

Russia, Britain and the Bulgarian Question 1885—1888

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From the summer of 1885 through March 1888 three major events in Bulgarian history dominated the European diplomatic scene: the unification of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia in September, 1885; the kidnapping and subsequent abdication of *Alexander of Battenberg* in August and September, 1886; and the election of *Ferdinand of Coburg* in July, 1887. The crises of these years are significant not only for Bulgarian national development, but for their role in international diplomacy and their importance in bringing about the final dissolution of the alignment of Austria, Germany (Prussia), and Russia which, with interruptions, had been in existence since the eighteenth century. In 1885 Russian diplomacy rested upon participation in the revived Three Emperors' Alliance (*Dreikaiserbund*), signed in 1881 and renewed in 1884. In this agreement Russia obtained support for her interests in Bulgaria and her interpretation of the rules regarding the closure of the Straits. In regard to the Bulgarian provinces, the treaty provided that the allies would not oppose the union of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia should an opportune moment arise; Austria-Hungary was to annex Bosnia-Hercegovina as compensation if she so desired. Although this agreement was the single basic Russian alliance, her partners had extended their commitments. In 1879 Austria and Germany signed a defensive alliance; in 1882 the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy was established. In 1881 Austria-Hungary concluded a treaty with Serbia which reduced that state to political vassalage. By 1883 both Austria-Hungary and Germany had signed defensive pacts, directed against Russia, with Rumania. The terms of these treaties were all secret, although the existence of the general combinations was usually apparent.

An alliance system, centered on Berlin, thus joined four of the great powers, leaving two, Britain and France, out of the major combinations. In the eighties the French diplomatic position, shattered by the events of 1870, remained weak. The growing force of revanchism together with the rise to prominence of General *Boulangier* complicated French relations with her neighbors. Conflicts arising from incompatible colonial policies, particularly in Egypt, made cooperation with Britain difficult. Like France, Britain was also in a position of diplomatic isolation, but this condition was of her own choice. Refusal to participate in agreements not of a specific and direct nature had characterized

her foreign policy throughout the century. Although isolation was a matter of national preference, it held dangers particularly in view of the active imperial and commercial policy pursued at the time. The menace of the formation of a continental coalition concerned British statesmen as well as those of the other powers. Even the existence of the Three Emperors' Alliance was a hindrance for British policy, particularly in the Near East. In 1876 *Disraeli*, faced with the combination of the first Three Emperors' Alliance, had commented: "There is no balance, and unless we go out of our way to act with the three Northern Powers, they can act without us, which is not agreeable for a state like England." The disruption of this alliance through the events of 1876—1878 had been a major achievement of British diplomacy. Yet by 1885 the Three Emperors' Alliance was again in existence, and another alignment, the Triple Alliance, increased the solidarity of the continental powers and the influence of Berlin in international relations. Although none of these combinations was directly hostile to Britain, their existence limited British freedom of action in international affairs. Most important, they appeared to assure German and Austrian support for Russia at Constantinople where Russian and British interests directly collided.

From the standpoint of the evolution of European diplomacy perhaps the most interesting aspect of the years under study is the means by which the British government was able to reverse a generally unfavorable diplomatic situation to one that was more to its own advantage, a condition brought about as much by Russian mistakes in eastern policy as by British shrewdness. In 1885 Britain stood alone — faced by a continent where Germany held the predominant position and where France stood in opposition because of colonial conflicts. By 1888, Britain was joined with Austria-Hungary, Italy and Spain through the Mediterranean agreements of February, March and December, 1887, and the Three Emperors' Alliance was broken. This condition was particularly favorable to her position in the eastern Mediterranean where she now had allies to support her interests and to exert influence on the Ottoman government. In 1890 the system of continental alliances established under *Bismarck's* leadership was further disrupted when *William II* refused to renew the Reinsurance Treaty.

