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The First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813) and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Eastern Question

Throughout the nineteenth century a major international issue facing the Great Powers of Europe was the volatile “Eastern Question.” As the Ottoman Empire grew steadily weaker, the question of the future disposition of its extensive territories (some 238,000 square miles in Europe alone in 1800) provoked an intense and prolonged rivalry among those European states with vested political and economic interests in the Near East. With its military power in decline and its frontiers menaced by powerful neighbors, the Ottoman Empire seemed on the verge of collapse at the beginning of the nineteenth century despite its imposing imperial edifice. Moreover, a new dimension was added to the dangers already threatening the territorial integrity of the empire when a militant movement for provincial reform among the Serbian population of the pashalik (province) of Belgrade evolved into an armed insurrection against the imperial government. This challenge to Ottoman authority by indigenous Balkan forces touched in varying ways and degrees the interests of the several powers—France, Russia, Austria, and Britain—directly involved in the affairs of the Near East. Indeed, the reactions of these powers toward the “First Serbian Uprising” (1804–13) revealed for the first time the broad outlines of the classic patterns of nineteenth-century Great-Power diplomacy in the Near East. In this regard, the uprising foretold the opening of a new era in the history of the Eastern Question.

Western scholars, however, have failed to appreciate this significant development.¹ Historical investigation of the nineteenth-century origins of the Eastern Question has, for the most part, focused on the Greek Revolution (1821–30), while in turn treating the Serbian uprising primarily as a symptom of the internal disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The comments by L. S. Stavrianos on the relative importance of the Serbian uprising vis-à-vis that of the Greek revolt are a case in point:

The revolt of the Greeks in 1821 followed that of the Serbs in time but not in importance. The Greek revolution was a much more significant affair for Europe as well as for the Balkan Peninsula. The Serbian revolution involved simply the control of the Belgrade pashalik. But the Greek revolution, be-

1. The failure of Western scholars to recognize some of the ramifications of the Serbian revolt can be ascribed in part to the paucity of monographic literature on the subject in Western languages. Until very recently, the only study to deal with the revolt in its entirety was written by the great German historian Leopold Ranke, *The History of Serbia and the Servian Revolution*, trans. Mrs. Alexander Kerr (London, 1853). A newly published work by Michael Petrovich, *History of Modern Serbia, 1804–1918* (New York, 1976), was unavailable for this study.

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cause of the strategic location of the Greek lands, raised basic questions of Near Eastern strategy and brought the great powers into sharp and open conflict. Likewise, the Serbian uprising was essentially a local movement with little effect on the rest of the empire. But the Greek insurrection had widespread and lasting repercussions, the reason being that the Greeks had played a much more important role in imperial affairs than had the Serbs.²

This viewpoint is shared by other distinguished authorities on modern Balkan history. Charles and Barbara Jelavich write: "The Serbian revolt, carried out in a remote section of Europe, had no significant international repercussions; the second Balkan revolution, that of the Greeks, dominated the diplomacy of the period."³ Although the importance of the Greek revolt in the history of the Balkans and that of the Eastern Question is beyond dispute, the significance of the Serbian insurrection has been underestimated.

In February 1804, the Serbian peasantry of the Belgrade pashalik, aroused by the corrupt and despotic rule of local Ottoman tyrants, rose in armed rebellion. The usurpation of power in Belgrade by the commanders of mutinous Ottoman forces (Janissaries) was the preamble to a three-year reign of terror that victimized the Muslim as well as the Serbian community.⁴ Led by the illiterate peasant livestock dealer Djordje Petrović (better known as Karadjordje), Serbian dissidents, with the connivance of provincial Muslim landowners (*sipâhis*) and merchants, acted in the name of Sultan Selim III to break the power of the Janissaries. Thus, initially, the Serbian uprising was no more than a desperate reaction against intolerable local conditions, accompanied by Serbian demands for the restoration of the relatively enlightened provincial administrative practices that prevailed before 1801.⁵

As the first rebel military operations achieved success, the uprising evolved into a movement for political autonomy in search of international guarantees. Although waning Serbian confidence in the willingness and ability of the sultan to restore and to maintain order in the Belgrade pashalik was further reduced by his failure to impose his will on the Janissaries by force, the attitude of the insurgents toward the imperial government remained conciliatory prior to 1807. In order to eliminate the possibility of the repetition of the current abuses, the rebel leadership concluded that the rights exercised by the Serbians before 1801 must be expanded and safeguarded by a foreign protector—namely, Austria or Russia.

From the Serbian point of view these two powers were logical choices, not only on the basis of geography, politics, and culture, but also because of their long involvement in Balkan affairs. However, although the Serbians had reason

2. L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (New York, 1958), p. 269.

3. Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Balkans* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), p. 48.

4. Dušan Pantelić, *Beogradski Pašaluk posle svištovskog mira, 1791-1794* (Belgrade, 1927); Dušan Pantelić, *Beogradski Pašaluk pred prvi srpski ustanak* (Belgrade, 1949); Stojan Novaković, *Ustanak na dahije* (Belgrade, 1904); Miroslav Djordjević, *Politička istorija Srbije XIX i XX veka*, vol. 1: 1804-1813 (Belgrade, 1956), pp. 25-54; Matija Nenadović, *The Memoirs of Proto Matija Nenadović*, ed. and trans. Lovett F. Edwards (London, 1969), pp. 55-59; Ranke, *The History of Servia*, pp. 66-71.

5. Dragoslav Janković, ed., *Francuska štampa o prvom srpskom ustanku* (Belgrade, 1959), pp. 23-24, 40-41; Stojan Novaković, *Vaskrs države srpske* (Belgrade, 1904), p. 34; Novaković, *Ustanak na dahije*, pp. 203-5; Grgur Jakšić, *Evropa i vaskrs Srbije, 1804-1834* (Belgrade, 1963), pp. 28-29; Milenko Vukićević, *Karadjordje*, vol. 2 (Belgrade, 1912), pp. 240-42, 305-7.

to expect a sympathetic hearing in Vienna and St. Petersburg, their pleas were not well received. In responding to a Serbian petition for Austrian military aid in mid-March 1804,⁶ Emperor Francis I declared his neutrality in the affair, ordered the border between Austria and the Belgrade pashalik closed to all traffic, and urged the rebels to resolve their differences with the Janissaries through Austrian mediation.⁷ In November 1804, Russia's foreign minister, Prince Adam Czartoryski, responded to a similar appeal by the Serbians for Russian assistance by telling a Serbian deputation that "Serbia and Russia are very far apart and we are at peace with the Turks."⁸ Both Austria and Russia were intent on avoiding international complications in the Near East while they concentrated on checking French expansion in Europe.

Nevertheless, neither Austria nor Russia was able, in the long run, to avoid involvement in the Serbian revolt. The penetration of the Balkans by European Great-Power rivalries ultimately drew the Serbians into the international political arena. The appearance of the Serbian question on the European diplomatic scene was in part a direct consequence of Napoleon's imperialistic designs on the eastern Mediterranean.

