

**THE PROGRESS AND
PRESENT POSITION OF
RUSSIA IN THE EAST: AN
HISTORICAL SUMMARY**

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The Progress and Present Position of Russia in the East: An Historical Summary by Sir John McNeill

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P R E F A C E

TO THE THIRD EDITION.

THIS attempt to show that the history of Russia unequivocally indicates the character and objects of her policy was first published in 1836, and a second edition was called for in 1838. The progress and position of Russia in the East is now, as it was then, the most anxious subject of consideration to every cabinet in Europe, and the course she has pursued in the interval is so closely in accordance with the views attributed to her seventeen years ago, that the justice of the inferences then drawn from her past proceedings may now perhaps be admitted. The future prospects of Europe appear at present to depend, in a great measure, upon a just appreciation of the position and policy of Russia; and it is therefore thought proper to reproduce this contribution to the elucidation of the truth, and to carry down to the present time the historical summary of the proceedings that verify the anticipations announced in 1836.

For one hundred and sixty years Russia has steadily kept in view the objects of ambition in the East first contemplated by Peter I., and bequeathed by him to his successors. These were, to raise Russia upon the ruins of Turkey—to obtain exclusive possession of the

Caspian and the Black Sea, with the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles—to extend her dominions beyond the Caucasus—to domineer in Persia with a view to open the road to India; and history perhaps furnishes no other example of equal pertinacity in prosecuting, *per fas et nefas*, a predetermined course of aggrandizement. Her crown has frequently been transferred, by open violence or by secret crime, from one head or one family to another, but each successive sovereign, with hardly an exception, has made some progress towards the attainment of those objects, and she continues to prosecute them with unabated avidity.

Her caution has hitherto been equal to her pertinacity. She has never pushed her successes in the East so far as to involve her in a contest with any of the great powers of Europe; but as soon as that danger appeared to be imminent she has suspended her progress, always claiming, and often receiving, credit for her magnanimity and moderation while she was abiding a more favourable opportunity again to advance.

Not less remarkable than her pertinacity and caution has been the uniformity of the means by which her acquisitions have been obtained. The process has almost been reduced to a regular formula.—It invariably commences with disorganization, by means of corruption and secret agency, pushed to the extent of disorder and civil contention. Next in order comes military occupation to restore tranquillity; and in every instance the result has been PROTECTION, followed by INCORPORATION. Such have been the means by which Poland—the two Kabardas—the Crimea—

Georgia — Imeretia — and Mingrelia have been added to the Russian dominions.

The policy bequeathed by Peter I. has so long been pursued with success and impunity, that Russia now begins to assume a sort of prescriptive right to carry it out; and affects to regard as unreasonable and presumptuous the resolution of other powers not to permit her to violate justice, the public law of Europe, and the treaties that protect the weaker nations—nor to trample upon their own acknowledged interests—in her lawless attempts at aggrandizement. Civilized nations can afford to smile at the barbarian arrogance of her tone when she tells England and France to mind their own business, and not to interfere with her projects in Turkey; or when, with more refined derision, she proposes, in deference to their wishes, to conclude an amicable arrangement, on conditions that would secure to her all the advantages she could hope to derive from a successful war. But when she puts forth, in justification of her outrageous policy, manifestoes, every statement in which is contradicted by ascertained facts known to all the world, and closes them with appeals to Heaven, we are forced to consider the possibility of again confiding in the moral rectitude or the good faith, however solemnly pledged, of a government that, with pretensions so lofty, can descend to actions so mean. That these documents cannot deceive any one out of Russia is no palliation of the offence; but there surely must have been some very urgent necessity for misrepresenting the circumstances in Russia, or such a man as the Emperor Nicholas could never have been induced to give the

sanction of his name to such a document. And if there be such a necessity it implies a condition of things in the interior of the empire not the most favourable to the maintenance of exorbitant pretensions. But many of Russia's negotiations show that to raise her pretensions, when she is least in a condition to enforce them, is the approved mode of cloaking her deficiencies and extricating herself from difficulties. This game has been successfully played on many occasions, and especially at Adrianople.

It is plain, however, that, be the internal condition of Russia what it may, the time has arrived when Europe must either submit to her dictation, or must arrest her in a course, the tendency and objects of which are proved, by the history of the past and by the experience of the present, to be incompatible with the principles or the laws which have been adopted and established for the maintenance of peace and justice. Either she must recede or we must give way before her; for she has rejected every admissible form of pacific arrangement that has been proposed. How far her present perseverance in wrong ought to be regarded as ultimately disadvantageous to the rest of Europe may be questioned; for her history inculcates no lesson more clearly than this,—that to return now to the state of things as they stood before her last unprovoked invasion of the Turkish territories would be only to postpone the contest until she should find a more favourable opportunity for renewing it. Europe must not be left exposed to the continual danger of being disturbed by her projects, or of being demoralized by her example and influence. The example

of a sovereign making an unprovoked aggression upon a weaker neighbour, and setting both the public law and the unanimous public opinion of Europe at defiance with impunity, would be one of the most demoralizing and dangerous that could be held up to the imitation of the world. But good may come out of evil. If the other nations of Europe are now convinced of the danger to which this contemptuous disregard of principle exposes them, they must combine to vindicate the supremacy of public law and justice, and to enforce upon the delinquent a due respect for both. Russia, by producing the necessity and furnishing the occasion for such a combination, may have conferred a benefit when she contemplated inflicting an injury, and may be the means of ultimately consolidating the peace she has disturbed. The feeling that they have embarked in the same just cause--that they have interests common to them all to defend against the same inveterate disturber of the public peace--may do more than even the peaceful intercourse of quieter times could do to clear away the prejudices, and to confirm the mutual confidence and esteem of nations.

It is true that we may have to fight for peace, and that the evils of war are great and manifold; but there are evils worse than war, and, if it must be encountered, it is better far to face it at once than to patch up a hollow, and perhaps not very creditable, truce, with the prospect of having war forced upon us a year or two hence, in circumstances, probably, less advantageous to us, and more advantageous to Russia. Turkey is still erect and stout of heart, with a better army—a better administration—a more energetic and

yet calmer, wiser, and more liberal and comprehensive spirit of nationality than those who have not seen—or seeing, have seen and have not understood her—could be induced to believe. But the drain upon her resources is great; and to force her to accept an arrangement which gave no sufficient security against renewed aggression would compel her to maintain for an indefinite time an attitude of preparation that would injure her finances, and thus cripple her means of defence when the real struggle came.

France—at whom the stroke was first aimed by Russia through the side of Turkey, and who sees combinations prepared with a view to disturb her internal tranquillity, and to use her crown as a make-weight in the adjustment of the balance in Turkey—is hearty in the good cause, and eager to throw her sword instead of her crown into the scale.

Austria, with shattered finances, and relying upon the compressive power of Russia, rather than upon a more generous system, for the means of holding together the heterogeneous nationalities that compose her empire, has not yet had the courage to forbid the encroachments that threaten to extinguish what remains of her independence. Believing that peace is necessary to her, she has not yet dared to take the only course that could have secured it. Seeking shelter in neutrality, she seems to lean towards the side that she thinks would be the least scrupulous in respecting it. But she cannot desire to increase the power of the giant who is already stifling her with his embraces; and when she can do so with safety, she will act upon the instinct of self-preservation.