occasioned, but also involves hyperbole, intimating that regime's policies were more aimless than they were.⁵¹

Although the tsar's decisions in this period may seem contradictory, they followed a certain logic. The Porte had a reputation for double-dealing, and, until it carried out the reforms it had promised, Russia would not abandon the South Slavs. It would instead prepare for all eventualities. The regime sought to maintain its freedom of maneuver while awaiting further developments. The Russian Foreign Ministry preferred to work with the Great Powers, yet without abandoning its traditional sphere of influence in the Balkans. If the Andrassy Note failed, then Gorchakov could use Serbia and Montenegro to pressure the Porte into holding to its commitments.

Intensification of the Balkan Crisis and Pan-Slavist Movement, March - September 1876

After March, the crisis in the Balkans escalated quickly. Hoping to capitalize on continuing chaos in Bosnia and Herzegovina, émigré nationalists provoked an uprising in Bulgaria in April. Poorly conceived and executed, the revolt received little local support and proved no match for the Ottomans. Circassian irregulars sent in to mop up, however, massacred thousands of Bulgarian civilians, sparking international outrage. Within Serbia and Montenegro, such reprisals strengthened the belligerent camps and put the leadership on a war footing. The so-called "Bulgarian horrors" even endangered the Ottoman Empire's alliance with Britain, usually its staunchest defender. In a widely circulated pamphlet, William Gladstone castigated

⁵⁰ A.N. Kartsov, *Russkaia Starina*, Vol. 133 (1908) 276-280.

⁵¹ Written decades after the period, Kartsov's account contains numerous embellishments. Kartsov takes pains to present himself as a voice of reason during a time of crisis. MacKenzie and Durman portray his anecdote as proof of the Foreign Ministry's indecisiveness and paralysis, but, as this essay shows, that is not the only possible inference that one can draw from Kartsov's anecdote.

Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli for supporting the Porte and abandoning Britain's "duties, in regard to...the Christian subjects, of Turkey."⁵²

Following on the heels of this episode, General Cherniaev, a friend of Aksakov's and the owner of the Pan-Slavist *Russkii Mir*, left his post in Central Asia and secretly entered Belgrade to lead the Serbian army. Though the tsar forbade his journey to Serbia, the Slavic Committees supported it. Throughout Europe, statesmen read his presence in Belgrade as proof of Russian duplicity and questioned the tsar's stated commitment to joint Great Power mediation.⁵³ On May 13th, Gorchakov and Andr assy met in Berlin to diffuse the situation. Within a day, they had drawn up the Berlin Memorandum, which proposed a two-month cessation of fighting that would give the Porte time to enact the reforms that it had promised earlier. Almost all parties found its terms satisfactory, but it came to naught because Disraeli objected and convinced the Porte to denounce the whole Memorandum.⁵⁴ Frustrated by international inaction, pro-war agitation in Serbia and Montenegro reached its peak. To maintain their legitimacy, the princes of Serbia and Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire.

In the wake of these developments, Aksakov and the committees stepped up their campaign to incite official action. They continued collecting funds for Balkan rebels and refugees, but, after May, diverted most to Serbia and Montenegro.⁵⁵ As donations flooded in, the committees organized volunteer regiments that they funded and sent to Serbia to fight under

⁵² William Gladstone, "The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East" (London : J. Murray, 1876). Accessed through HathiTrust.

⁵³ The extent to which the Slavic Committees engineered and directed Cherniaev's appearance in Serbia is the subject of much dispute. Even though Cherniaev defied Alexander II's orders, he was somehow able to convince Serbian officials that he had government support.

⁵⁴ The term to which Disraeli objected most was Gorchakov's insistence that Russia had the right to intervene militarily in the Balkans if the Porte did not follow through on its promises during the armistice. See Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923*, 183-184.

⁵⁵ By late 1876, the committees had raised around 3,000,000 rubles. See Aksakov, *Sochineniia*, Vol. I, 226-229; and N.V. Tcharykov, *Glimpses of High Politics Through War and Peace, 1855-1929: the Autobiography of N.V. Tsharykow* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931) 92-93.

Cherniaev. Within a few months, they had dispatched approximately 5,000 volunteers to Serbia, many of whom were veterans or soldiers on leave from the regular army.⁵⁶ Through the Pan-Slavist movement, Aksakov hoped to not only aid the belligerents, but also to force the tsar's hand by giving Russia a greater stake in the outcome of the Balkan crisis.

To that effect, he and his supporters also sought to demonstrate that the Slavic Cause had united all strata of society and awakened the people (*narod*) to their duty to their co-religionists. In a widely-circulated speech, Aksakov devoted substantive space to illustrating the universality of support for committee activities.⁵⁷ "Even peasants," usually so ignorant, he claimed, begged to go to Serbia because they wanted "to help their brethren" and gave what little they could.⁵⁸ Amounting to two-thirds of the committees' intake, their donations were especially significant to Aksakov. They evinced, he concluded, the peasantry's growing awareness and endorsement of Russia's mission and thus "weighed, in the annals of history, heavier than a hundred gold coins."⁵⁹ Aksakov frequently used the "humble character" of donations as leverage to compel the state to take a more active stance. To the director of the Foreign Ministry's Asiatic Department, N.K. Giers, he alluded that all of Russia hoped the regime would take "drastic and favorable action" in the struggle, "being decided now not so much by diplomacy, as by Slavic arms."⁶⁰

As before, Dostoevsky corroborated Pan-Slavist propaganda. That summer, he marveled at the outpouring of feeling for the Balkan Slavs in his July installment of his popular *Diary of a*

⁵⁶ Only around 2,000 seem to have made it to Belgrade. Others took the money provided by the committees and then disappeared. See Nikitin, *Slavianskie komitety v Rossii v 1858-1876*, 319-21.