The first tangible evidence of such designs was apparent with the collapse of the Venetian Republic and the partition of its territories between France and Austria. In the Treaty of Campo Formio (October 17, 1797), France recognized Austria's annexation of what had formerly been Venetian Istria and Dalmatia, while in turn acquiring possession of the Ionian Islands and the adjacent Albanian coastline.⁹ But this state of affairs did not endure for very long. Following Napoleon's victories over the combined Austro-Russian armies at Ulm (October 17, 1805) and Austerlitz (December 2, 1805), France became a powerful factor in the Balkans. While the Russians retreated, the Austrians, who had hastily sued for peace, were forced by the Treaty of Pressburg (December 26, 1805) to cede all of Venetian Istria and Dalmatia to the newly created Kingdom of Italy, of which Napoleon was acknowledged as king. Above all, Bonaparte's daring Egyptian expedition of 1798–99 signaled the abandonment of an old principle of French foreign policy, namely, the preservation of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Napoleon's Near Eastern policy now pointed toward the eventual dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, with France taking the largest share. Partition was, however, a long-range objective. In the meantime, Napoleon managed

6. Sergeant-Major Johann Wittanovitch to the General Command in Temesvár, March 11, 1804, in *Spisi bečkih arhiva o prvom srpskom ustanku*, 5 vols., ed. Aleksa Ivić (Subotica, 1935–39), 1:34 (hereafter cited as *SBA*); Karadjordje, Janko Katić, and others to Colonel G. Tomerlin, March 19, 1804, *ibid.*, p. 56; Jakov Nenadović and Karadjordje to Stevan Stratimirović, March 23, 1804, *ibid.*, p. 69; Jakov Nenadović and Karadjordje to General G. Geneyne, March 23, 1804, *ibid.*; copy of a report to Francis I regarding the Serbian uprising, May 24, 1804, in Valtazar Bogishich, ed., *Razbor sochinennia N. A. Popova "Rossiia i Serbiia"* (St. Petersburg, 1872), pp. 34–35; Adolph Beer, *Die orientalische Politik Oesterreichs seit 1774* (Prague, 1883), pp. 183–84, 188.

7. General G. Geneyne to the Serbian insurgents, April 1804, *SBA*, 1:85–86; memorandum, Vienna, May 25, 1804, *ibid.*, pp. 154–60; Beer, *Die orientalische Politik Oesterreichs*, pp. 189–90, 196.

8. Quoted in Nenadović, *The Memoirs of Proto Matija Nenadović*, p. 114.

9. Referring to the Treaty of Campo Formio, Bernard Lewis writes: "France, the traditional ally of the Ottoman Empire, had become her neighbor and ancient friendship could not stand the shock" (Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* [Oxford and London, 1961], p. 65).

to conceal his true ambitions while directing his attention to the more immediate problem of soliciting the sultan's support in the continuing battle against Britain and Russia.

To tsarist officials, French Near Eastern policy posed a challenge to Russia's traditional goal of establishing an exclusive sphere of influence in the region of the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Tsar Alexander I countered the threat of French expansion in the Balkans by strengthening traditional Russian ties with tiny Montenegro in order to secure a naval base for Russia's Mediterranean squadron on the southeastern coast of the Adriatic Sea.¹⁰ Moreover, on September 23, 1805 the Russians obtained a renewal of the Russo-Turkish alliance of 1799, which ostensibly brought the Ottoman Empire into the Third Coalition; each power guaranteed the integrity of the other's territories while acknowledging joint responsibility for the defense of the Straits.¹¹

Napoleon's star, however, was then approaching its zenith. The resounding French triumphs at Ulm and Austerlitz brought France into diplomatic ascendancy at the Sublime Porte. These victories convinced Selim that in joining the anti-French coalition he had allied with the losing side, and he thereupon refused to ratify the September 23 agreement with Russia. Napoleon, acting quickly to capitalize on his increased stature in Istanbul, launched a two-pronged diplomatic offensive, the primary objective of which was the formation of an anti-Russian alliance with the Porte. General Horace Sebastiani, the newly appointed French ambassador at the Sublime Porte, was instructed to secure the closure of the Straits to Russian vessels, to urge the Ottoman government to reassert its absolute authority over the Danubian Principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia) which had been under Russian protection since 1774, and, most important, to persuade the sultan to join with France and Persia in forming a coalition against Russia.¹² Concurrently, French agents were dispatched to various regions of the Balkans with instructions to undermine Russian influence among the Balkan Christians, and the French consulates in the capitals of Moldavia (Jassy) and Wallachia (Bucharest) became the principal centers of anti-Russian intrigue in the area.¹³ Moreover, Sebastiani intimated that France was prepared to back an Ottoman effort to recover the northern coast of the Black Sea (particularly the Crimea) recently seized by Catherine the Great of Russia.

In his efforts to inflame Russo-Turkish relations, Napoleon made considerable use of the Serbian question. Indeed, Napoleon considered the Serbian revolt to be the most serious internal problem confronting the Ottoman government as well as a major obstacle to the consolidation of an effective anti-Russian coalition.¹⁴ Napoleon's agents at the Porte accused the Russians of inciting the rebel-

10. Norman E. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean, 1797-1807* (Chicago, 1970), pp. 196-202.

11. For the complete text of the treaty, see *Vneshniaia politika Rossii XIX i nachala XX veka*, ed. A. L. Narochitskii (Moscow, 1960-), 2: 584-94 (hereafter cited as *VPR*).

12. V. G. Sirotkin, "Franko-russkaia diplomaticheskaia bor'ba na Balkanakh i plany sozdaniia Slaviano-Serbskogo gosudarstva v 1806-1807 gg.," *Uchenye zapiski Instituta Slavianovedeniia*, 25 (1962): 175.

13. Paul F. Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question, 1806-1807* (New York, 1931), pp. 51-52; A. M. Stanislavskaiia, *Russko-angliiskie otnosheniia i problemy Sredizemnomor'ia, 1798-1807* (Moscow, 1962), p. 435; Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean*, p. 212.

14. Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, pp. 73-74.

lion in order to promote tsarist designs on the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ In a personal note addressed to Selim on June 20, 1806, Napoleon characterized the Serbian revolt as a product of Russian diplomacy and accordingly advised the sultan against allowing Russia to participate in any subsequent Serbo-Turkish negotiations.¹⁶ In the event that the Serbians of the Belgrade pashalik managed, under Russian tutelage, to gain autonomous status akin to that of the Danubian Principalities, other Balkan Christians, Napoleon warned, would be encouraged to seek similar concessions and thereby precipitate the downfall of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ Although no evidence exists to suggest that Russia was directly involved in the Serbian revolt prior to the summer of 1806,¹⁸ Napoleon firmly believed its suppression would lead to diminished Russian influence in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹

The rise of French influence in the Ottoman capital and on the Balkan mainland in 1805–6 was a source of growing concern to statesmen in Vienna and St. Petersburg. For that reason, early in 1806, a major Serbian diplomatic initiative to solicit support from Austria and Russia produced a more favorable reaction than had been the case in the preceding two years.²⁰ Because of the diminution of Habsburg prestige and influence in the Balkans after the Treaty of Pressburg, the Austrian government felt constrained to modify its earlier stance on the Serbian question in the hope of reasserting Austria's Balkan interests.²¹ Fearful that another rebuff might force the Serbians to turn either to France or to Russia, Francis I offered the services of his brother, Archduke Karl, as a mediator in the widening conflict between the Serbian rebels and the Ottoman Porte.²² Selim refused to countenance any foreign interference in Ottoman domestic affairs, however, and correspondingly rejected the Austrian proposal for mediation.²³ The rejection of Francis's overtures was an indication of the diplomatic realignment at the Porte after Austerlitz,²⁴ for Napoleon had urged the sultan to subdue the Serbians by force of arms without any foreign involvement.

