

Research Report

The topic of my dissertation is Ottoman-Russian relations from 1908 to 1922. I conducted research at the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (*Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii*), the Russian State Military History Archive (*Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voенno-Istoricheskii Arkhiv*), the Russian State Military Archive (*Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voенnyi Arkhiv*), the library of the Institute of the Countries of Asia and Africa (*Institut Stran Azii i Afriki*) the Russian State Historical Library (*Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia Istoricheskaia Biblioteka*).

The dissertation examines the sources and evolution of both Ottoman and Russian policies. On the Ottoman side, the central question is to what extent, if any, was Panislam and Panturkism exerted on Ottoman policies toward Russia and the Caucasus. The existing literature incorrectly puts great explanatory weight on these ideologies. Hence, a central concern of the dissertation will be to refute this explanation and demonstrate that Ottoman policies were driven more by traditional concerns of great power politics. The bulk of evidence for this hypothesis, of course, I found in the Ottoman archives, but what I found in the Russian archives illuminates important aspects of how the Ottomans pursued their policies. For example, the Russian archival materials I found document how the Ottomans used their consulates inside Russia and Russian-occupied Iran as well as itinerant preachers to propagate Panislamic propaganda with varying degrees of success (Panturkism, despite the vivid fears of Russian officialdom, was rarely propagated by the Ottomans). Notably, however, the Russian materials reveal that the Ottomans also backed non-Muslim Georgian, Ukrainian, and even Greek and Armenian separatists before and during WWI. Such backing took the form of money, arms, and the provision of sanctuary in Ottoman diplomatic posts

On the Russian side, my research enabled me to get a fuller picture of the nature of Russian policy toward the Ottomans. The archival material leaves no doubt that Russian policy was innately aggressive, contrary to what some earlier studies have suggested. That aggressiveness is reflected not only in the stated intentions of Russian statesmen, but also in the actions they authorized. The Russian foreign policy establishment never questioned whether Russia would seize the Black Sea straits and Eastern Anatolia. The only question was when. A combination of security concerns and an inherent sense of imperial destiny motivated Russian policy. Russian officials viewed seizure of the straits as a way to protect Russia from outside, especially British, attacks. Possession of Eastern Anatolia, they believed, would help secure Russia's vulnerable borders, and enable Russia to project its influence throughout the Middle East.

In order to gain control of Eastern Anatolia, Russia pursued a comprehensive Kurdish policy that involved wooing Kurdish tribal leaders, providing arms, money and diplomatic sanctuary to Kurdish separatists, and even establishing with Kurdish leaders a Kurdish school in Iran where Russian language and literature was taught. Russian academics were tasked with standardizing the Kurdish language and adapting the Cyrillic alphabet for it. By backing and inciting various Kurds to rebellion, the Russians aimed to accomplish two interrelated goals. The first was to weaken Ottoman control of the region and stimulate enough anarchy and attacks on Christian Armenians and Nestorians to justify undertaking an immediate and unilateral "humanitarian intervention." To this end, it used its consulates as centers for subversion. Then, with Russia in control of the region, the Kurds could be used to check the national

aspirations of their rivals, the Armenians, and thereby maintain an ethno-political equilibrium in Russia's favor.

Russia's policies in Eastern Anatolia were sophisticated, and not lacking in cynicism. Most obviously, while Russia was preparing to challenge the cause of Ottoman Armenians it was intentionally backing Kurdish revolts that endangered those same Armenians. And at the same time that it encouraged Kurdish leaders to entertain projects of a Kurdish political unit under Russian suzerainty, its own analysts warned of the Kurdish tribes inherent 'immaturity' for any sort of unified or centralized political unit. After the outbreak of World War I, the ongoing enmity between Kurds and Armenians were played out in the Russian bureaucracy. Kurdophile and Armenophile Russian officials lobbied for their respective constituents to the point that both resorted to rumors, innuendo, and even frame-ups to discredit each other.

Another largely unexpected discovery I made was of the relatively high quality of Bolshevik intelligence on the North Caucasus in 1921 and 1922. The Bolsheviks were quite aware of and well-informed about the various cleavages in North Caucasian society, and often turned these cleavages to their advantage. At the same time, their own agents noted that the excesses of Bolshevik forces, and especially of the Cheka, did much to foster resistance and anti-Russian feeling among the mountaineers. This material, which coheres with my discoveries in the Ottoman sources, will allow me to make a more sophisticated portrayal of the Bolshevik subjugation of the North Caucasus. Existing analyses misleadingly portray a united and religiously inspired North Caucasian resistance crushed by sheer overwhelming Bolshevik force.