⁵⁷ He gave this speech in the fall, but was describing the committees' achievements during the preceding summer. See Aksakov, "Speech to the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee in a Meeting," 223-224.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ This is not the only possible (or even the most likely) inference to be drawn from the data, data that Aksakov himself provided. Unfortunately, scholars have no means of corroborating it. Aksakov may well have skewed the figures as he had a vested interest in demonstrating the universality of support for his cause. Third Section reports (which I cite later in this essay) suggest that some peasants only donated because their community leaders and priests instructed them to do so, not necessarily because they too wanted to compel Russia to intervene in the Balkan crisis. Ibid.

⁶⁰ Such vague allusions were typical of Aksakov. See Letter of I.S. Aksakov to N.K. Giers, September 1, 1876, No. 246 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 374-376.

Writer. He asserted that "the whole of the Russian land suddenly spoke up...the soldier, the merchant, the professor, the saintly old woman - they all spoke with one voice...for the Orthodox cause."⁶¹ For Dostoevsky as for Aksakov, the events of the summer were of historic significance because they illustrated that the Russian people had become unified and conscious of Russia's destiny.⁶² "The Slavic idea, in its highest sense," he stated, "has ceased to be only a matter for Slavophiles and has suddenly, as a result of the pressure of circumstances, entered the very heart of society."⁶³ Dostoevsky's interpretation of ongoing events lent weight to the committees' rhetoric at the time, but was secondhand because he spent the period vacationing in Ems, a resort town in Germany.⁶⁴

Private and official sources indicate there was some truth to Aksakov's and Dostoevsky's assertion that the Slavic cause had mobilized all strata of Russian society. In his private diary, the editor of the conservative daily *Grazhdanin*, Prince V. P. Mescherskii observed that "as the Serbs and Bulgarians shouted, we all, almost to a man, become passionate slavophiles and exclaimed: to arms, Russians!"⁶⁵ Women too seemed moved by the Balkan crisis. A daughter of a landowner volunteered as a nurse in Bosnia (against Dostoevsky's advice), and one midwife implored the Moscow committee to help her go to Serbia. She felt "it was a sin for a Russian woman to remain indifferent to the suffering of her brothers."⁶⁶ Even some who had been reluctant to aid

⁶¹He credited this awakening to the committees "energetic appeal[s] to the whole of Russia for aid to our insurrectionary brothers." Dostoevsky, "July and August 1876," in *A Writer's Diary*, 595-597.

⁶² *Ibid*, 598.

⁶³ Several daily newspapers adopted similar lines when calling for the liberation of the Slavs.⁶³ *Ibid*.

⁶⁴ His *Diary of a Writer* was the most widely read publication of its type that summer. Even Tsarevich Alexander requested a copy. See Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) 729.

⁶⁵ V.P. Mescherskii, *Moi vospominania*, 279.

⁶⁶ Application of midwife to the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee, July 1876, No. 190 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 319.

Bosnian and Herzegovinian refugees the previous year arranged collections to subsidize Russian volunteers in Serbia.⁶⁷

Expressions of Slavic solidarity throughout the empire in August attest to how widespread sympathy for the South Slavs became, especially in the cities. On August 27th, a crowd converged on a Moscow train station to see off a volunteer regiment leaving for Belgrade. During the day, the assembly grew so large that the governor-general, V. A. Dolgorukov, "commanded the police to operate as cautiously as possible."⁶⁸ So many swarmed the station that trains could neither arrive nor depart.⁶⁹ The gathering sang hymns, while committee agents took up "collections for the benefit of the Slavs." People of all ranks attended, and "ordinary women gave their aprons and headscarves to collectors...ashamed that they were unable to give more."⁷⁰ Similar episodes occurred in other provinces. To the Minister of the Interior, the governor of the Vyatka district reported that, on August 30th, leaders of the *volost* - a peasant assembly managing local affairs but under the supervision of the state - convened a general assembly during which they collected 6,121 rubles for the Slavic committees.⁷¹ At the height of the Slavic campaign initiated by a few members of educated society, support for the South Slavs did indeed come from many quarters.

Nevertheless, Pan-Slavists misread current events; the Slavic cause did not pit Russian society as a whole against the state. What some educated elites referred to as "society" was in

⁶⁷ Dispatch of the chief of the provincial gendarme of Riazan, A.I. Bordiugov, to the Third Department, July 31, 1876, No. 187 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 317; and Private Letter from Brother A. to P.A. Schmitz, August 29, 1879, No. 235 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 365.

⁶⁸ Letter from V.A. Dolgorukov to A. B. Lobanov-Rostovsky, August 28, 1876, No. 234 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 364-365.

⁶⁹ Apparently the crowd numbered was over 10,000 strong by the end of the day. See Letter from A. to P.A. Schmitz, August 29, 1876. No. 235 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 265.

⁷⁰ The author of this letter echoed Aksakov and Dostoevsky, marveling at the peoples' sympathy and concluding that the gathering on August 27th was "a genuine expression of the people's will." See Letter from A. to P.A. Schmitz, August 29, 1876, 265.

