

Peter The Great's Testament And Its Role In The Policies And Societies Of Eastern Europe

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Received: 25/02/2024; Accepted: 20/07/2024;

Published: 11/08/2024

Abstract:

The historical discord between Eastern and Western civilizations traces its origins to ancient conflicts, notably the Medean wars between Greece and Persia. With the advent of Islam, religious dynamics further intensified these geopolitical tensions, culminating in pervasive Islamophobic sentiments. Though modern in nomenclature, the roots of Islamophobia in Europe can be traced back to the initial settlements of Muslims, particularly under the shadow of the Ottoman Empire. This fear was significantly fueled by the incendiary rhetoric of kings and emperors from major European powers, who sought to diminish the Islamic presence on the continent. This study focuses on the purported will of Peter the Great as a pivotal case study to explore its influence on Islam-West relations. Our investigation addresses four key areas: firstly, an examination of Peter the Great's policies towards the Islamic Caliphate; secondly, the underlying motives behind his will; thirdly, the adherence of subsequent Russian emperors to this will; and fourthly, the relevance of Peter the Great's directives in contemporary Russian politics. Through analytical comparison of historical documents and subsequent policies, we ascertain that Peter the Great's directives were primarily strategic, aimed at positioning Russia as a dominant force in Europe. The religious façade he employed effectively mobilized Ottoman Christian populations against the Islamic Caliphate. Following his legacy, Russian leaders continued to employ strident anti-Muslim rhetoric, which not only diminished Ottoman territories but also solidified Islamophobia, a phenomenon that continues to cause profound distress among Muslim communities in regions like Bosnia and Herzegovina and Armenia.

Key Words: Peter the Great, Ottoman Empire, International relations, Russia, Islamic world.

Introduction:

The diplomatic history of the Sublime Porte is marked by particularly turbulent relations with Russia, positioning it among the most strained alliances the Ottomans ever encountered. Over the span of five centuries, the two powers engaged in twelve protracted wars, underscoring the depth of their animosity and establishing Russia as the foremost adversary of the Ottomans in Europe.

This hostility was rooted not only in shared borders but also in their concurrent ambitions to exert influence over Eastern Europe. A pivotal aspect of Russia's strategy against the Ottoman Empire involved inciting the Christian populations within Ottoman territories. Russian leaders propagated a narrative steeped in hatred and animosity towards Muslims, thereby fostering a distorted perception of Islam across regions such as Bosnia, Herzegovina, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Armenia.

This historical campaign, orchestrated with meticulous precision by Russian emperors, continues to affect the Muslim minorities residing in these areas. Emperor Peter I, also known as Peter the Great, was instrumental in this strategy. Not only did he implement these policies, but he also crafted a directive for his successors, famously known as Peter the Great's Testament. This document raises critical questions about its real-world application, especially within the Muslim provinces, and this paper seeks to elucidate the testament's enduring impact on Islamic-Western relations through a detailed analysis and comparison of the testament's directives with the actions of Peter's successors.

1- An Overview of Peter the Great's Policy Towards the Islamic Caliphate

Under the reign of Peter the Great, Russia began its ascent as a formidable global power. Prior to his rule, Russia was characterized by fragmentation¹, with sparse, small cities and a social structure dominated by the rise of feudal lords and prevalent serfdom.² The rights of workers and peasants were largely ignored, and there was little engagement with the flourishing European Renaissance or any significant reform movements until the latter half of the 17th century. Cultural

¹ Molé-Gentilhomme and Saint Germain Le Duc, Catherine² or Russia in the 18th Century, Paris: Victor le Cou, 1854, p. 1.

² Michael Hart, The 100 Immortals, trans. Anis Mansour, The Modern Egyptian Office, n.d., p. 258.

outputs, including literary and artistic works, were notably scarce, and academic disciplines such as sciences and mathematics were largely disregarded.

Peter the Great's ascension marked a radical shift in Russian policy and ambition. Between 1697 and 1698, he embarked on an incognito journey to the Netherlands to acquire expertise in weaponry manufacturing, followed by a visit to England where he studied shipbuilding techniques.³

Accompanied by a delegation of 250 individuals, his travels were focused on learning and observation. Upon his return, he initiated an extensive modernization campaign. He established new cities, educational institutions, printing presses, and libraries. He also facilitated the influx of Western experts across various disciplines and sponsored young Russians to pursue their education in Europe, promising them financial incentives and prestigious positions upon their return.