On the Russian side, Prince Czartoryski was also reevaluating Russia's position on the Serbian revolt. The anti-Russian intrigues of French agents in the Balkans convinced Czartoryski of the necessity of adopting a more active policy toward the Serbians so that they would not be inclined to look to France for

15. Vernon J. Puryear, *Napoleon and the Dardanelles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), p. 90.

16. Sirotkin, "Franko-russkaia diplomaticheskaia bor'ba na Balkanakh," p. 176; Stanislavskaiia, *Russko-angliiskie otnosheniia*, p. 446.

17. Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, p. 74.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 63; Benjamin Kallay, *Die Geschichte des serbischen Aufstandes, 1807–1810* (Vienna, 1910), p. 14.

19. Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, p. 74.

20. Karadjordje to Emperor Francis I, January 24, 1806, *SBA*, 3:16–19; Karadjordje to Baron Stürmer, January 24, 1806, *ibid.*, pp. 14–15; Vukićević, *Karadjordje*, pp. 305–9, 315–16; Karadjordje and Matija Nenadović to Alexander I, December 12, 1805, *VPR*, 3:666, n. 70; O. M. Bodianskii, "Predstavlenie serbskoi deputatsii k russkomu imperatoru, v fevrale 1806 v Ven," in *Chtenia v imperatorskom obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom universitete*, no. 3 (1871), pp. 122–29.

21. Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, pp. 34–35.

22. Francis I to Selim III, March 12, 1806, *SBA*, 3:69–71; Beer, *Die orientalische Politik Oesterreichs*, p. 194.

23. Selim III to Francis I, April 25, 1806, *SBA*, 3:120–21.

24. A. D. Novichev, *Istoriia Turtsii*, part 2, vol. 1 (Leningrad, 1968), pp. 78–79; Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean*, pp. 211–16; Vukićević, *Karadjordje*, pp. 337–40.

support.²⁵ Moreover, Czartoryski had come to believe that if the steady deterioration in Russo-Turkish relations led to war the Ottoman Empire was doomed and faced imminent partition. With this possibility in mind, Czartoryski recommended to the tsar the creation of a South Slavic Balkan state that would enjoy internal autonomy while being subordinate to Russia in external matters. This proposed state would serve as a buffer zone between any remaining Ottoman territory in the eastern Balkans and the French bastion in Dalmatia to the west. In anticipation of continued Russo-French hostilities, Czartoryski also suggested the possibility of utilizing such a state as an advance base from which Russian troops and South Slavic auxiliary units, particularly the battle-hardened Serbians, could strike a diversionary blow against French forces defending Dalmatia and Italy.²⁶ While Czartoryski was thus contemplating several options in the event of a rupture in Russo-Turkish relations, he provided the Serbian rebels with monetary support and advised them to seek a negotiated settlement with the Porte under the auspices of the Russian minister in Istanbul. But as long as the possibility existed for a peaceful denouement of the deepening crisis between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, Tsar Alexander maintained correct relations with the Porte and refused to become involved in the turbulent affairs of the Belgrade pashalik.²⁷

Napoleon also appreciated the geographical and strategic implications of possible Serbo-Russian military collaboration for his own position in the Balkans. British naval hegemony in the Mediterranean had forced France to establish trans-Balkan lines of communication and trade linking Paris with Istanbul by way of Salonika, Bosnia, and French-dominated Dalmatia. Moreover, this communications axis also served French economic interests by functioning as a conduit through which Near Eastern cotton bound for French mills was transported. If Russia succeeded in establishing a foothold on the south bank of the Danube in the Belgrade pashalik, this important communication and commercial artery would be endangered.²⁸

Of the powers involved in the affairs of the Near East only Great Britain had no abiding interest in the Serbian question. The primary objectives of Britain's Near Eastern policy were the maintenance of naval mastery over the eastern Mediterranean and the preservation of the British-Russian-Turkish coalition against France. Britain evinced concern over the events transpiring in the Belgrade pashalik only insofar as Ottoman suspicions of Russian intrigue among the Serbians were generating considerable friction between St. Petersburg and Istanbul. The British ambassador at the Porte, Sir Charles Arbuthnot, believed in 1806 that a peaceful settlement of the Serbian problem would ease Russo-Turkish tension and possibly avert war.²⁹ However, Arbuthnot's hopes for an early reconciliation between the Porte and its disenchanting Serbian subjects proved illusory.

In the winter and spring of 1806, with assurances of French support, Selim mobilized his armed forces for a major offensive against the Serbians; he also took

25. Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, p. 21.

26. Sirotkin, "Franko-russkaia diplomaticheskaia bor'ba na Balkanakh," p. 177.

27. A. Ia. Budberg to I. I. Michelson, September 24, 1806, in V. N. Avtokratov and R. E. Al'tshuller, eds., "Iz istorii pomoshchi Rossii serbskomu narodu v period pervogo narodnogo vosstaniia," *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1960, no. 1-6, p. 119; Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, pp. 252-53.

28. J. E. Driault, *Napoleon en Italie, 1801-1812* (Paris, 1900), pp. 644-50.

29. Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, pp. 183-84.

steps to bolster Ottoman defenses along the Russo-Turkish frontier in Bessarabia as well as those along the Danube against possible hostile moves on the part of the Russians or their British allies.³⁰ Moreover, Selim imposed sanctions on Russian imports and closed the Straits to all Russian naval and commercial traffic.³¹ In August 1806, Russo-Turkish relations were further strained by Selim's dismissal of the pro-Russian *hospodars* (governors) of the Danubian Principalities without the consent of the tsar, in open violation of a prior agreement with Russia.³² The sultan defended his actions on the grounds that the *hospodars* were abetting the Serbian rebels at the behest of their Russian sponsors. In their place, Selim appointed men of pronounced pro-French sympathies.

The preeminence of French diplomacy at the Porte seemed to augur a fundamental alteration in the balance of power in the Near East. Tsar Alexander was especially alarmed by the growth of French influence in the Principalities (because of their proximity to the frontiers of southern Russia) and by the sultan's closure of the Straits.³³ Both developments suggested to tsarist officials that Ottoman foreign policy was being dictated by Napoleon. Vigorous Russian protests, supported by Great Britain, over the removal of the former *hospodars* led to their reinstatement in mid-October 1806.³⁴ But Selim's refusal to yield to Russian demands for the expulsion of Sebastiani from Istanbul and the free passage of Russian vessels through the Straits prompted Russia's invasion and occupation of the Principalities in late October and early November 1806.³⁵ These Russian military measures were supported by an abortive British effort to force the Straits with naval gunfire.³⁶ The Ottoman government responded to these acts of aggression with a declaration of war against Russia and Great Britain on January 5, 1807.

When the war broke out the situation in the Belgrade pashalik seemed ideal for Russian interests.³⁷ A chain of Serbian military victories, culminating in the capture of the citadels at Belgrade (December 29, 1806) and Šabac (February 6, 1807) that left the rebels in complete control of the Belgrade pashalik, made a pronounced impression in St. Petersburg.³⁸ Russian strategists hoped to use Karadjordje's cadres, now some 30,000 strong, as the connecting link joining units of Russia's Moldavian army operating in the Principalities with contingents of Vice-Admiral S. N. Seniavin's Mediterranean fleet stationed in Montenegro,

30. Stanford J. Shaw, *Between the Old and the New: The Ottoman Empire under Selim III, 1789–1807* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. 335.

31. Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, p. 55; Boris Mouravieff, *L'Alliance Russo-Turquie au milieu des guerres Napoléonnes* (Neuchâtel, 1954), pp. 205–6.