⁷¹ Letter from the governor of Vyatka, N. A. Trojnitskii, to A.E. Timashev, September 24, 1876, No. 282 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 423; and Letter of Priest P. Razumovskii to the Moscow Slavic Committee, No. 243 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 371.

fact an array of distinct groups whose views never aligned fully. Within the Slavic committees themselves, few agreed on tactics or aims. Aksakov wanted to force the state to intervene militarily and thus guarantee Russia's place as the leader of Slavdom and as a Great Power, but moderate liberals believed that they should use the Pan-Slavist fervor to demand domestic political reform. After sitting in on several committee meetings, an attaché to the Archives of the Foreign Ministry, N. V. Tcharykov, realized that, for some, the objective was not just the liberation of the Balkan Slavs, but of "Russia herself." According to liberals, the current crisis offered an opportunity to "shake off the yoke of an effete bureaucracy, which had become a barrier between the Tzar and his people" and replace it with a more representative regime.⁷²

While committee members debated the goals of the Pan-Slavist movement, other educated elites condemned it in its entirety. The aged liberal poet and friend of Pushkin, P.A. Viazemskii pointed out that Russia's limited finances made supporting the Slavic cause counter to Russian interests and warned that, "We set Russian blood in the background while Slavophilism comes first."⁷³ Writing in a similar vein, the Minister of State Assets, Peter Valuev claimed that "all rave about the South Slavs," but do not realize that they are "overcome by an apparition on a wall, and revering that apparition, do not reflect."⁷⁴ Both Viazemskii and Valuev criticized their contemporaries for getting swept up in a Pan-Slavist fever.

A censored, anonymous letter to the moderate newspaper *Golos* went further; it not only described the Pan-Slavist movement as a dangerous distraction, but also questioned its popularity and universality.⁷⁵ "The Russian people [narod] living in profound ignorance," it began, do not

⁷² N.V. Tcharykov, *Glimpses of High Politics*, 91-92.

⁷³ P.A. Viazemskii, Letter on the Balkan Crisis, 1876, No.39 in *A Source Book for Russian History: From Early Times to 1917*, Vol. III, Edited by George Vernadsky (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972) 629.

⁷⁴ P.A. Valuev, *Dnevnik*, 381.

⁷⁵ Like Viazemskii, the letter contended that Russia's priorities were out of order. He states: "Open subscription for better public education, - this is more expedient than assistance to the Slavs, which...do not love us because the weak

understand what is continually printed in the newspapers about the suffering of the Slavs. Although the press claims to represent "the will of the people [narod]," it argued, they can only speak to the attitudes of the educated elites [obshchestvo]. The letter urged the editor to "speak with a peasant...about the great Slavic Family - the muzhik will only stare blankly."⁷⁶ Within this letter, the tsar admitted, "There is much validity."⁷⁷ One of the literary greats of the era, Lev Tolstoy, also concurred with the letter's assessment. His last installment of *Anna Karenina* published in 1877 portrayed support for the Slavic cause as a passing trend among elites that did not touch the peasantry.

Though the letter was combative and polemical, surveillance reports by the Third Section bear out its observations.⁷⁸ Officials in most large cities attested to the sympathy of most estates for the Balkan Slavs, but those from the countryside and the empire's borderlands show that the strength of the Pan-Slavist movement varied from region to region. An assistant to the gendarme chief in Kherson in Ukraine, Major Orlovskii reported that "the events, which are occurring in the Balkan peninsula and hold an active interest for all educated society, did not arouse here political reactions."⁷⁹ Support for the Slavic cause also varied by estate. Chief of the gendarmes in Moscow, General Lieutenant I.L. Slezkin noted that it manifested most "in the

never love and will never love the strong. It is wrong to go to war...Be logical: if Russia in the time of the Polish rebellion had the right to request that others not intervene in her affairs, then the Turks can request the same! If you treat the Serbs with humanity, then also treat the Poles with humanity! See Censored letter signed "G-ov" to A.A. Kraevskii, August 5, 1876, No. 200 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 328

⁷⁶ Censored letter signed "G-ov," 328.

⁷⁷ Alexander II penned this comment in the margins of the manuscript. Ibid.

⁷⁸ I have given these reports greater weight in my analysis than the speeches and writings of the educated elite because the task of the gendarmes of the Third Section was to relate as accurately as possible the attitudes and behavior of people in the regions that they oversaw. They were the eyes and ears of the state, and their reports remained internal. As a result, contemporary discourse likely had very little influence on their content.

⁷⁹ He also noted that, "toward the disastrous situation of the Slavic family in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nikolaev [a city in the province] reacted with almost complete apathy." Since the report does not address why people in Kherson showed no interest in the Slavic question, it is hard to determine why they were so apathetic. It is possible that the new censorship laws imposed on Ukraine during the Balkan crises played a role, but Saunders asserts that support for the Slavic cause was probably even greater in Ukraine than in Moscow, an assertion not reflected by my findings. See The political survey of the assistant of the chief of the gendarmes of Kherson, Major Orlovskii, July 14, 1876, No. 123 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 246-247.

highest class, then in the clergy and in part among merchants." Sympathy was least evident among the peasants and in the country.⁸⁰ Such observations are significant because they indicate that late Imperial politics and political culture were more complex than Pan-Slavists acknowledged. Peoples' motivations for supporting the Slavic committees, if they did so at all, were not uniform, and none could rightly claim that the whole of Russia stood behind them. Their campaign to liberate the Balkans did not transform society into a discrete institution completely at odds with the state.