These initiatives catalyzed significant urban expansion, the creation of a formidable Russian fleet, and the standardization of military attire and armaments. Administrative reforms were implemented to unify and strengthen governance across Russia.

Peter the Great transformed the Orthodox Church into a cornerstone of his government's ideology and undertook significant developments in the Russian language and the adoption of the Western calendar.⁴ Through these reforms, Russia emerged by the late 17th century as a modern Western state and a prominent European power, boasting a potent naval fleet, its efficacy a testament to Peter's visionary leadership.⁵

In his quest to demonstrate Russia's military prowess and expand its geographical boundaries, Peter the Great actively participated in the Great Ottoman War alongside Austria and other nations from 1683. A strategic alliance with Poland was forged in Moscow on May 6, 1686, ensuring mutual defense among the signatories. When the Ottomans attacked Poland, this prompted the Russian Tsar to declare war on the Ottoman Empire and its allies, the Crimean Tatars.⁶

His military campaign was primarily focused on gaining control

³ Ducoudray Gustave, *Elementary Notions of General History and History of France*, 13th ed., Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1914, p. 355.

⁴ Michael Hart, *op.cit.*, pp. 259-260.

⁵ Voltaire, *History of the Russian Empire Under Peter the Great*, Vol. 16, 1771, p. 121.

⁶ Koach, *Abridged History of the Peace Treaties between the Powers of Europe since the Peace of Westphalia*, Vol. 4, Paris: Enfrei Libraire, 1797, p. 8.

of the Black Sea. In 1695, he dispatched one of his top generals, General Kordu, to spearhead this mission. General Kordu was responsible for the construction of strategic fortifications and armories around the Black Sea, capturing key locations such as the Kafa and Bosphorus straits and the Semirechye region.

This led to Russian dominance over Crimea and facilitated burgeoning trade relations with Persia through Georgia.⁷ The culmination of these efforts was the successful annexation of Azov on July 28, 1696, following the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, which officially integrated this territory into Russian dominion, affirming its control over a significant portion of the Black Sea.⁸

Following the conclusion of the Great Ottoman War, Peter the Great embarked on strategic preparations for what would become the Great Northern War (1700-1721), pitting Russia against Sweden. Sweden had expanded significantly during the 17th century, encroaching on the territories of Saxony, Poland, and Denmark-Norway, thus establishing itself as a preeminent power in Northern Europe and the Baltic region. This expansion directly threatened the interests of several nations, notably Russia.

The ascension of King Charles XII to the Swedish throne in 1697, when he was just fifteen years old, was perceived by Emperor Peter as an opportunity, given the apparent vulnerability of the Swedish kingdom under such youthful leadership. Determined to reclaim the eastern Baltic coast, Peter sought to undermine Sweden's dominance by forging a European coalition against it, drawing in allies such as Prussia and England, alongside territories previously under Swedish control.

Despite the apparent odds, King Charles XII demonstrated exceptional military prowess. His strategic brilliance led to the defeat of the allied forces at multiple engagements, securing his formidable reputation in history. His victories compelled the territories that had allied with Russia to sever their ties and seek peace independently.

However, the modernized Russian military, under Peter's reformatory command, proved robust. The clash of Peter's disciplined forces against the audacity and recklessness of the young Swedish king culminated in the latter's defeat at the Battle of Poltava in 1708. This pivotal battle forced King Charles XII to seek asylum with the Ottoman Empire, a longstanding adversary of Russia.⁹

⁷ Voltaire, *op.cit.*, pp. 118-123.

⁸ Mohammed Farid Bek, *History of the Sublime Ottoman State*, edited by Ihsan Haqqi, Beirut: Dar al-Nafaes, 1981, p. 310.

⁹ Lamartine Alphonse, *History of Russia*, Vol. 31, Paris: At the Author's, 1863, pp. 92-96.

This turn of events segued into the Russo-Ottoman War of 1710-1711. The Ottoman Empire facilitated the escape of King Charles XII, transporting him and his followers to Ottoman territories, ensuring their safety and comfort during the journey.¹⁰ Numerous Poles, Swedes, and Cossacks, fleeing from the harshness of the Russian military and the devastations of war, joined them. Upon reaching Bender, Charles found himself among 1,800 followers. Initially housed in tents, the Sublime Porte eventually provided more permanent accommodations, constructing a semblance of a new city for the king, his officers, and soldiers.