Due to the research I was able to conduct in the Russian archives, I will be able to put together a much more convincing analysis of the goals, methods, and execution of both Ottoman and Russian foreign policy. This research force a revision not only of our understanding of the policies of these two entities, but also of our conceptualization of such broader questions such as the emergence of nationalism, the sources of ethnic conflict, and the pursuit of foreign policy.

Although this research was not driven by immediate questions of policy relevance, I can think of at least three implications of it for policy-making and analysis. The first is that it challenges the interpretation that Russia's relations with Muslims are innately troubled, the legacy of a historical relationship defined almost wholly by severe oppression and bitter resistance. This interpretation, heavily informed by the émigré opponents of Russian expansion, is all too common among policy makers and analysts as well as journalists. Its popularity perhaps stems from British and American historiographies which have been concerned with the question of Russia's expansion. While there is indeed a great deal of validity to such an interpretation, it overlooks the existence at times of genuinely pro-Russian sympathies among certain groups of Muslims, and of more constant divisions among those same groups of Muslims. A policy maker better informed of the history of Russia's relations with the North Caucasus, for example, might not be surprised by the failure of the war in Chechnya to spread, or by the loyalty or sympathy for Russia sometimes expressed by some North Caucasians and Central Asians.

Closely related to the first is a second implication regarding the potential of Panislam as a revolutionary force. Despite the very enthusiastic backing of the Germans (who were perhaps more enthusiastic than the Ottomans of the political potential of Panislam), the Ottoman effort to exploit religious sentiment in the form of a *jihad* of all Muslims and led by the Ottoman Caliph was only partially successful. In places where significant anti-Russian sentiment already existed, such as among the Kurds of Northern Iran and among the Chechens and Daghestanis, it met with some success. But in areas where that hostility was not already present and rooted, the notion

of Panislam found no resonance. Indeed the Russians as well as the British even succeeded in attracting some Muslim groups in their campaigns against the Ottomans.

A third implication of my research suggests that policy makers and analysts should not be so impressed with the alleged originality of the concept of “humanitarian intervention,” sometimes assumed to be a uniquely American and innovation at the end of the twentieth century. The concept was very much in existence already at the beginning of the century, and the great powers, the “international community” of their day, accepted it as a legitimate principle for the conduct of foreign policy. Such acceptance, of course, did not mean that those powers surrendered their particular interests to a greater “humanitarian”. Indeed, Russian sources show that Russia was willing to aggravate artificially the local conflicts in Eastern Anatolia to justify its planned annexation of the region.

During the course of my research many questions for future research occurred to me. The Imperial Russian and Ottoman paradoxical practice of backing nationalist separatist movements warrants further investigation. Here are two multinational, multiethnic empires that, despite their own perceptions of the grave danger of ethno-national separatism, nonetheless back ethno-nationalist movements in their bids to expand and/or improve their security. Hence one agenda worth research might be the seemingly self-destructive practice of states, and of empires especially, to attempt to harness forces that threaten their own existence for short-term gain.

Another suggested by the same episodes relates to the use of covert operations in international relations. In their struggle for control over Eastern Anatolia and Iran before World War I, both the Ottomans and the Russians ran sophisticated covert operations involving such methods as: the use of trade missions as cover to make contact with and supply armed insurgent groups in peacetime; the use of consulates as centers for subversion; the targeting and exploitation of ethnic and religious cleavages, including the study of such cleavages; and the peacetime infiltration of military personnel in disguise to carry out acts of sabotage and provocation. Hence one topic that would be best approached in a comparative manner would be the rise of institutionalized state intelligence organizations and the use systematic use of covert operations. Is this a largely universal process inherent to the centralization and expansion of the capacities of modern states? Or is it the product of the peculiar circumstances of the Ottoman and Russian empires -- both land-based imperial dynasties ruling over restive and large multi-ethnic polities and increasingly compelled to hold their state structures together in the face of severe internal and external challenges? A similar comparative examination of domestic intelligence and police institutions would also answer many important questions and point to new conceptualizations of state development.