Against this backdrop, Russian officials tried to steer a middle course, maintaining their negotiations with the Great Powers while preparing for conflict. In a letter to Queen Victoria, Alexander II claimed that he felt that peace was in "the common interest of all the Great Powers," but expressed doubts that the powers would be able to stop "a conflict that will cause much bloodshed."⁸¹ With Serbia's and Montenegro's declaration of war, the Andrassy Note had become a dead letter. Gorchakov's senior counselor (and secretary) in the Foreign Ministry, Baron Alexander Jomini remarked that "the situation is bad," but hoped that the Great Powers would reach an accord.⁸²

The foreign minister directed all his efforts toward securing Russia's freedom of maneuver. On July 8th, his overtures to the Great Powers met with some success. Austria and Russia worked out a joint approach to the Balkan crises, an approach laid out in the Reichstadt Agreement. Both promised not to intervene immediately, but reserved the right to abandon

⁸⁰ Slezkina also observed that the educated elite were the strongest supporters of the Slavic cause because they understood the impact that aiding the Balkan insurrections would have on Russia's political position. See Dispatch of the chief of the gendarmes of Moscow, I. L. Slezkina, to N.V. Mezentsov, October 26, 1876, No. 328 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 466-467.

⁸¹ Tsar Alexander to Queen Victoria June 22/July 4, 1876, No. 69 in *SR* (March 1925).

⁸² A.G. Jomini to N.K. Giers May 28/June 9, 1876, in Barbara and Charles Jelavich, *Russia in the East, 1876-1880: the Russo-Turkish War and the Kuldja Crisis as Seen Through the Letters of A.G. Jomini to N.K. Giers* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959) 12.

neutrality if the situation changed.⁸³ On the one hand, if the Balkan principalities won, Austria promised to permit Serbia and Montenegro to extend their borders in exchange for Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁸⁴ On the other, if the Ottomans won, Austria agreed to step aside and allow the tsar to take whatever measures he considered necessary, military or otherwise. The Agreement did not, however, require Austria to assist Russia in the event of Serbian defeat.⁸⁵ This was significant because it meant that the Russian Empire might still find itself up against a Great Power coalition (sans Austria), a repeat of the Crimean War scenario - a possibility that limited Russian options later. At the time though, Gorchakov was fairly confident that Serbia and Montenegro would defeat the Ottomans and that official intervention in the Balkans would be unnecessary.⁸⁶

During the summer and fall of 1876, the Russian government followed the Reichstadt Agreement to the letter. Absorbed with internal reforms and growing radicalism at home, the tsar and his officials knew that cooperating with the other Great Powers was in the regime's best interest. Michael von Reutern, Russia's Minister of Finance, made it clear to Gorchakov and Alexander II that military mobilization would spell disaster for the Russian economy. Meanwhile, D.A. Miliutin, the Minister of War, painted a bleak picture of Russia's military readiness. He assured the tsar that the 1874 military reforms had taken root, but advised that Russia had not built enough railways yet to insure a speedy and efficient mobilization of the

⁸³ Sumner, *Russia and the Balkans*, 172-176.

⁸⁴ The exact redistribution of territory agreed was a point of controversy. The Austrian foreign minister Andrassy thought that Gorchakov had approved Austria's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in total, while Gorchakov insisted that he had only conceded northern Bosnia to Austria. Herzegovina was instead to receive Montenegro.

⁸⁵ This was another point that later proved controversial; Gorchakov believed that the Agreement secured Austrian diplomatic and military support, whereas Andrassy insisted that it only required Austrian neutrality.

⁸⁶ He believed this in part because Cherniaev's press reports exaggerated Serbian military readiness and understated the Serbian army's defeats. Immediately on his arrival in Belgrade, Cherniaev set up his own press corps, which effectively prevented newspaper correspondents from divining what was actually happening on the Serbian-Ottoman front.

army.⁸⁷ For those reasons, the regime took steps to keep the "Pan-Slav agitation" from getting out of hand, increasing censorship of the press. In the words of Jomini, it was "quite natural for the press of each country to exalt its own power," but in doing so it had to avoid damaging the "amour-propre of the others."⁸⁸

Though circumspect and cautious in their official capacities, the tsar and his ministers nevertheless were enmeshed in ongoing internal debates and became more sympathetic to the plight of the South Slavs. A less circumspect Jomini increasingly felt that the state's position was "morally very painful." He hypothesized that "if the Serbs, Montenegrins and Herzegovinians are crushed, neither Andrassy, nor the Germans, nor the Magyars nor Europe will lament too much. Still less can we count on their support to stop their [the Slavs] cruel execution." What Jomini feared most was that "we [Russians] will be alone, helpless, our prestige and our heart-felt sympathies suffering." He recognized that the press exacerbated such sentiments and thus encouraged the Ministry of the Interior "to muffle the élan over the Christian Slavs."⁸⁹ Even as Jomini empathized with the public, he and the other ministers sought to moderate public enthusiasm.