From Russia's perspective, Emperor Peter expressed in his memoirs that he had been kept in the dark about these developments. He claimed that his personal communications to the Sultan were intercepted at the border and that the Sultan's harboring of the Swedish king during an ongoing conflict amounted to a breach of the peace treaty established between Russia and the Ottoman Empire since 1700.¹¹ The historian Hammer points out that Russian forces had actively pursued the Ottoman convoy carrying King Charles, leading to skirmishes that the Ottomans perceived as direct aggression, thus prompting them to declare war.¹²

King Charles successfully persuaded the Sultan of Russia's true intentions. As Europe's covetous gaze fell on the weakening Swedish territories, fears of a disrupted international balance grew, leading to the formulation of international laws advocating for non-intervention in these regions. Despite these stipulations, Russia was the first to act, swiftly advancing towards Poland, which Charles had annexed in 1706.

Russia's efforts to reinstate the deposed King Augustus II in Poland, effectively making him a pro-Russian puppet, were perceived by the Ottoman Empire as flagrant violations of international norms. This aggressive interference in Poland by Russia provided the Ottomans with sufficient justification to declare war, standing against what they viewed as egregious breaches of international law and order.¹³

Amidst escalating tensions, the Ottoman Sultan recognized a pivotal opportunity to dictate terms or initiate a conflict that might enable the recovery of Azov, a territory previously

¹⁰ Voltaire, op. cit., pp. 169-170.

¹¹ Koch M. DE, *Aggregate History of the Peace Treaties between the Powers of Europe since the Peace of Westphalia*, Vol. 14, Paris: Gide Fils, 1818, p. 340.

¹² Hamer J DE, *History of the Ottoman Empire From Its Origin to Our Days*, trans. J.J. Hellert, Vol. 13 - from the peace treaty of Carlowitz to the peace treaty of Passarowitz - Paris: 1839, p. 211.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 180-181.

annexed by Russia.¹⁴The demands laid forth by the Sultan were unequivocal: they called for the Tsar's forces to withdraw from Poland and to permanently abstain from deploying troops to the region, coupled with the requisition that Russia evacuate Azov and dismantle its fortified structures there.¹⁵

In response, Emperor Peter communicated to the Sublime Porte that the Tatars had breached the Russian borders with their raids, which contravened the stipulations of the existing treaty between the two empires. Peter claimed that despite sending multiple correspondences to the Sultan regarding these incursions, all had been intercepted at the borders. Thus, he argued that he had not initiated hostilities but was merely reacting to a declaration of war from the Ottoman side.

Following these exchanges, the Ottoman Sultan ordered the detention of the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, confining him within the Castle of the Seven Towers, a traditional measure upon the declaration of war by the Turks.

The declaration of war seemed strategically advantageous for both sides. The Sultan's conditions were intentionally stringent, set with the foreknowledge that they would be unattainable, thereby trapping the Tsar. Simultaneously, the Tsar, feeling affronted by these demands, saw them as a timely pretext to advance his imperial objectives without the need for the usual international diplomatic justifications.

Thus, the war was ignited by mutual consent, as both parties, despite their public avowals of reluctance and innocence, sought to capitalize on the conflict, each with their covert ambitions and preparatory machinations aimed at victory.

To further his strategic goals, Peter the Great cultivated alliances with several Ottoman-controlled European emirates, inciting the Orthodox populations to support his cause. Given that many in these regions perceived the Tsar as a liberator, the inhabitants of Montenegro initiated movements to sway state support in favor of Russia. In acknowledgment, the Tsar granted them 35,000 ducats and expressed his gratitude and allegiance to the Orthodox Christian cause in official correspondences.¹⁶

Meanwhile, Wallachia showed initial interest in joining the alliance but later receded, fearing that Prince Cantemir of Moldavia would eclipse their role. The Tsar also found a willing

¹⁴ De Lamarty, *Memoir to Serve the History of the 18th Century Concerning the Negotiations, Treaties, Resolutions and Other Authentic Documents*, p. 600.

¹⁵ Peter the Great, *The Journal*, Berlin; George Deacker, 1773, pp. 339-340.

¹⁶ François Combes, *History of the Hungarian War during the Campaigns of 1716...*, Vienna, 1788, pp. 141-148.

partner in Poland, securing promises of material support from its king. However, the Polish legislative council, wary of losing Ottoman favors, declined to formalize these commitments, leading Russia to settle with an alliance with Moldavia.¹⁷

The Russo-Ottoman War of 1710-1711 concluded with an Ottoman victory, culminating in the Treaty of Pruth in 1711. This treaty mandated the withdrawal of Russian forces in exchange for Peter's commitment to relinquish territories acquired during the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 and to refrain from meddling in Cossack affairs.¹⁸

However, the resentment that Peter harbored towards the Ottoman state intensified following the loss of Azov and his setbacks in Moldavia and at Pruth. These experiences prompted him to craft a testament for his successors, a detailed military-political strategy outlining the objectives they were to pursue, ensuring the continuity of his vision and the enduring enmity towards the Ottoman Empire.