The events of 1885 to 1888 thus brought about a reorientation of European diplomacy in a manner favorable to British interests and at the same time they dealt a blow to Russian prestige in the Near East. It is interesting to note, however, that this shift in power relationships was not accompanied by a commensurate increase in animosity in the relations between Britain and Russia. As usual, throughout the crisis the leading British officials retained the hard-headed and cool appraisal of Russian aims and actions which they had always held. In Russia the most vocal critics of Russian diplomatic defeats blamed not their main adversary, England, but their German neighbors and allies for their failure to provide sufficient support to Russian interests. In 1856 it was Austria, not Britain and France, who won the chief Russian blame

for the Crimean War disaster; in 1878 Germany and Austria-Hungary were credited for the setback at the Congress of Berlin more than the British government, who provided the real directing force against Russian policy. In 1886 and 1887 Austria-Hungary and Germany received far more criticism for their stand in the Bulgarian question than did Britain¹).

The general background of the events of 1885 to 1888, particularly the diplomacy of *Bismarck*, has been covered in numerous publications. This study will therefore concentrate almost exclusively on Russian and British relations and on the divisions within the Russian and British governments on the handling of Bulgarian affairs. No attempt will be made to discuss events within Bulgaria. The chief source will be the reports of Sir *Robert Morier*, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, and the private letters of Baron *Egor Egorovich Staal*, the Russian ambassador in London, to the Russian foreign minister, *Nicholas Karlovich Giers*²). Both *Morier* and *Giers*, as can be seen

¹) Commenting on this Russian reaction, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg wrote in 1886: "It is characteristic of the present temper of Russian opinion, that, throughout the present crisis, the open antagonism of England has produced far less bitterness and irritation than the somewhat specious assurances of goodwill which the Russian government has received from its two Imperial Allies. For one outburst against the 'Cabinet of St. James' there have been ten sneers at the 'treacherous duplicity of Austria' or the Machiavellian designs of the 'honest broker'." *Morier to Iddeleigh*, Great Britain, Public Record Office, Political Despatches (cited hereafter as FO) 65/1262, No. 370, St. Petersburg, October 15, 1886.

²) The reports of *Morier* are to be found in the Public Record Office, London. The letters of *Staal* are from the collection of the private papers of *N. K. Giers* which are in the possession of his grandson, *Serge Giers*, who had kindly allowed me to use them. A selection of these will be published in a separate article in the next issue.

For further information on this period see the bibliographies in Charles Jelavich, *Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism: Russian Influence in the Internal Affairs of Bulgaria and Serbia, 1879—1886*. Berkeley, 1958, pp. 287—294 and Colin L. Smith, *The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople*. Oxford, 1957, pp. 160—180. The important documentary collections for this subject are: *Avantjury russkogo tsarizma v Bolgarii* [Adventures of the Russian tsarism in Bulgaria], edited by P. Pavlovič, Moscow, 1935; *Documents diplomatiques français, 1871—1914*, first series, volume 6, Paris, 1934; *Die Große Politik der europäischen Kabinete, 1871—1914*, edited by J. Lepsius, A. M. Bartholdi and F. Thimme, volume V, Berlin, 1922; and the five British Blue Books on Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia for 1886, 1887, and 1888 (C—4612; C—4767; C—4933; C—4934; C—5370). The *Correspondance diplomatique de M. de Staal, 1884—1900*, edited by Baron A. Meyendorff, volume 1 (Paris, 1900) is particularly important for this article. Special studies of interest relating to the three Bulgarian crises are: W. N. Medlicott, *The Powers and the Unification of the Two Bulgarias, 1885: English Historical Review*, LIV (1939), pp. 67—82, 263—284; Jono Mitev, *L'attitude de la Russie et de l'Angleterre à l'égard de l'union de la Bulgarie en 1885: Études historiques* (Sofia, 1960), I, pp. 247—377; and Ivan Panajotov, *Bŭlgarskata kriza i Evropa, 1885—1888* [The Bulgarian crisis in Europe, 1885—1888], Sofia, 1924. A recent work is Andrej Pantev, *Anglija sreštu Rusija na Balkanite, 1879—1894* [England against Russia in the Balkans], Sofia, 1972. For other documentary collections, diaries, memoirs and general studies, the reader should consult the above-mentioned bibliographies.