A similar ambivalence prevailed at the tsar's court. In his official capacity, the tsar supported joint efforts to end the uprisings in the Balkans, but in private, he countenanced and even at times aided Pan-Slavist efforts. According to the conservative Prince Mescherskii, the tsar permitted the Slavic Benevolent Committees to conduct collections at court. Upset by this, the English ambassador confronted Gorchakov, who insisted that the fund-raising was benign. He explained, "our sympathy is for the wounded, not for those fighting against the Turks."⁹⁰

⁸⁷ D. A. Miliutin, *Dnevnik*, Volume I, 47.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ A.G. Jomini to N.K Giers May 30/June 11, 1876" in Ibid, 13-15.

⁹⁰ Mescherskii, *Moi vospominania*, 280.

Although the foreign minister admitted that "the government tolerates" certain activities, he assured the ambassador that Russia "will not move a finger to benefit the Slavic rebels, and in this, as in everything will keep to the European concert."⁹¹

Gorchakov himself though related sentiments in private that revealed his own mixed feelings. After news reached the Foreign Ministry of Cherniaev's clandestine arrival in Belgrade in May, Gorchakov raged in public out of "legal form," but was not truly upset by Cherniaev's insubordination.⁹² The foreign minister believed that, if things came to war, the general would lead the Serbs more competently than their own officers. When Serbia declared war on the Ottoman Empire a month later, Jomini too expressed ambivalence towards official policy. He claimed that "...we have exerted all our efforts to pass this cup from us, even at great sacrifice of sentiments and prestige" and questioned the efficacy of Russia's pacifist stance.⁹³

A part of Russian society, tsarist officials shared many of the attitudes and sentiments of those around them even as they sought to defend the empire's interests abroad. In the months following Serbia and Montenegro's declaration of war, what the tsar and his ministers believed to be the best course for the Russian Empire changed somewhat. Though their views did not align with those in the Pan-Slavist and nationalist camps, they came to believe that the empire's honor and prestige might require unilateral action. At the start of the summer, they had been firmly convinced that the opposite was the case. The intensification of fighting in Ottoman Europe and the flowering of a Pan-Slavist discourse at home altered officials' perceptions and shifted the regime's priorities. Although policy and public opinion diverged initially, broader cultural shifts gradually aligned state and society, never discrete entities in complete isolation to begin with.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² A.G. Jomini to N.K. Giers May 14/26, 1876, in Jelavich, *Russia in the East*, 9-10.

⁹³ A.G. Jomini to N.K. Giers June 12/24, 1876, in Ibid, 17-18

The Road to War, September 1876 - March 1877

Serbian defeats crushed Russian officials' hopes that the Balkan principalities would emerge victorious and render further steps unnecessary.⁹⁴ In August, Serbia asked Russia to arrange an armistice with the Ottomans. As before, the tsar and his ministers tried to cooperate with the other Great Powers. To Russia's agent in England, P.A. Shuvalov, Gorchakov explained that only a swift multilateral response could salvage the situation in the Balkans, "to stop the bloodshed which otherwise would flow freely." "Given the urgency of the situation," the foreign minister advised, "to avoid a meeting would supplement inevitable delays in diplomatic correspondence and detract from the authority and effectiveness of European action."⁹⁵

It took months, however, to work out the armistice, months punctuated by painful Serbian losses. Alexander II wrote personally to the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph to facilitate negotiations. Emphasizing the severity of the crisis, he pointed out that, "The blood flows, fanaticism has been lit, passions unleashed." The tsar maintained that "if Europe is united, she will be able to impose a solution, " and reminded Francis Joseph that "our two countries" have a direct interest in the Balkans and cannot "rest indifferently." For these reasons, he urged his Austrian counterpart to "work energetically to establish a European concert, first to get a real and immediate armistice...to jointly seek the proper conditions for a lasting peace."⁹⁶

As this shows, the tsar and his ministers remained committed to a joint solution during the first month following Serbia's request. Sticking to this approach, the Russian Foreign Ministry was able to secure a cease-fire between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire. Shortly thereafter though, the war party in Istanbul replaced the moderate sultan Murad V with his less

⁹⁴ In contrast, Montenegro successfully fended off the Turkish troops sent to bring them in line and did not require the same assistance as Serbia.

⁹⁵ Gorchakov to Shuvalov, August 14/27, No. 69 in *SR* (June 1925) 182-183.

⁹⁶ Tsar to Francis Joseph, September 11/23, No. 79 in *SR* (June 1925), 187-189.

tractable brother, Abdulhamid II.⁹⁷ With the support of the British, the latter blocked efforts to translate the cease-fire into a permanent solution. He insisted on punishing the Serbs for their insubordination, and fighting resumed as a result.

Enmeshed in Pan-Slavist debates, the tsar and his ministers became less willing to accept "a bastard solution...offensive to our national sentiment."⁹⁸ Like other educated elites, they increasingly connected Russian honor to the resolution of the Balkan crisis. With his typical flair, Jomini lamented that the Empire was "at an impasse between war by us alone and a plunge in our dignity and prestige."⁹⁹ Although adopting a more measured tone, Gorchakov too indicated that Russian honor depended on solving the Balkan conflict. He claimed that "as long as Europe is not united on a moderate program, and with positive guaranties and energetic pressure, it will get nothing from the Turks...we would like to avoid isolated action, but we cannot align ourselves with a collective action that lacks dignity, honesty, and efficacy."¹⁰⁰ Influenced by contemporary cultural shifts, the tsarist regime came to the conclusion that war might be necessary to protect Russian interests.