2- Peter the Great's Testament

Peter the Great passed away in 1725, leaving behind a legacy not fully realized regarding his expansive dreams of establishing Russia as the premier power in Europe. Despite his untimely death, his commitment to Russia's ascendancy was immortalized through a detailed testament aimed at guiding his successors.

This testament, preserved in the archives at Peterhof near Saint Petersburg, eventually fell into French possession and was published in 1855. The oldest copy of this testament was sourced from the French National Library, comprising fourteen pages with articles dictating strategic directives for Russia's future rulers¹⁹. Due to space limitations, the articles have been succinctly summarized as follows:

- **Article 1:** The Russian military should perpetually be engaged in warfare, cultivating a national disposition attuned to combat. It is imperative that Russia harness periods of peace as strategic opportunities to fortify its war capabilities, and conversely, utilize times of war to bolster its peacetime resilience and expand its national

¹⁷ Pierre Charles Levesque, *History of Russia and the Main Nations of the Russian Empire*, Vol. 4, Paris: Fournier Libraire, 1812, p. 386.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 28-30.

¹⁹ Peter the Great, *Will or Plan of European Domination Left by Him to His Successors on the Throne of Russia*, Stored in the Archives of Peterhof near Saint Petersburg, Paris: Passard Publisher, 1855, p. 3.

advantages.²⁰

- **Article 2:** It is crucial, during conflicts, to enlist military expertise from Europe's more developed nations. Similarly, in peacetime, Russia should seek to attract scholars and experts to transfer knowledge and advantages from other realms to enhance its own capabilities.²¹
- **Article 3:** Russia must actively insert itself into European affairs, engaging in ongoing disputes, particularly those involving the Germanic states proximate to Russian borders, to directly extract benefits.²²
- **Article 4:** Employ corruption, strife, and division within Poland through strategic bribery, aiming to manipulate its political landscape. This involves financially influencing Polish dignitaries and ensuring a pro-Russian monarch's ascension. Subsequently, Russian military presence should be established and maintained within Poland to safeguard these interests and prepare for a lasting dominion. During conflicts with neighboring states, temporary concessions may be made to Polish factions to pacify disputes, with the ultimate goal of reclaiming these concessions when strategic opportunities arise.²³
- **Article 5:** Russia should aim to annex territories from Sweden whenever possible, creating conditions whereby Sweden is compelled to declare war on Russia, thereby justifying Russian aggressive expansions. Efforts should be directed at fostering ongoing discord between Sweden and Denmark to weaken both nations' positions relative to Russia.²⁴
- **Article 6:** The Russian imperial lineage should consistently seek marital alliances with the German royal families to strengthen political and familial ties. These unions are strategic, enhancing Russian influence within Germany and securing collaborative benefits.²⁵
- **Article 7:** Given the pivotal role of maritime prowess, England emerges as a crucial ally due to its significant maritime needs. Russia should prioritize trade agreements with England, focusing on the export of timber and other commodities in exchange for gold, thereby strengthening economic and maritime connections.²⁶
- **Article 8:** Geographical expansion should be a dual strategy,

²⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

²¹ Ibid, p. 3.

²² Ibid, p. 3.

²³ Ibid, p. 4.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 4.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

targeting the north along the Baltic Sea and the south along the shores of the Black Sea to secure and extend Russia's territorial reach.²⁷