through these documents, were pacific and conciliatory in attitude; they both sought paths of agreement and compromise in times of international tension. *Morier*, who held views similar to *Randolph Churchill*, believed that Central Asia and India should hold the prime place in British foreign policy, with less stress on Balkan problems and the Straits; *Giers* was recognised as an advocate of moderation and caution in Russian diplomacy. The attitude of both men contrasts, at least in part, to that of their colleagues in Constantinople, the central diplomatic post for Bulgarian affairs. There, both *Sir William White* and *Alexander Nelidov* assumed more aggressive and combative roles in their pursuit of British and Russian interests.

The early summer of 1885 was a period of relative calm in Russian-British relations. The Penjdeh episode of the spring was in the process of settlement; the Russian-Afghan border was set in the agreement of September, 1885. In June the Conservative Party under the leadership of Lord *Salisbury* returned to power. Once again in office, this statesman followed a policy based on the preservation of the conditions of the Treaty of Berlin and of cooperation with other powers in the Eastern Question. Unaware of the stipulations of the Three Emperors' Alliance, he sought in particular to work with Germany and Austria-Hungary. The revolution in Plovdiv in September, the acceptance by *Alexander of Battenberg* of leadership in the movement for unity, and the subsequent Russian opposition both to the prince and to the event brought previous British policy into question. The unification was clearly in violation of the Treaty of Berlin and detrimental to the interests of the Ottoman Empire, whose position Britain had previously sought to protect, but the negative Russian reaction brought other considerations into play.

Although Russia had been principally responsible for the creation of the autonomous Bulgarian state and for the establishment of its first regular government, relations between Sofia and St. Petersburg thereafter gradually grew less cordial. This condition became worse after the accession of *Alexander III*, who clashed repeatedly with his cousin, Prince *Alexander of Battenberg*. By 1885 relations were so strained that Russia now opposed any action which would strengthen the new state and the prestige of its young ruler. Thus the Russian government, the principal sponsor of Bulgarian nationalism in the past, despite the fact that it had included a provision for the possible eventual union of the two Bulgarian provinces in the treaty of the Three Emperors' Alliance, now emerged as the chief opponent of the event. Nor was the Russian reaction confined to words. The Russian officers assigned to the Bulgarian army were recalled and Prince *Alexander* was deprived of his Russian military rank. On the diplomatic front the Russian government called for a meeting of the ambassadors at Constantinople to discuss how to deal with this violation of the Treaty of Berlin. Supported by her allies, Austria-Hungary and Germany, Russia sought a return to the *status quo ante*.

Although at first *Salisbury* appears not to have been pleased with the union, the advantages of the situation were soon obvious. It was quite appar-

ent that Russia had lost the one great gain which she had made at the Congress of Berlin — her predominant position in the new Bulgarian state. British interests naturally lay in the continuation of Russian-Bulgarian tension. Moreover, Queen *Victoria* at this time and through the next three years remained a strong supporter of her relative, *Alexander of Battenberg*, and of Bulgarian defiance of Russia. The British position in the discussions on the Bulgarian question thus became that of the support of the personal union of the two Bulgarian provinces under Prince *Alexander*. His deposition or the entrance of Turkish troops into Bulgarian territory were strongly opposed. This policy was in fact detrimental to Turkish interests, which Britain had previously upheld. However, the opportunity to deal a blow to Russian prestige in the Balkans offered by this immediate problem was too favorable to be missed. The basic British policy of the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire was not reversed, but it was in this instance widened to accommodate the Bulgarian union. Like all of the other powers, Britain had no desire to see a reopening of the Eastern Question; in particular she feared a rising in Macedonia. She wished to secure the confirmation of the union under Prince *Alexander*, nothing further. Her attitude in the Bulgarian question also allowed her to argue in favor of the principle of the „Balkans for the Balkan people“ when it served her interests in combatting Russian influence in the area.