As Russian intervention in the Balkans became more likely, officials tried to get a better read on public opinion. On October 22nd, the head of the Third Section, N. V. Mezentsov asked his gendarme chiefs to report their "personal observations" on the degree to which each estate displayed "sympathy for the suffering Slavs." He also directed them to assess the willingness of each to make personal and material sacrifices in the event of Russia's military intervention in the

⁹⁷ This was in fact the second coup in the Ottoman Empire that year. Murad V had only been in power since May of 1876, thus reigning for less than a hundred days.

⁹⁸ A.G. Jomini to N.K. Giers August 25, 1876, in Jelavich, *Russia in the East*, 22-23.

⁹⁹ With this Jomini revealed that his thinking had undergone a marked transformation. In June and July, Jomini distanced himself from public enthusiasm for the Slavic cause and urged Giers to moderate the press, but in August, he unequivocally aligned himself with "national sentiment." See A.G. Jomini to N.K. Giers August 23, 1876, in Jelavich, *Russia in the East*, 21-22.

¹⁰⁰ Gorchakov to Shuvalov, September 21/30, No. 84 in *SR* (June 1925) 191-192.

Balkans.¹⁰¹ Mezentsov's instructions demonstrate the extent to which officials' perceptions and priorities shifted over the course of the fall. Initially the tsar and his ministers believed that war would undermine Russian honor and prestige, but gradually they concluded that Russia's Slavic duty might require just such a move.

Third Section reports revealed to the regime that the Russian educated elite (*obshchestvo*) remained profoundly divided on the Balkan crisis and how the state should respond. Some called on the tsar to intervene, but others advocated a diplomatic approach. The gendarme officer in Simbirsk in the Volga, P.M. Bradke, noted that "in society, it is often asked: why, in view of the brutality of the Turks, will Russia not declare war?"¹⁰² The gendarme chief in St. Petersburg, N.S. Virin, recorded similar complaints. Some people, he noted, believe that "diplomatic conversations will lead to nothing, and that it is necessary to beat the Turk and banish him from Europe."¹⁰³ He observed further that, though some were "absolutely thirsty for war," others "defend[ed] diplomatic discussions, trusting completely...that it [the government] will do everything to keep Russian honor unblemished and achieve by discussions, without shedding blood, the liberation of the Christians of the Balkan peninsula."¹⁰⁴

Among most estates, the likelihood of war substantively reduced support for the Slavic cause. Anxiety about what conflict between Russia and the Ottoman Empire might entail eclipsed the sympathy merchants, townspeople, and peasants initially felt for their suffering "coreligionists."¹⁰⁵ The gendarme chief in Pskov, A. V. Komarov, observed that, "from the first of October, suddenly, a cooling of interest in the Slavic people [narod] occurred...as the

¹⁰¹ Circular of N.V. Mezentsov to the chiefs of the provincial gendarmes, October 22, 1876, No. 320 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 459-460.

¹⁰² Dispatch of chief gendarme of Simbirsk province, P.M. Bradke, September 1, 1876, No. 241 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 370.

¹⁰³ Dispatch of chief gendarme of St. Petersburg district, N.S. Virin, October 25, No. 325 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 463.

¹⁰⁴ Dispatch of chief gendarme of St. Petersburg, 463.

¹⁰⁵ Dispatch of the chief of the Yaroslavl gendarmerie Kajanzkii to Mezentsov, November 3, 1876, No. 343 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 485-487.

possibility of war with Turkey and England moved to the fore."¹⁰⁶ Declining sympathy for the Slavic cause stemmed mainly from material concerns raised by the specter of war. "All," Komarov noted, "from the simple peasants to the higher classes of the province, are conscious that war is one of the greatest of national calamities."¹⁰⁷ Talk of conscription and the activities of military agents exacerbated the people's "anxious suspense," inciting rumors. Some peasants became convinced that the state would force them "to give up horses free of charge."¹⁰⁸ The "fashion for sympathy" passed as people began to focus on the economic ramifications of conflict.¹⁰⁹

The array of responses to Mezentsov's circular illustrate the complexity of late Imperial society and political culture. The social solidarity that the Balkan crisis had engendered the previous summer did not last long. More individuals in late Imperial society were politically engaged, but they did not form a distinct civil society unified or strong enough to commandeer Russian policy. At no point did officials ever suggest that public opinion had become so voracious that they had to cater to its demands. Still they were not immune to, but a part of, developments around them. The regime's determination to act stemmed from cultural shifts hard to discern and difficult to recapture.

Even as popular support for the Slavic cause waned, the tsar and his ministers became more committed to action. From their reflections, it becomes clear that Pan-Slavist rhetoric increasingly informed their perceptions and policies. The ever cautious Gorchakov observed that "the national and Christian sentiment of Russia...impose on the Emperor duties which his

¹⁰⁶ Dispatch of A.V. Komarov to N.V. Mezentsov, October 26, 1876, No. 330 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 468.

¹⁰⁷ Dispatch of A.V. Komarov, 469.

¹⁰⁸ Report of A.V. Komarov to N.V. Mezentsov, October 1, 1876, No. 296 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I, 437.

¹⁰⁹ Report of A.V. Komarov, 437.

majesty cannot shirk."¹¹⁰ Contemporary discourse effectively redefined the emperor's "duties" and thus the requirements of Russian honor. Officials came to see saving the Balkan Slavs as essential to preserving the Russian Empire's future. Society did not direct their actions, but rather shaped their understanding and priorities.