- **Article 9:** Achieving proximity to Istanbul and India is pivotal as control over these regions can effectively dictate global dominion. Therefore, it is imperative to instigate ongoing conflicts, alternating between the Ottoman and Persian Empires. Establishing a robust naval presence in the Black Sea is crucial, serving as a strategic base to facilitate naval industry and regional dominance. Similarly, control of the Baltic Sea is vital due to its strategic importance in hastening the decline of the Persian state, thereby paving the way to the Persian Gulf. This shift will potentially reroute the venerable trade routes of the Eastern kingdoms back through the Levant towards India, recognized globally as a significant commercial hub. Such maneuvers aim to diminish reliance on English financial resources by reestablishing traditional trade supremacy.²⁸
- **Article 10:** It is essential to cultivate and sustain a strategic alliance with Austria while outwardly aligning with its ambitions in Germany. Simultaneously, internal strategies should focus on fostering discord and jealousy among the other Germanic states towards Austria, encouraging them to seek Russian support against Austrian influence. This approach is designed to position Russia as a protector, eventually facilitating Russian control over these states.²⁹
- **Article 11:** The Austrian royal family should be motivated to drive the Turks out of Rumelia (the Ottoman territories in Europe). Following the potential capture of Istanbul, Russia should either incite the older European states to confront Austria or mitigate Austrian scrutiny and envy by conceding a minor portion of the territories previously acquired. The ultimate goal is to reclaim these territories from Austria, thereby solidifying Russian gains.³⁰
- **Article 12:** Winning the allegiance of Christians who reject the Pope's spiritual authority, particularly those in Hungary and the southern Ottoman territories within the Polish realms who adhere to Orthodox beliefs, is crucial. Russia should establish itself as their spiritual and political beacon, fostering a form of doctrinal leadership to exert monastic-like influence and control. This strategy aims to cultivate a network of devoted allies who can support Russian efforts against its adversaries.³¹
- **Article 13:** Once strategic regional victories are secured,

²⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

³¹ Ibid, p. 6.

subduing the Swedes, defeating the Iranians, pacifying the Poles, and controlling the Ottoman territories, Russian forces should consolidate their strength while maintaining naval dominance over the Black and Baltic Seas. Discussions should then proceed covertly with France and Austria to negotiate the terms of shared global governance. Russia should use these negotiations as leverage, pitting one state against the other depending on their responses to Russian proposals, thereby isolating and targeting the non-cooperative state.³²

- **Article 14:** In the unlikely event that neither state accepts Russia's propositions, Russia must remain observant of the ensuing conflict and discord between them, awaiting an opportune moment to strike. The strategy involves deploying two naval fleets, one from the Sea of Azov and the other from the Arctic Ocean, complementing the fleets stationed in the Black and Baltic Seas. These forces would initiate a coordinated assault on the French coastlines, while Germany, preoccupied with internal strife, would be vulnerable to attack. This comprehensive military strategy aims to bring the remainder of Europe under Russian control, ensuring an unopposed and swift conquest of the continent.³³

3- Russian Emperors and the Implementation of Peter the Great's Testament

Following Peter the Great's death in 1725, subsequent Russian emperors faced the daunting task of upholding his ambitious testament, which had already achieved significant historical recognition. This testament outlined a strategic vision for expanding Russian influence and power, particularly targeting Poland, Sweden, and the Ottoman Empire, along with controlling the Black Sea and fostering the Orthodox Church.

Initially, the empire's expansionist initiatives encountered a standstill due to internal difficulties under the brief reigns of Catherine I (1725-1727) and Peter II (1727-1730). However, with Empress Anna Ivanovna's rise to power in 1730, a renewed focus on implementing Peter the Great's strategies emerged, particularly during the Ottoman-Persian War (1730-1736).

Anna Ivanovna targeted Poland, seizing the political upheaval following the death of Polish King Augustus II and the subsequent election of Stanisław Leszczyński in 1733 as opportunities. Internal divisions within Poland led one faction to seek Anna's support. She responded by deploying her armies under the pretext of assistance, though her actual intent was to further Russian imperial ambitions.

Conversely, the faction opposed to Anna's intervention turned to the Ottoman Empire for support, leading to accusations of

³² Ibid, p. 6.

³³ Ibid, pp. 6-7.

Russia violating international law. This conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, under the guise of supporting the Polish, culminated in the fifth Russo-Ottoman War, concluding with the Treaty of Belgrade on September 18, 1737.

During this conflict, Empress Anna portrayed the Muslim Ottomans as oppressors of the Greek community, which helped justify her military actions but also intensified Christian resentment towards the Ottoman Caliphate.

Catherine the Great, who ruled from 1762 to 1796, vigorously pursued Peter the Great's testament. She undertook significant efforts to protect and propagate the Orthodox doctrine globally, influencing several strategic regions within the Ottoman Empire. Starting in 1766, she implemented a program to support Christian provinces under Ottoman control,³⁴ notably promising support to Montenegro and promoting revolutionary ideas among the Greeks and other Slavic nations, hinting at upheaval against the Ottoman state.³⁵ Her reign also saw the strategic weakening and eventual takeover of Poland, aligning with Peter the Great's testament to diminish the influence of Poland, Sweden, and the Ottoman Empire.