32. Andrei Ia. Italinskii to Budberg, August 23, 1806, *VPR*, 3:263–69.

33. Alexander I to Italinskii, March 8, 1806, *Sbornik Imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva*, 148 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1867–1916), 82:325–28 (hereafter cited as *SIRIO*).

34. Italinskii to Alexander I, October 18, 1806, *VPR*, 3:713, n. 247.

35. Alexander I to General I. I. Michelson, November 4, 1806, in A. N. Petrov, *Voina Rossii s Turtsiei, 1806–1812*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1885–87), 1:380–81; Alexander I to General M. F. Kamenskii, December 27, 1806, *VPR*, 3:439–42.

36. Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, pp. 364–91.

37. Alexander I to Michelson, December 4, 1806, in Kallay, *Die Geschichte des serbischen Aufstandes*, p. 15.

38. Miroslav Djordjević, *Oslobodilački rat srpskih ustanika, 1804–1806* (Belgrade, 1967), pp. 372–75.

thereby forming a continuous front stretching from the Dniester River to the Adriatic Sea. This strategy was intended to serve the dual purpose of holding the Ottomans at bay in the east while simultaneously guarding against a possible French incursion into the Balkans from the west.³⁹ In order to lure the Serbians into military alliance with Russia, tsarist agents informed Karadjordje and his cohorts of the tsar's readiness to promote their independence from Ottoman rule.⁴⁰ Russian appeals to the Serbians were replete with references to the common spiritual and racial bonds that linked Russians and Serbians.

As relations between Russia and the Ottoman Porte deteriorated at an accelerating rate throughout 1806, Selim hastened to make an accommodation with the Serbians in order to block possible Serbo-Russian military cooperation during the impending conflict with Russia.⁴¹ The terms of a settlement proposed by the sultan would have been acceptable to the Serbians in 1804, but the mood in the Serbian camp had become less amenable to compromise by the beginning of 1807. The Russian offer to support a Serbian effort to eliminate all vestiges of Ottoman authority over the Belgrade pashalik, together with the Serbian victories over the local Janissaries and over two formidable Ottoman expeditionary forces dispatched by the sultan in 1805 and 1806, stimulated Serbian political aspirations. The rebel leaders accordingly rejected the conciliatory Ottoman peace offering, declared the Belgrade pashalik independent from Ottoman rule in March 1807, and joined with Russia in waging war against the Porte.⁴²

The promise to support Serbian independence from Ottoman rule notwithstanding, the Russian government viewed Serbian aspirations as being incompatible with its interests. So long as the Russo-Turkish War (1806–12) continued, however, Russia regarded the Belgrade pashalik as an advantageous military outpost in the Balkans and the Serbian army as a useful auxiliary force for the furtherance of Russian policy in the Near East. During the conflict, tsarist officials consistently endeavored to exert some measure of control over the domestic and foreign policies initiated by the Serbian leaders to assure their continued military cooperation. Ideally, the Russian government favored retaining some type of patron-client relationship with the Serbians. Although the optimum solution for St. Petersburg might well have been the creation of a dependent Serbian principality ruled by a Russian grand duke, the most realistic alternative, given the prevailing international climate of opinion, was the restoration of nominal Ottoman sovereignty over the Belgrade pashalik under Russian guardianship.⁴³ And eventually, in return for additional concessions in the far more strategically located Danubian Principalities, Russia evinced a readiness to abandon the Serbians entirely. In the final analysis, Russian policy toward the Serbian rebels in the

39. Vukićević, *Karadjordje*, pp. 457–58; Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, pp. 459–60.

40. Michelson to Karadjordje, January 23, 1807, *VPR*, 3:378–79.

41. Vukićević, *Karadjordje*, p. 418; Shaw, *Between the Old and the New*, pp. 350–51; Mittesser to General G. Geneyne, September 25, 1806, and Stevan Stratimirović's observations on the Serbian insurrection, November 1, 1806, *SBA*, 3:359–61; Report of Franz Klezl, March 10, 1807, *SBA*, 4:257–59; Janković, *Francuska štampa*, pp. 187, 211–12.

42. Metropolitan Leontije to C. Ipsilanti, April 16, 1807, Milenko Vukićević, "Pisma iz prvog i drugog ustanka," *Spomenik*, 37 (1900): 136–37; Vukićević, *Karadjordje*, p. 474; Janković, *Francuska štampa*, p. 218.

43. N. P. Rumiantsev to General M. I. Kamenskii, February 19, 1810, *VPR*, 5:361–67.

period from 1807 to 1812 was determined by the fluctuations in Franco-Russian relations.

Defeated once again by the French at the battle of Friedland in mid-June, Tsar Alexander abandoned his British allies and made peace with Napoleon at Tilsit on July 7–9, 1807.⁴⁴ As part of the Tilsit pact, Napoleon was obliged to mediate peace between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in return for a commitment by Alexander to promote a Franco-British rapprochement. In the event that French mediation failed to end the Russo-Turkish War, the two emperors agreed to act in concert to solve the Eastern Question. The actual terms for the solution of this problem, however, were left to the future because each party refused to acknowledge the other's claims to Istanbul and the Straits. Under those circumstances they agreed in principle only to "liberate" the Balkans, with the notable exception of Istanbul and the adjoining Rumelian hinterland to the west.

On August 24, 1807, Russia signed a truce agreement with the Porte under French auspices in which no mention was made of the Serbians.⁴⁵ During the two years that the uneasy armistice remained operative, the Tilsit partners tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a more fundamental and mutually satisfactory agreement on the Near East. The discussions about a possible partition of the Ottoman Empire resumed in March 1808 in St. Petersburg as both sides attempted to work out the details for a final resolution of the Eastern Question. The difficult task facing Russia's new foreign minister, Count N. P. Rumiantsev, and the French ambassador, A. O. Caulaincourt, on the occasion of these negotiations was accentuated by their awareness that no plan for partition could ignore legitimate Austrian "geographic" interests in the Balkans. In recognition of this factor Rumiantsev offered to concede the Belgrade pashalik to Austria, provided France approved Russia's proposal to annex Bessarabia, the Danubian Principalities, and Bulgaria in addition to Istanbul and the Straits. However, Caulaincourt's refusal even to consider the Russian demands for the Straits and Istanbul resulted in the suspension of the talks.⁴⁶

The inability to resolve the Straits question revealed serious weaknesses in the Tilsit partnership and precluded genuine and permanent cooperation. In late summer 1808 Napoleon moved to bolster the disintegrating alliance with Russia during his meeting with Alexander at Erfurt. On this occasion Napoleon secretly consented to Alexander's plans to retain permanent possession of the Principalities.⁴⁷ In the immediate aftermath of the Erfurt conference Russia moved to legitimize its de facto domination of the Principalities through direct negotiations with the Porte. The opening of a Russo-Turkish peace conference, delayed by a series of bloody palace revolts in Istanbul which included the assassination of Selim and the elevation of his cousin Mahmud II to the imperial throne, finally

44. For the entire text of the Treaty of Tilsit, see *VPR*, 3:631–49; for analyses of the impact of the treaty on the Ottoman Empire, see Puryear, *Napoleon and the Dardanelles*, pp. 191–95, and Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, pp. 545–46.

45. Petrov, *Voyna Rossii s Turtsiei*, 2:405–8; Stürmer to Stadion, August 25, 1807, *SBA*, 4:776–78; Puryear, *Napoleon and the Dardanelles*, pp. 213–14; Shupp, *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question*, pp. 555–56.

46. Serge Tatistcheff, *Alexander I^{er} et Napoleon: D'après leur correspondance inédite, 1801–1812* (Paris, 1891), pp. 303–78; Puryear, *Napoleon and the Dardanelles*, pp. 281–305.