The tsar reached the decision to intervene in the Balkan crisis in October at Livadia, while immersed in a court with strong sympathies for the South Slavs. In Jomini's view, the court at Livadia was so caught up in international affairs it "smelled of gunpowder."¹¹¹ According to A.F. Hamburger, a member of Gorchakov's staff, "no one is able to work regularly...we cannot write, telegraph, we are [so] agitated."¹¹² At the outset of the Livadia meetings, many argued for Russian intervention and few against. The Finance Minister reminded that Russia could not bear the economic burden of war, but even the moderate Miliutin believed the situation required action.¹¹³ Jomini declared that, "the Rubicon has been crossed...the Emperor is very decided," while Gorchakov admitted that Russia could no longer content itself with "sterile sentences for the amelioration of the condition of the Christians" and that it would "act alone if necessary."¹¹⁴

When news came that the Ottomans captured the fortress of Djunis on October 29th, the tsar and his advisors proved firm in their resolve. Without consulting the other Great Powers, they issued the Porte an ultimatum. If Abdulhamid II did not halt the Ottoman advance within twenty four hours, the foreign minister insisted, Russia would declare war and recall its ambassador, N.P. Ignatiev, from Istanbul. Jomini wrote to Giers that "the die has been cast."

¹¹⁰ Of course, Gorchakov goes even further here, suggesting that the Balkan crisis is one that all of "civilized Europe" must address. See Gorchakov to Shuvalov, October 22/November 3, No. 91 in *SR* (June 1925) 194-195.

¹¹¹ A.G. Jomini to N.K. Giers September 12, 1876, in Jelavich, *Russia in the East*, 27.

¹¹² A.F. Hamburger to N.K. Giers, September 21/October 3, 1876, in *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Miliutin, *Dnevnik*, Vol. II, 87.

¹¹⁴ A.G. Jomini to N.K. Giers October 5/17, 1876, in Jelavich, *Russia in the East*, 27; Gorchakov to Giers, October 5/17, 1876, in *Ibid.*

Even if the Turks accept the ultimatum, he concluded, Russia would push forward and not "waste time in needless negotiation."¹¹⁵ That same day, the foreign minister affirmed Jomini's observations, noting that "the Emperor is perfectly resolute and we will not flinch."¹¹⁶

At the urging of the British, the Turks accepted the ultimatum on November 2nd and agreed to discuss an armistice at a conference in Istanbul in early December.¹¹⁷ On November 11, Alexander II gave a speech to the Moscow gentry conveying his firm resolve to act "independently" if the conference did not serve Russian interests. In his view, Russia's future depended on the fate of the Balkan Slavs.¹¹⁸ Russian mobilization began two days later on November 13th, committing the Empire to action if the Porte did not cooperate.¹¹⁹ Until all belligerent parties reached an agreement acceptable to Russian prestige and honor, the tsar would keep the Empire on a war footing, giving Russian demands teeth.

Over the following months, the regime persisted in the course that it had adopted in late October at Livadia, refusing to demobilize its forces until the Ottomans backed down. At the outset of the conference in Istanbul, the foreign minister called for a return to the status quo ante in Serbia.¹²⁰ If the Porte refused this demand, Gorchakov insisted, Russia would have to follow through on its war threats.¹²¹ Britain agreed to back this moderate program. However, the Ottomans again resisted Great Power mediation. On December 23rd, the Grand Vizier, Midhat Pasha, announced a new constitution guaranteeing the civil equality of all Ottoman subjects, Christian and Muslim alike.¹²² In Midhat Pasha's view, this constitution made Great Power

¹¹⁵ Jomini to Giers October 19/31, 1876, in *Ibid*, 34.

¹¹⁶ Gorchakov to Giers, October 19/31, 1876, in *Ibid*.

¹¹⁷ The ultimatum only extended to January 1877, but effectively ended the Serbian-Ottoman War. See Geyer, *Russian Imperialism*, 74; MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism*, 152.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in translation in Durman, *Time of the Thunderer*, 194-195.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*.

¹²¹ "Ignatiev to Shuvalov, December 3/15, 1876," No. 140 in *Ibid*, 453.

¹²² Durman, *Time of the Thunderer*, 199.

action unnecessary. Though conference delegates rejected this logic, they were unable to alter the Ottomans' stance, and the conference ended in late January, its purpose unfulfilled.

At the same time, public enthusiasm for the Slavic cause continued to wane in the Russian Empire.¹²³ Fears of wartime deprivation in fact almost completely extinguished general sympathy for the suffering South Slavs. At his estate in Smolensk, the populist landowner Alexander Engelgardt observed that peasants only remained interested in the Balkan crisis during the winter because it "touched on their immediate interests." It was they, he reminded, that would bear "the entire burden" of a war.¹²⁴ One woman whose husband, a retired cavalry officer, had been recalled to the army expressed to Engelgardt the hope that peace would somehow be preserved.¹²⁵

Visible decline in public support for official intervention in the Balkan crisis had little effect on the regime's stance. Because the ministers had become convinced the empire's interests were at stake, they were unwilling to accept any "palliatives, half measures, [or] illusory programs." The tsar met with his ministers in February in St. Petersburg to reaffirm their approach. They acknowledged that, "internally and economically, 'Russia is in such a phase that any external entanglement may lead to a prolonged disruption in the state organism.'" Nevertheless, Miliutin pointed out that "a retreat before Turkish obstinacy could turn into a long term plague for the Empire, injuring its dignity and material interests, perhaps up to the point where the last remnants of our influence in the Balkan peninsula are uprooted." He concluded that Russia needed peace, but not "peace at any price."¹²⁶ With this statement, the tsar heartily

¹²³ For evidence of the waning of public support for the Slavic Cause, see No.s 320, 325, 329, 343, and 350 in *OBoTI*, Vol. I. These are gendarme reports summing up the mood in the cities and provinces.