Poland, particularly vulnerable due to a lack of military and political structure and divided between conservative and reformist factions³⁶, became the focus of Catherine's interventions³⁷. She placed Stanisław Poniatowski, a loyal follower, as the Polish leader on September 7, 1764, despite opposition from local factions³⁸.

The intensifying conflict led to the sixth Russo-Ottoman War (1768-1774), which further strained the Ottoman Empire both internally and externally, culminating in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca on July 21, 1774.³⁹ This treaty not only reinforced the portrayal of Muslims as aggressors in Eastern Europe but also enhanced Russia's image as a protector of Orthodox populations.

³⁴ Albert Sorel, *The Eastern Question in the 18th Century: The Partition of Poland and the Treaty of Kainardji*, 2nd ed., Paris: Plon-Nourit, 1889, p. 27.

³⁵ A. M. Ouroussow, *Historical Summary of the Main Peace Treaties Concluded between the European Powers from the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) to the Treaty of Berlin (1878)*, Evreux: Charles Herisey Printing, 1884, p. 403.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 9.

³⁷ B. Hauréo, *History of Poland from Its Origin Until 1847*, Paris: Pagnerre Publisher, 1847, pp. 155-156.

³⁸ Victor Duruy, *History of Modern Times from 1453 to 1789*, 13th ed., Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1899, pp. 508-509.

³⁹ Théophile Lavallée, *History of the Ottoman Empire from Ancient Times to Our Days*, Paris: Garnier Brother, 1855, p. 404.

By securing the right to protect Orthodox citizens in Ottoman territories, Russia effectively gained a significant foothold to intervene in Ottoman affairs, ostensibly under the guise of protection. This strategic manipulation underscored Russia's long-term goal of expanding its influence over Eastern Europe, as envisioned in Peter the Great's testament.

Empress Catherine pursued her expansive ambitions rigorously, extending her military campaigns to the Ottoman Crimean Peninsula. Here, her forces committed severe atrocities against the Muslim population in an effort to establish control. Amidst international scrutiny, Catherine felt compelled to justify her actions publicly.

She issued a statement declaring her intervention in Crimea was motivated by a commitment to safeguard its newly attained freedom and stability, which she attributed to her own initiatives. She expressed concerns about the actions of the Muslim Tatars in Crimea, suggesting they posed a threat to the region's stability.

The financial burdens of maintaining armaments for protection, she argued, left her no choice but to annex Crimea, Taman, and Kuban, framing these actions as a necessary compensation for the expenses incurred in the name of peacekeeping.⁴⁰

However, these justifications thinly veiled the reality that the annexation blatantly violated the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which had granted Crimea independence from the Ottoman Empire while allowing the Ottomans to manage the affairs of their Muslim subjects there. This overt breach prompted Sultan Abdul Hamid to declare the seventh Russo-Ottoman War in 1787.

In the strategic tapestry of European conflicts, Russia's alliance with Austria marked a significant maneuver against the Ottoman Empire⁴¹. This alliance successfully overcame the Ottoman line of fortresses, leaving only the fortified region of Nis between the victorious Russian and Austrian armies and Constantinople.

Following significant retreats from the Ottoman forces, which withdrew several kilometers from the city of Iași⁴², pivotal

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 411.

⁴¹ William Cox, *History of the House of Austria-1218-1792*, trans. P. F. Henry, Vol. 5, Paris: chez H. Nicole, 1810, pp. 493-497.

⁴² Archibald Alison, *History of Europe during the French Revolution and the Empire*; translated from the 2nd edition by M. Paquis, Paris: Beauvais Libraire-Editor, 1838, p. 275.

agreements were reached: the Treaty of Zsolt with Austria on August 4, 1791, and the Treaty of Iași with Russia on January 9, 1792. These treaties effectively realized another aspect of Peter the Great's testament, erasing Poland from the European map through its partition among Russia, Prussia, and Austria and seizing parts of the Ottoman Empire, notably Crimea. This period also intensified the negative portrayal of Muslims in these regions, exacerbated by the massacres perpetrated by Russian forces.

The ongoing Russo-Ottoman wars were relentless in pursuing the objectives outlined in Peter the First's testament. Following victories over Sweden and Poland, the remaining target was the Ottoman Empire, with the strategic goal of controlling the warm waters around Constantinople.

The eighth Russo-Ottoman war, spanning from 1806 to 1812, concluded with the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812, which positioned Russia as the rescuer of Orthodox populations. This treaty also facilitated the establishment of an autonomous Serbian principality, largely independent in its internal administration from the Ottoman state—a development that significantly fueled European nationalist movements. The Greek revolution in 1821, marked by its vehement Christian anti-Muslim rhetoric, was among the most intense expressions of this nationalist fervor.

Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) took on the mantle of protector of Eastern Christians, a role that significantly influenced European involvement in the Greek issue. His ambassador in Constantinople, Stroganov, delivered a stern ultimatum to the Sublime Porte, demanding the reconstruction of churches destroyed by the Turks and the assurance of freedom of worship.

Additionally, the ultimatum sought the withdrawal of Turkish armies from the Danubian principalities and the appointment of new governors—demands that the Ottoman state ultimately rejected. Following Alexander's death, his brother Nicholas I ascended to the Russian throne in 1825, eagerly continuing the pursuit of Peter the Great's goals. He pressed the Ottoman Empire with demands for the handover of the Danubian provinces and improvements in the treatment of Christians in Serbia. This led to the Akkerman Convention on October 1, 1826, which stipulated several reforms aimed at addressing these issues.⁴³

Tsar Nicholas I, continuing the legacy of his predecessors, initiated another military campaign against the Ottoman Empire in 1828, intensifying the historical rivalry between

⁴³ Noor Al-Din Hatoum, *History of the 19th Century in Europe and the World*, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-Mu'asir, p. 359.

Russia and the Ottoman state⁴⁴. Aware of Russia's expanding ambitions, the Ottoman Sultan issued a significant manifesto across his provinces on December 18, 1827. In this manifesto, he starkly outlined Russia's objective as the overthrow of Islam and pinpointed the Greek revolution as a disturbance incited by Russian instigation.⁴⁵

The Sultan framed the potential independence of Greece as an act of national betrayal, compromising state sovereignty by handing over control to disloyal elements. In response to these perceived threats, he called upon all Muslims to join the conflict against Russia and declare a jihad. This proclamation markedly escalated tensions between Muslims and the Western world, altering the contemporary perception of jihad.⁴⁶

In reaction to these developments, Tsar Nicholas I formally declared war on April 26, 1828. The conflict culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Adrianople, which introduced significant reforms for the Christian populations in the Balkans. This was followed by the Treaty of Constantinople in 1830, which notably granted Greece its independence, thereby altering the geopolitical landscape of the region.⁴⁷

The implementation of Peter the Great's testament by his successors consistently aimed to support Christian communities internationally, yet beneath this veneer, their strategic goal was the systematic dismantling of the Ottoman Empire by fostering divisions between European Christians and Muslims. This strategic intent was evident when Tsar Nicholas I, through his ambassador Menshikov, addressed the contentious issue of the Holy Places in early 1853.⁴⁸

Menshikov traveled to Istanbul on February 10, 1853, with the specific mission of securing rights for Russia to protect all Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman Empire. Upon facing resistance, he issued a stringent ultimatum to the Sultan on May 5, demanding a response within five days.⁴⁹ Although the Sultan agreed on May 10 to uphold the sanctity of the Orthodox creed, he staunchly refused to formalize any treaty that would grant Russia undue influence.

Menshikov departed Istanbul on May 28, leaving behind a stark

⁴⁴ Mohammed Farid Bek, op.cit., p. 429

⁴⁵ George Bibesco, *Romania from Adrianople to Balt liman (1829-1849)* Vol. 1, Paris: Plon, 1893, p. 1.

⁴⁶ M. Camille, Leynadier, op.cit., p. 235.

⁴⁷ Mohammed Farid Bek, op.cit., p. 431.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 492-495.

⁴⁹ Robert Mantran, *History of the Ottoman State*, trans. Bashir Al-Sabai, Vol. 2, Cairo: Dar al-Fikr for Studies, 1992, p. 134.

threat of occupying Wallachia and Moldavia should the Sublime Porte persist in its refusal.⁵⁰ This precipitated an international crisis, drawing the attention and military preparedness of Britain and France, which positioned their fleets in strategic locations in anticipation of further escalations.⁵¹

The resultant conflict, spanning from 1854 to 1856, concluded with an Ottoman victory, significantly bolstered by the support of European powers. Yet, the region remained a hotbed of conflict and discontent, leading to another significant clash in 1878, spurred by a series of revolts in the Balkans.⁵²

A pivotal moment occurred in Thessaloniki in 1876 when a Bulgarian girl's conversion to Islam led to severe communal strife after her abduction by Christian conservatives. The resulting violence, fueled by rumors and exacerbated by the Sublime Porte's inaction, apart from compensating the families of the deceased consuls, fanned flames of discontent and violence across the region. This situation prompted Midhat Pasha to undertake harsh measures against the Bulgarian insurgents, leading to widespread atrocities.⁵³

Amidst this backdrop, nationalist fervor in Serbia and Montenegro surged, culminating in a formal declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire on July 6, 1876. The Serbian and Montenegrin armies swiftly engaged the Ottoman forces, but despite their initial success, further advances were stymied by European intervention, led by Russia under the pretext of protecting Christian populations.