47. Articles 8 and 9 of the Erfurt Convention relate to the transfer of the Danubian Principalities to Russia, while article 11 guarantees the integrity of all other Ottoman territories. For the full text of the convention, see *VPR*, 4:359–63.

took place in March 1809 in the city of Jassy. The negotiations foundered immediately over the new sultan's adamant refusal to yield to the Russian *sine qua non* for the restoration of peace, namely, the cession of the Principalities to Russia.⁴⁸ The Russians responded by abruptly terminating the talks, declaring the armistice at an end, and resuming military operations along the Danube in early autumn.

The resumption of Russo-Turkish hostilities brought immediate relief to the Serbian army which had been under intense Ottoman military pressure since the late spring of 1809. After the collapse of the Jassy negotiations the Russians had moved slowly in mobilizing for the summer campaign. The Ottomans took advantage of this respite by launching a massive offensive against the Serbians in an effort to crush the revolt before the Moldavian army took the field.⁴⁹ The Serbians had managed to withstand the initial assault, but resistance was crumbling rapidly when the anticipated Russian offensive finally began in September 1809. The capitulation of the Ottoman fortresses of Brăila and Ismail, major links in the chain of Ottoman Danubian fortifications, forced the Turks to break off the battle with the Serbians and to retire to the lower Danube in order to stem the Russian advance.⁵⁰ The Serbians used the opportunity provided by the withdrawal of the Ottoman invasion force to restore their battered defenses and to consolidate their positions. By mid-July of the following year 3,500 Russian regulars had joined with elements of the Serbian army to conduct joint military operations against Ottoman auxiliary forces stationed in the adjoining Niš and Vidin pashaliks.⁵¹

Meanwhile the Austrian government observed with mounting anxiety the success of Russia's armed forces along the Danube in 1809 and 1810. Indeed, throughout the Russo-Turkish War, Austrian policy was strongly influenced by the apprehension aroused by the explosive situation which Russian military operations in the Balkans had created. In particular, the appearance of Russian troops in and around the Belgrade pashalik in 1810 caused grave concern in Vienna. To Habsburg officials the presence of Russian military units among the Serbians not only threatened the security of Austria's southern frontiers but also disrupted Austria's lucrative Levant trade. The Treaty of Pressburg had precipitated a major shift in Austrian trade patterns in the Near East. After Napoleon had stripped Austria of its maritime provinces along the Adriatic coast, the bulk of Austria's Levant trade was diverted overland across the Balkan mainland via Belgrade and Niš to Salonika.⁵² Concurrently the volume of Austrian commerce on the Danube increased sharply. This basic shift in Austria's Near Eastern trade routes placed the troubled Belgrade pashalik in a key position as the principal artery through which Austrian goods were transported to Near Eastern markets; furthermore, the pashalik became a major trading partner of the Habsburg Monarchy.⁵³

48. Rumiantsev to General I. I. Prozorovskii, December 6, 1808, *ibid.*, pp. 367–68; see also two dispatches from Rumiantsev to Alexander I, December 27, 1808, and January 8, 1809, *ibid.*, pp. 439–40, 456–58.

49. C. Rodofnikin to Prozorovskii, June 16, 1809, in Petrov, *Voina Rossii s Turtsiei*, 2:274.

50. Janković, *Francuska štampa*, pp. 301–3.

51. Jakšić, *Evropa i vaskrs Srbije*, p. 149.

52. Vasilj Popović, *Meternihova politika na bliskom istoku* (Belgrade, 1931), pp. 24–25.

53. Vasilj Popović, "Trgovina i promet Bosne u Napoleonovo doba," *Spomenik*, 68 (1929): 83–91.

The armed struggle between the Serbians and the Ottomans did not, however, prove to be an insurmountable obstacle to the conduct of Austrian commerce in the Near East until joint Russo-Serbian military operations in 1810 impeded the flow of trade through Niš.⁵⁴ This new outbreak of fighting alerted the Austrian government to the adverse effect which Russian domination of the Danubian Principalities and the Belgrade pashalik would have upon Austria's Near Eastern commerce. By controlling both these areas Russia would be in a position to sever Austria's important Near Eastern trade routes.⁵⁵ Austrian apprehension over the future status of the Belgrade pashalik became especially acute after another disastrous defeat suffered by Habsburg armies at the hands of Napoleon in the battle of Wagram. In the ensuing peace settlement signed at Schönbrunn (October 14, 1809), Austria was obliged to surrender to France all of its Istrian possessions along with Trieste and Gorizia, western Carinthia, Carniola, and part of Croatia lying south of the Sava River.

That the Serbian question had become an issue of major importance in Vienna was manifested by a memorandum dated October 10, 1809, addressed to Francis I by his new foreign minister, Count Klemens von Metternich, a mere two days after he had assumed his office. In the memorandum, Metternich suggested two alternatives for the resolution of the Serbian problem: the Belgrade pashalik must either remain an Ottoman possession or become an Austrian province. Metternich's concern over the future status of the Belgrade pashalik was stimulated in part by rumors that France and Russia had reached a secret accord to partition the Ottoman Empire between them—without Austria's participation. Recent developments in the Balkans served only to lend credence to such rumors. After the Erfurt summit, Tsar Alexander had issued an imperial decree announcing his intention of annexing the Danubian Principalities.⁵⁶ France's failure to denounce the proposed Russian action regarding the Principalities or to protest against Russian military operations in the immediate vicinity of the Belgrade pashalik appeared to confirm Metternich's worst fears.

In July 1809 Metternich journeyed to Paris to confront Napoleon directly with Austria's suspicions of Franco-Russian collusion in the Near East. During the discussion with Napoleon, Metternich came to realize that, far from intending to exclude Austria from exercising an active role in the Balkans, the emperor of France, whose attention was focused on Spain, wished to use Austria to block continued Russian expansion in the area. In responding to Metternich's expression of alarm over the growth of Russian influence in the Balkans, particularly among the Serbians, Napoleon acknowledged that while he was bound by treaty to acquiesce in Russia's annexation of the Principalities, he opposed additional Russian territorial aggrandizement in southeastern Europe. On the possibility of Russia's establishing a foothold in the Belgrade pashalik Bonaparte expressed the following views:

Serbia must belong to you some day. Yet I do not believe it in my interest to provoke the fall of the Ottoman Empire: its destruction would be of no advantage to you. If you wish to occupy Belgrade, I shall not oppose it; let the Porte make peace with the Serbians, and give them a prince of their own

54. Ibid.

55. Beer, *Die orientalische Politik Oesterreichs*, p. 232.

56. See Popović, *Meternihova politika*, pp. 11-12.

nationality. I shall not object to it if this prince is under your guarantee and protection. However, I can neither admit a *hospodar* under Russian guarantee and protection, nor the least usurpation of that power on the right bank of the Danube. If she wishes to occupy even one fortified place, I should look upon that as upon the conquest of Constantinople. The Danube is a great obstacle; the barrier of the river has, up to the present, halted the progress of the Russian armies; but a single inch of land on the right bank in the hands of the Russians would be, in my opinion, equal to the complete destruction of the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁷

Although Metternich doubted the sincerity of Napoleon's assertion that the Belgrade pashalik would eventually come under the exclusive protection of Austria,⁵⁸ he was convinced that France would not abide any attempt by Alexander to bring the Serbian rebels into Russia's political orbit.