The Constantinople Conference of Ambassadors, the diplomatic body directly concerned with the Bulgarian question at this time, was forced to deal with further inroads on Ottoman rights when Greece and Serbia almost immediately presented demands for compensation for the apparent increase in Bulgarian national strength. Greek claims were disposed of through an international blockade of her shores established in June, 1886. The Serbian demands proved to be more difficult to settle. On November 18, 1885 King *Milan* declared war on Bulgaria. Almost immediately, at the battle of Slivnitsa on November 16—19, the Serbian forces were soundly defeated and the Bulgarian armies entered Serbia, only to be stopped by an Austrian ultimatum at the end of the month. This precipitous and ill-advised action by Serbia contributed greatly to the success of the Bulgarian union. The great powers were now forced to recognise the difficulties which awaited them should they try to restore the *status quo ante*.

In discussing the Bulgarian union with *Morier* during this period, the Russian officials emphasized the dangers which could arise from the event. The establishment of a great Bulgarian state along the lines of the Treaty of San Stefano was now far from the minds of the Russian statesmen. On December 2, 1885 *Giers* spoke with *Morier* on the problem of the rivalry among the Balkan nations and “said no one not intimately connected with these countries could know the intensity of the hatred which these nationalities indulged in toward each other. The closer the kindred the more inveterate and undying the animosity, and he instanced the blood feud between Russia and Poland...” He feared that an enlarged Bulgaria would become a danger both to its neigh-

bors and to Turkey. It would soon attack Macedonia and take over the settlement of the Eastern Question. *Giers* further expressed "his conviction of the absolute necessity of maintaining Turkey alive and of doing nothing to weaken the position of the sultan"³).

Nevertheless, despite the strong Russian stand, *Giers* in the same month was forced to admit that the *status quo ante* could not be restored and that *Alexander* was the only possible ruler in Eastern Rumelia⁴). In April, 1886 the prince was therefore appointed for a five-year term as the governor of Eastern Rumelia, establishing thereby a personal union between the two Bulgarian provinces. The union was recognised on terms less favorable to *Alexander* than first envisaged by the British diplomats due in part to the return to power in February, 1886 of the Liberal government of *Gladstone*, which adopted a weaker stand in eastern affairs. With this settlement the first crisis came to an end. The Three Emperors' Alliance had held together; Austria-Hungary and Germany had both supported the Russian position on the union. Nevertheless, even with their aid, Russia had not been able to prevent the unification, and Prince *Alexander* had indeed won a moral and material victory.

The second crisis of August and September, 1886 was far more serious in its ultimate effect on the European diplomatic system. On August 21, 1886 a revolutionary conspiracy, directed by Russian partisans, forced *Alexander of Battenberg* to abdicate; he was then transported out of the country and a new government was set up in Sofia. After a week a second revolt, led by *Stefan Stambulov*, restored the former government, enabling the prince to return⁵). Upon re-entering Bulgaria, *Alexander* committed the immense blunder of sending the tsar a telegram containing the phrase: "As Russia gave me my crown, I am prepared to give it back into the hands of its Sovereign." Still embittered by his cousin's past actions, *Alexander III* accepted the implied offer of abdication. After appointing a Regency, consisting of *Stambulov*, *Mutkurov*, and *Karavelov*, *Alexander* again abdicated and left the country. The Regency then proceeded to hold elections for a National Assembly which was to choose a new prince. *Alexander III* at the same time sent a special, personal emissary, General *Nicholas Kaulbars*, the brother of the former minister of war in Bulgaria, to Sofia in an attempt to restore Russian influence and prestige.

In August, 1886 in Britain the Conservative party returned to power with *Salisbury* as prime minister and the *Earl of Iddesleigh* as foreign secretary.

³) *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1219, No. 415 secret, St. Petersburg, December 2, 1885.