This intervention highlights the complex interplay of national, religious, and ethnic loyalties that continued to shape the turbulent history of the region,⁵⁴ directly influenced by the long-standing ambitions outlined in Peter the Great's testament.

4- Peter the Great's Testament in Current Russian Politics

The enduring impact of Peter the Great's strategic vision is palpably evident in the modern geopolitical landscape, particularly in regions like Bosnia and Herzegovina where the Muslim population constitutes approximately 51%. Historical

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 135.

⁵¹ Mohammed Farid Bek, op.cit., p. 495.

⁵² Ibid, pp. 603-604.

⁵³ An Old Diplomat, The Ottoman Empire 1839-1877, England and Russia in the Eastern Question, pp. 133-146.

⁵⁴ Ibrahim Bek Halim, The History of the Sublime Ottoman State Known as the Halimi Gift, Beirut: The Cultural Books Foundation, 1988, p. 221.

prejudices seeded during Peter's era persist, notably highlighted by the tragic Srebrenica massacre perpetrated by Serbian forces, a grim reflection of the broader racial and religious antagonisms that have plagued the region through both World Wars and the Bosnian War following the dissolution of Communist Yugoslavia between 1992 and 1995.

These events underscore a legacy of intolerance and violence, with Serbia often cited for its role in ethnic cleansing campaigns against Muslim communities in Kosovo, Croatia, and within its own borders, aimed ostensibly at purging the region of Muslim presence.

The narrative that Russia continues to pursue objectives aligned with Peter the Great's testament has found resonance in contemporary analyses and statements by international figures such as former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who has likened Vladimir Putin's actions to those of Peter the Great. This comparison draws particularly from Russia's involvement in the Syrian conflict, which began in late September 2015 when Russia joined the Western alliance. Accusations against Russia have included targeting civilian structures such as hospitals and schools, contributing to severe humanitarian crises with countless Muslim casualties and widespread displacement.

The continuity between Peter the Great's campaigns and modern Russian military strategies is seen not only in the overt objectives but also in the underlying ambitions. Peter's professed goal was to protect Orthodox minorities in Muslim-dominated regions from persecution and to counter Catholic influence.

However, a more covert ambition was the strategic expansion of Russian influence into the warm waters of the south. Similarly, the Russian military intervention in Syria has utilized coastal cities like Tartus and Latakia not merely as military footholds but as part of a broader strategy to project power across the Levant and counterbalance Islamic influence, particularly from Turkey. This intervention, endorsed by the Russian Orthodox Church, underscores a continuity of religious and strategic objectives reminiscent of Peter's era.

Under Putin, Russia's actions in Syria and its aggressive foreign policy maneuvers, including the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and support for separatist movements in Ukraine, resonate with the historical imperatives of expanding Russian territory and influence as prescribed by Peter the Great. These actions have led to significant geopolitical tensions, evidenced by ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, which saw major escalations in 2016, 2018, and most notably in 2022 with Putin's bold attempt to further occupy Ukrainian territories.

Conclusion:

We have established that Peter the Great was fundamentally driven by ambitions of strategic expansion, aiming to position Russia as the preeminent power in Europe. Yet, it was the religious facade he employed that proved to be a strategic advantage, manipulating the Christian populations within the Ottoman Empire to foster dissent against the Islamic Caliphate.

Peter the Great explicitly raised the banner of protecting Orthodox communities, a directive he strongly impressed upon his successors. The execution of this testament crafted a legacy of deep-seated animosity towards Muslims, a strategy that effectively diminished the territorial reach of the Ottoman Empire and sowed the seeds of Islamophobia, a phenomenon that continues to manifest through intense harassment faced by Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, among other regions. This historical antagonism has also profoundly influenced the nature of the interactions between Islam and the West.

In contemporary terms, Russian policy under President Vladimir Putin exhibits stark parallels to that of Tsar Peter the Great. Both leaders share an expansionist vision aimed at extending their influence over Eastern Europe and securing strategic access to warm waters.

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