In view of the sharp fluctuations on the international scene, Metternich ascertained that the most effective means of advancing Austria's political and economic interests in the Balkans was to ensure the maintenance of Ottoman authority over all the Balkan peoples as a bulwark against competing French and Russian interests.⁵⁹ These considerations convinced Metternich that Austria must make a renewed effort to reconcile the Ottomans and the Serbians before more serious international complications resulted. After returning from Paris, Metternich initiated a series of diplomatic moves aimed at securing the approval of both parties for Austrian arbitration of the various questions at issue between them.

Metternich's diplomatic initiative was ill-timed. After having been spared from imminent disaster in 1809 by the intervention of Russian arms, the Serbian leadership did not wish to alienate Russia at this critical moment by collaborating with Austria. When Austrian frontier officials tried to arrange a conference with Karadjordje they were informed by a representative of the rebel chieftain that the emperor should dispatch troops at once, if Austria sincerely desired to aid the Serbian cause.⁶⁰ While Austrian attempts to persuade the Serbians to accept Austria's mediation were being rebuffed in Belgrade, the Austrian minister at the Porte, Baron Stürmer, was encountering stiff resistance from the Ottoman government. Stürmer had endeavored to impress the Porte with the argument that the restoration of peace in the Belgrade pashalik would be mutually beneficial to both Austria and the Ottoman Empire. However, he cautioned the Ottomans that peace with the Serbians must be accompanied by modest concessions in order to guarantee the future stability of the province:

The Ottoman minister will perhaps flatter himself that he can achieve this end, peace with the Serbs, by forceful means. This reasoning is doubtful and depends on circumstances and chance. But the divan should be aware that by ravaging this province, which is already in sad condition, and by killing the people, and by making it into a vast desert, it will become a refuge for brig-

57. Metternich to Francis I, July 28, 1810, in Richard Metternich, ed., *The Memoirs of Prince Metternich, 1773-1859*, vol. 2 (New York, 1880), pp. 439-40.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, vol. 1 (Princeton, N. J., 1963), p. 136.

60. Karadjordje to Stevan Jevtić, September 21, 1810, in R. Kroner, *Josef Freiherr von Simbschen und die Stellung, Oesterreichs zur serbische Frage* (Vienna, 1890), pp. 128-31.

ands who are equally dangerous to the peace of the Ottoman Empire and to the bordering provinces of Austria.⁶¹

Stürmer also sought vainly to allay growing Ottoman distrust of Austria. The Ottomans had never been satisfied with the declaration of Austrian neutrality toward the Serbian revolt. Ottoman doubts as to the sincerity of Austria's pledge to protect Ottoman territorial integrity seemed confirmed by reports of the shipment of large quantities of supplies from southern Hungary to the Belgrade pashalik.⁶² These suspicions were exacerbated by British allegations that the Schönbrunn agreement contained secret provisions guaranteeing Austria future territorial compensation, at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, for losses incurred in central Europe.⁶³ Wariness of Austria's Balkan aims was a manifestation both of the Porte's disillusionment with France after Napoleon had made peace with Russia at Tilsit and of improved relations between London and Istanbul after an Anglo-Turkish rapprochement was achieved on January 5, 1809.⁶⁴ The Ottoman government suspected that Franco-Russian chicanery was behind the Austrian mediation proposal, and therefore emphatically demanded that Austria desist from all meddling in the Serbian question.⁶⁵

Parallel to the setbacks sustained by Habsburg policy in Istanbul and in Belgrade was the growth of dissension between Austria and Russia. Austrian indignation was high after reports reached Vienna of the occupation of Belgrade in January 1811 by Russian troops.⁶⁶ In Austrian military circles, where the prevailing sentiment favored the adoption of an expansionist Balkan policy, the Russian occupation of Belgrade was viewed as a more damaging blow to Austria's international position than the loss of the Netherlands.⁶⁷ Metternich, on the other hand, was more concerned over the adverse effects which the Russian presence in Belgrade, in close proximity to "three million Greek [Orthodox] subjects scattered throughout Hungary and Croatia," would have upon the internal stability of the Austrian empire.⁶⁸ Because the Russian decision to garrison Belgrade did not appear to be dictated by military exigencies arising out of the Russo-Turkish War, the emperor interpreted it as a political act that provided indisputable testimony of tsarist designs on the Belgrade pashalik. Metternich demanded an immediate explanation from St. Petersburg, while Francis took

61. Stürmer to Stratford Canning, n.d., in Čeda Mijatović, ed., "Prepisi iz zvaničnih i poverljivih izveštaja engleske ambasade u Carigradu od 1804-1814," *Spomenik*, 54 (1922): 82-83.

62. Grgur Jakšić and Vojislav Vučković, eds., *Francuski dokumenti o prvom i drugom ustanku, 1804-1830* (Belgrade, 1959), p. 71.

63. Feodor von Demelitsch, *Metternich und seine auswärtige Politik*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1898), pp. 133-34.

64. See Robert Adair, *Negotiations for the Peace of the Dardanelles*, 2 vols. (London, 1845).

65. Canning to Richard Wellesley, October 4, 1810, in Mijatović, "Prepisi," pp. 80-82; Jakšić, *Evropa i vaskrs Srbije*, p. 160.

66. Otto to Maret, March 6, 1811, in Jakšić and Vučković, *Francuski dokumenti*, pp. 72-73.

67. Beer, *Die orientalische Politik Oesterreichs*, p. 254; as early as 1807 General F. M. Radetzky had proposed expanding Austria's frontiers in the Balkans to encompass the entire area between the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea (*ibid.*, p. 226).

68. *Ibid.*

the precautionary measure of ordering reinforcements to the frontier region across the Danube from Belgrade.⁶⁹

The Russians predictably denied that their actions in Belgrade were politically motivated or that they represented a threat to Austrian integrity. Count P. A. Shuvalov, special Russian emissary to Vienna, assured the Austrian government that the stationing of Russian armed forces in Belgrade was "undertaken by the high command [of the Moldavian army] for purely military purposes."⁷⁰ Notwithstanding the lack of conclusive contradictory evidence, Shuvalov's justification for the increased scope of Russian involvement in the Belgrade pashalik can be challenged on two counts. First, the likelihood that Tsar Alexander would have allowed the commander of the Moldavian army to exercise his own judgment in determining the feasibility of deploying Russian troops in Belgrade is remote. The Russian government was well aware that such action was bound to arouse suspicion in Vienna. Policy decisions of this import were made by tsarist statesmen in St. Petersburg, not by military commanders in the field. Second, Russia's action in this matter cannot be rationalized by claims of military necessity. Russo-Turkish battle lines had become fixed by mid-spring 1810. Subsequent military activity has been described by one contemporary observer as "languid."⁷¹ By early autumn the Serbian front had also been stabilized, as rebel forces, with Russian military backing, succeeded in regaining control over practically all of the territory yielded during the fighting of the preceding year. With apparent calm prevailing in the Belgrade pashalik, Russian forces were evacuated to winter quarters in Wallachia late in the year.⁷²

Why, then, did the Russians return to the Belgrade pashalik several months later in mid-winter? In view of the absence of documentary evidence on this matter, analysis of such a puzzling development is necessarily speculative. The rapid deterioration of Russo-French relations after the Erfurt conference threatened Russia with diplomatic isolation: Russia's only ally was once again about to become the principal enemy of the tsarist regime. The only remedy for the deplorable condition of Russian policy was an alliance with another power, and the most likely partner was the Habsburg Monarchy. An alliance between Vienna and St. Petersburg offered the advantage of providing a measure of security for Russia's vulnerable western borders because it would neutralize the possibility of an Austro-French combination. However, Russian expansion in the Balkans had severely strained Austro-Russian relations. The Austrian government refused even to consider the question of an alliance with Russia until the tsar made peace with the Ottoman Empire and withdrew all Russian forces from Ottoman territories seized in the Balkans during the conflict.⁷³ After five years of warfare Alexander was unwilling to renounce all territorial claims against the Porte. Instead, he abandoned hope of achieving an alliance with Austria in favor of the seemingly more realistic alternative of securing a promise of Austrian neutrality in the event of an open breach between Russia and France. When

69. P. N. Shuvalov to Rumiantsev, February 9, 1811, *VPR*, 6:44-48.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Adair to Wellesley, June 8, 1810, in Mijatović, "Prepisi," p. 76.