¹²⁴ See Alexander Engelgardt, *Iz Derevni, 1872-1887* (St. Petersburg, 1897) 330.

¹²⁵ This anecdote is one of a series of Engelgardt's observations about the effect of the Russo-Turkish War on women, who were left with no means of supporting themselves. The majority of his letter is in fact devoted to this task and the description of the government's requisitions on horses. Engelgardt, *Iz Derevni*, 145.

¹²⁶ Translated by Durman in *Time of the Thunderer*. For the original, see *Osobyie Pribavlenia*, Vol. 6.

agreed, claiming that "there are moments in the life of states and individuals when it is imperative to forget everything save the defense of honor."¹²⁷

Even as the conference in Istanbul limped on, the Foreign Ministry had been preparing in case negotiations failed. If Russia did have to intervene militarily in the Balkans, the ministers wanted to guarantee that none of the other Great Powers would step in as they had in the Crimean War. To that effect, Gorchakov began secret negotiations with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which resulted in the Budapest Conventions. Signed in January and March 1877, these reiterated the arrangements laid out in the Reichstadt Agreement of the previous summer; the Austro-Hungarian Empire promised to remain neutral in the event of a Russo-Turkish war in exchange for the right to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Still wary of British intentions, the foreign minister worked with England to devise a final set of demands to send the Ottoman Empire in the spring of 1877. These demands, the London Protocols, were similar to the terms laid out by Ignatiev at Istanbul. They differed on only one point: demobilization. Russia promised to demobilize its troops only after the Ottoman Empire did so because, as Shuvalov stated, "our national honor and dignity will not allow us to be placed on equal footing with the Turks."¹²⁸ Even though the Russian public no longer pressured the regime to act, the tsar and his ministers clearly remained committed to the course they had set the previous year. The shift in officials' thinking that had occurred in the fall - a shift prompted by ties and cultural exchange with the society - held fast. For the regime, Russian prestige had become inexplicably tied to the resolution of the Balkan crisis. Thus, when the Porte refused the London Protocols in the spring, Alexander II declared war on the Ottoman Empire.

¹²⁷ See No. 164 in *Rossii i natsional'no-osvoboditel'naia bor'ba na Balkanakh, 1875-1878: Sbornik Dokumentov* (Moscow: Academia NAUK SSSR, 1978).*

¹²⁸ Shuvalov to Gorchakov, March 10/22, 1876, in *SR* (March 1926) 757-759.

Conclusion: War, April 1877

On April 24, 1877, Alexander issued his war manifesto from army headquarters. In it, he stated that "all our faithful and beloved subjects know the lively interest we have always devoted to the destinies of the oppressed Christian population of Turkey. Our desire to ameliorate and guarantee their condition has been shared by the whole Russian nation which shows itself ready today to make fresh sacrifices to relive the condition of the Christians in the Balkan Peninsula."¹²⁹ Pan-Slavists responded enthusiastically.

They read the tsar's declaration as a personal triumph. Led by the Slavic committees and an increasingly nationalist press, society had, they concluded, forced the government to act. Reflecting on the period, Dostoevsky himself stated that "it is the people themselves who rose to go to war."¹³⁰ In his speech to the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee that spring, Aksakov likewise asserted that society had seized the reins of the state.¹³¹ Yet a great disparity existed between what Pan-Slavists claimed about the origins of the Russo-Turkish War and what had actually occurred.

On the one hand, the pan-slavist movement was not nearly as popular as its advocates indicated. Even though much of the public contributed to the activities of the Slavic Benevolent Committees, they did not necessarily share their goals and sensibilities. Russian society did not speak with one voice, but many. On the other, no direct link existed between sympathy for the Slavic cause and the state's decision to go to war in April of 1877. State and society in late Imperial Russia were not fundamentally opposed, but joined by various associations and beliefs. Never entirely discrete entities, the interaction of the two effectively redefined official priorities,

¹²⁹ "Manifesto of War Against Turkey, April 12/24, 1877," in *A Source Book for Russian History: From Early Times to 1917*, Vol II, ed. George Vernadsky, 629-630 (New Haven: Yale University, 1972).

¹³⁰ Dostoevsky, "April 1877," in *A Writer's Diary*, 929.

¹³¹ Aksakov, Speech to the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee in a Meeting, October 24/ November 6, 1876.

making the tsar and his ministers more willing to break with the Great Powers than they hitherto had been.

Ultimately, the unfolding of the Balkan crisis from 1875-1877 matters because it offers a window through which to glimpse the complex processes underlying official decision-making, processes that contemporary rhetoric clouded. It also reveals that scholars obscure more than they reveal by viewing late Imperial Russian politics and political culture in dualistic terms. To fully understand the era, scholars must look at their subjects - the elite and the common, state and society, the domestic and the international - together, mapping out both the ties that bind and the rifts that divide them.

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