72. Milenko Vukićević, "Odnosi Rusije prema Srbiji u vreme prvog ustanka od kraja 1808 do kraja 1813 godine," *Delo*, 24 (1902): 67.

73. Feodor F. Martens, ed., *Sobranie traktatov i konventsii zakliuchennykh Rossieiu s inostrannymi derzhavami*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1876), pp. 76-79.

Austria continued to balk at Russia's latest overtures, Alexander attempted to break the deadlock by offering, on February 8, 1811, to cede to Austria the Danubian Principalities up to the Sereth River, along with all of the Belgrade pashalik, in return for Vienna's pledge of neutrality.⁷⁴

Under these circumstances the Russian occupation of Belgrade assumes special meaning. Significantly, this action preceded by scarcely a month the tsar's proposal to cede the entire Belgrade pashalik and a large portion of the Principalities to Austria. The timing of these two events does not appear to be coincidental. In all likelihood the dispatch of Russian regulars to Belgrade was intended to pressure Francis into declaring his neutrality in the now imminent conflict between Russia and France, if for no other reason than to ensure the immediate departure of Russian troops from Austria's southern frontier. Nevertheless, the emperor declined to participate in this scheme for the partial dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Approval of the Russian conditions would have been tantamount to an Austrian declaration of war against the Porte. Understandably, therefore, Austrian leaders saw little or no benefit in the Monarchy's becoming embroiled in a war with the only neighbor who did not pose a threat to its integrity.

Russia's apparent control of a strong advance post in the western Balkans also menaced the security of the French-dominated "Illyrian Provinces," a recent creation of Napoleon (1809) which comprised all of the territories acquired by France on the Balkan mainland since 1805. Napoleon fully appreciated the strategic significance of the Russian march into Belgrade, for he too had been presented with a similar opportunity two years earlier. At the height of the profound military crisis threatening the Serbian insurgent movement in the summer of 1809, Karadjordje in a moment of despair appealed to Napoleon to become the "august defender and protector of the Serbian nation."⁷⁵ Karadjordje not only assured Bonaparte of the loyalty of the Serbian rebels, but also implied that the South Slavic peoples of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, and the Serbians of southern Hungary, as well as the Bulgarians and the Greeks, were prepared to pledge their fealty to the emperor of France. According to the Serbian chieftain, "having all these peoples under the wings of France will make her enemies tremble." As an additional incentive for French intervention, Karadjordje called attention to the economic resources of the Belgrade pashalik, including mineral deposits, timber, livestock, and foodstuffs. Permission was also granted by the Serbian leader for the immediate dispatch of French forces to garrison the fortresses at Belgrade and Šabac.⁷⁶ Karadjordje's emissary, Rado Vučinić, who presented a Serbian petition to French officials in Vienna at the time of the Schönbrunn negotiations,⁷⁷ received only vague promises of future French assistance.⁷⁸ Although Vučinić, at Napoleon's request, traveled to Paris in 1810 to serve as the official liaison between Bonaparte and Karadjordje, nothing of a substantive nature ever developed from these contacts during his

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

75. Karadjordje to Ledoulx, August 16, 1809, in Ogist Bop [August Boppe], ed., "Karadjordje i Francuska: Dokumenti o dogadjajima Srbije sa Napoleonom (1809–1814)," *Otadžbine*, 19 (1888): 118–20.

76. *Ibid.*

77. Karadjordje's instructions to Rado Vučinić, n.d., *ibid.*, pp. 122–24.

78. Colonel A. Meriagne to Champagny, February 21, 1810, *ibid.*, pp. 336–38.

four-year tenure in the French capital.⁷⁹ Napoleon's treatment of the Serbian question throughout this period was expressive of his equivocal attitude toward the affairs of the Near East after Tilsit. Preoccupied with problems beyond the Balkans from 1807 onward, Napoleon took little more than a cursory interest in the Serbian overtures.

Meanwhile, as the likelihood of war between Russia and France grew, along with Austrian opposition to the extension of Russia's southern frontier to the Danube, Alexander found his international position becoming steadily more difficult. During the winter and spring of 1811 Alexander attempted to use the Serbian question as a bargaining instrument to induce the Porte to accept Russian territorial demands; the tsar agreed to sever all ties with the Serbians if the Porte would cede the Principalities to Russia.⁸⁰ However, reports of rising Russo-French antagonism strengthened Mahmud's determination to resist Russian demands for a major territorial adjustment in the Balkans. Ottoman representatives accordingly informed the Russians that the sultan would consent to the resumption of peace talks only if a prior Russian announcement acknowledged the *status quo ante bellum*.⁸¹ The tsar refused and the war continued.

By late October 1811, the Porte's ability to resist Russian demands for the convocation of a peace conference was impaired by a rapid succession of Ottoman military reverses along the Danubian defense perimeter. During the summer and autumn of 1811, Russia's Moldavian army under its new commander, General M. I. Kutuzov, won a series of brilliant, decisive victories over numerically superior Ottoman forces led by the grand vizier. Having failed to protect its interests by recourse to arms, the Porte then turned to the devices of diplomacy. Peace negotiations finally resumed on October 31, 1811 after a lapse of two years.⁸² The deliberations that followed dragged on for seven months.

During the negotiations the Russians insisted that the Porte grant autonomy to the Belgrade pashalik.⁸³ Russian intentions in introducing this demand at the peace conference are not entirely clear. The tsar apparently intended to use the Serbian issue as a diplomatic ploy to pressure the Porte into ceding the Principalities by raising the specter of an even greater diminution of Ottoman authority in the Balkans. Had the Porte agreed to abandon the Principalities, the Russians would no doubt have dropped all claims on behalf of the Serbians.

The Russian government was forced to reevaluate its position on the Serbian question, however, by the political crosscurrents in Europe and in Istanbul. Bonaparte's diplomatic success in concluding anti-Russian pacts with Prussia (February 24, 1812) and Austria (March 14, 1812) profoundly alarmed St. Petersburg. Moreover, Russian officials learned, to their dismay, of the combined efforts of the French, Austrian, and Prussian envoys at the Porte to undermine the ongoing Russo-Turkish peace negotiations and to pressure the Porte into

79. For a summary of Serbo-French relations during the Serbian insurrection, see Jakšić and Vučković, *Francuski dokumenti*, pp. 83–86.

80. Kamenskii to P. A. Fonton, February 9, 1811, *VPR*, 6:48–50.

81. Fonton to Kamenskii, February 17, 1811, *ibid.*, pp. 692–93.

82. Petrov, *Voina Rossii s Turtsiei*, 3:346; M. I. Kutuzov to Rumiantsev, November 10, 1811, in L. G. Beskrovnyi, *M. I. Kutuzov: Sbornik dokumentov*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1956), pp. 684–85.

83. Rumiantsev to Kutuzov, October 12, 1811, *VPR*, 6:181–82; Kutuzov to Barclay de Tolly, November 10, 1811, in Beskrovnyi, *M. I. Kutuzov*, pp. 687–88.

joining the anti-Russian coalition. In the face of these threatening conditions Alexander dramatically reduced his Balkan territorial claims but hardened his stand in favor of Serbian autonomy.⁸⁴ The reason for this shift in emphasis can be ascribed in large measure to Alexander's resurrection of Czartoryski's 1806 plan to use the Balkan Slavs for a diversionary attack against French possessions in Dalmatia (that is, the Illyrian Provinces) and against Napoleon's Italian satellite kingdom. In fact, Alexander broadened the scope of the Czartoryski plan to include an attack against Austria:

the underhanded behavior of Austria in allying with France forces Russia to use all means at its disposal for the destruction of these two powers. . . . The most important of these means are the Slavic peoples, like the Serbians, Bosnians, Dalmatians, Montenegrins, Croats, Illyrians, and those Hungarians whose dissatisfaction with their government will present an excellent instrument for disturbing Austria.⁸⁵

Since the tsar contemplated employing Karadjordje's cadres as the vanguard of the military diversion, special attention was given to the maintenance of amicable relations with Belgrade. Consequently, in the Treaty of Bucharest (May 28, 1812), which finally terminated the Russo-Turkish War, the Russians secured the Porte's promise of complete amnesty for the Serbian insurgents and recognition of the Belgrade pashalik as an autonomous province within the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁶

Whatever immediate benefits the Russians or the Serbians may have derived from the provisions pertaining to the Belgrade pashalik were negated by the invasion of Russia by Napoleon's *Grande Armée*. Napoleon's march into Russia relegated the Near East to a position of secondary importance in Russian policy. In July 1812 Alexander hastily abandoned preparation of his audacious project for a military diversion and ordered the immediate evacuation of all Russian forces from the Balkans for the defense of the realm.⁸⁷ Despite the obligations that Russia had exacted from the Porte regarding the future regulation of the internal affairs of the Belgrade pashalik, the Ottomans took advantage of Russia's preoccupation with the Napoleonic menace to crush the Serbian rebellion with a massive display of military power. By November 1813 the Ottoman government had reasserted its unchallenged mastery over the entire province.

In the years under consideration the Serbian insurrection failed to attain the dimension of a dominant international issue. Nevertheless, by threatening the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, the insurgency raised fundamental questions of Near Eastern policy among the Great Powers. The reactions of the powers to the turbulent developments in the Belgrade pashalik had important

84. Alexander I to Kutuzov, April 3, 1812, in Beskrovnyi, *M. I. Kutuzov*, pp. 850–52; Kutuzov's instructions to the Russian plenipotentiaries, April 30, 1812, *VPR*, 6:381–82.

85. Alexander I to Admiral P. V. Chichagov, May 14, 1812, *SIRIO*, 6:67–73.

86. Text of the Treaty of Bucharest, May 28, 1812, *VPR*, 6:406–17; Gabriel Noradounghian, ed., *Recueil d'actes internationaux de l'Empire Ottoman*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1901), pp. 86–92.

87. Alexander I to Chichagov, July 30, 1812, in S. M. Gorianov, *1812 Dokumenty Gosudarstvennogo i S. Peterburgskogo glavnogo arkhivov* (St. Petersburg, 1912), pp. 89–90.

repercussions for the evolution of the Eastern Question and for the various Balkan national liberation movements. Indeed, the responses of the powers to the Serbian problem broadly delineated the classic patterns of nineteenth-century Near Eastern diplomacy.

The Serbian rebellion introduced an unsettling element into the affairs of the Balkan Peninsula that was ultimately to have a determining influence on the fate of the Habsburg Monarchy. Austrian leaders such as Metternich perceived that the Serbian revolt, if successful, would threaten Austria's domestic political cohesion because of its anticipated calamitous effects on the Monarchy's own "Greek" (Orthodox) minorities. Moreover, the Austrian government feared that Russia intended, in the name of Orthodoxy, to exploit the Serbian movement to extend still further its power and influence in the Balkans. The twin dilemmas of possible internal disruptions and Russian expansionism confronted the Habsburg Monarchy in every major Balkan crisis of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Since Austria could not hope to derive any benefit from the Balkan provincial disorders that plagued the Ottoman Porte, the Habsburg government decided that its interests would be best served by preserving the Ottoman state intact as a bulwark against both the encroachments of Austria's Near Eastern rivals and against the imminent threat to the stability of its own territories. The maintenance of the Ottoman Empire thus became the cornerstone of Habsburg policy in the Near East.

Although Great Britain shared Austria's concern for the preservation of Ottoman territorial integrity, it had none of the diverse territorial interests which linked Austria and the other powers with the Balkans. The overriding aim of British Near Eastern policy for the whole of the nineteenth century was protection of its imperial communications network by maintaining naval supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean. Having no land forces to employ to safeguard its interests in the area, Britain had no alternative but to try to wield its influence through its naval power and general prestige. The disorder in the Belgrade pashalik, hundreds of miles to the west of the strategically vital Straits, was not a major factor in the actual formulation of British policy. Nevertheless, the Serbian uprising appeared to forecast an alteration in the power configuration in the Near East by further weakening the Ottoman Empire at a time of expanding French and Russian influence in the Balkans. The British assessment of the possible consequences of the Serbian revolt reveals a tendency of British policymakers throughout the nineteenth century to evaluate disturbances on the Balkan mainland in terms of their possible disruptive effect on the prevailing balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean.

As was the case with British policy, the long-range implications of the French reactions to the Serbian revolt are not immediately apparent. French policy fluctuated according to Napoleon's ever-changing priorities. The emperor of France neither knew precisely what he wished to achieve in the Balkans nor how to accomplish his objectives. French Near Eastern policy of the period was thus in a state of constant flux. Yet Napoleon did exploit Ottoman suspicions of Russian involvement in the Serbian insurgency to help promote a rupture in Russian-Ottoman relations. Moreover, Napoleon's inclination to consider resolving the Eastern Question by trading populations and territories so that the various powers would receive proportionate increases in power and influence

anticipated the attitudes of later generations of European leaders toward the Near East.

Tsarist interests in the Serbian insurrection were determined primarily by the military and diplomatic exigencies arising out of the war with the Ottoman Empire. St. Petersburg, however, in pursuing its objectives, played upon the common ethnocultural and spiritual heritage of the Russian and the Serbian peoples. Russia thereby donned the mantle of liberator and protector of the Balkan Christians from foreign rule, a role that cloaked imperial Russian policy in the Balkans until the demise of the Russian Empire in 1917. On the basis of geopolitical and economic considerations, the principal goal of Russian policy in the Near East was the establishment of some measure of direct or indirect control over the Straits and Istanbul. St. Petersburg's handling of the Serbian question between 1806 and 1812 manifested the tendency of tsarist Near Eastern policy to bargain away the interests of the populations in the western Balkan territories in exchange for a permanent outpost in the eastern Balkans (for example, the Danubian Principalities). This propensity reflected the preoccupation of St. Petersburg with the Straits, a preoccupation which was to persist throughout the remainder of the tsarist era. Nevertheless, because of Russian pressure on the Ottoman government during the negotiations leading up to the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest, the Serbians of the Belgrade pashalik became the first of the Balkan peoples to be specifically mentioned in an international agreement; the treaty laid the political and territorial foundations on which the modern Serbian nation-state was erected.