⁴) *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1220, Tel. No. 77 confidential, December 23, 1885.

⁵) At this time *Iddesleigh* telegraphed *White*: "Private. Do not let the Prince get discouraged. We are doing our best for him." *Iddesleigh* to *White*, FO 364/3, Tel., Foreign Office, September 2, 1886. It always was feared that any other prince who might succeed *Alexander* would be more pro-Russian. *Salisbury* to *White*, FO 78/3746, No. 332 confidential, Foreign Office, September 28, 1885.

In his handling of the Bulgarian crisis, *Salisbury* at first faced disagreement within his own cabinet, particularly from Lord *Randolph Churchill*, the chancellor of the Exchequer, who favored cooperation with Russia on the basis of British support of Russia's Balkan interests in return for favors in Asia. Lord *Iddesleigh* also differed from the prime minister on certain points of policy. In December, 1886 *Churchill* resigned; *Lord Iddesleigh* died in the following January. Thereafter *Salisbury* took the position of foreign secretary.

From the British standpoint the period after September, 1886 was marked by a tightening of attitude toward Russia and an attempt to work with Austria-Hungary to block expected Russian moves in the Balkans. The principal British concern was that Russia would first occupy Bulgaria and then, from this strong military position, either obtain dominance over the Ottoman government or march into Constantinople. British support of Bulgarian opposition to Russia was thus determined by British interests in circumscribing Russian influence in the Balkans and over the Ottoman government rather than in the merits of the Bulgarian issues themselves. At the time of the first abdication, British influence in Constantinople was used to back the Regency and to try to prevent the sultan from yielding to Russian pressure to take strong action in Bulgaria. The British position was clearly stated in a memorandum by *Iddesleigh*, dated September, 1886, drawn up to be used for an approach to Austria-Hungary⁶).

"The physical, and perhaps still more, the moral advance of Russia threatens our communications with our Eastern possessions, and may directly and indirectly shake our power over our Mahometan subjects. We may not be primarily so much interested in the independence of Bulgaria and the smaller Balkan States as Austria-Hungary; but the growing power of Russia in those countries is of nearly as much consequence to us, and threatens us with almost as serious changes as Austria-Hungary can herself apprehend."

The memorandum foresaw two possibilities in regard to the Bulgarian question: the Russians would either re-establish their position slowly and without military measures, or actively with an outright occupation. Should the latter occur, it could be assumed that the powers, Britain among them, would intervene. However, *Iddesleigh* continued:

"The more dangerous of the two alternatives which I have suggested is undoubtedly the first. It is to be feared that Russia may so influence the Bulgarian people that, partly by cajolery, partly by fear, and partly by corruption,

⁶) In transmitting this document to *White*, *Iddesleigh* commented: "It was intended to convince the Austrians that they might under certain circumstances count on aid from this country. But I am uneasy as to the line which the German Powers are taking, or rather at their unwillingness to take any distinct line at all. They will not speak out now, when their speaking firmly might prevent Russia from committing herself to a forward policy, from which it will be difficult for her to withdraw. When it is too late, they will see their error." *Iddesleigh* to *White*, FO 364/1 confidential, October 12, 1886. The memorandum is printed in H. W. V. Temperley and L. M. Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy, 1792—1902*, London, 1966, pp. 442—444.

they may practically give themselves up to her. In that case the influence would be exerted not only over the Balkan States, but over Constantinople itself. The Sultan in the hands of Russia would be a very formidable power; and it could not be long before England would find herself in a position from which she would hardly be able to extricate herself without a serious war, which might lead to consequences at present beyond calculation."

The British commitment to the Ottoman empire was stated: "For a clearly defined object such as the defense of Constantinople, England no doubt would fight. Whether she would do so to obviate the danger of an attack is very questionable, unless she had the full support of some other Powers." The rest of the despatch contained a discussion of the events in Bulgaria and the need for cooperation among the powers to influence the sultan to resist Russia.

At the same time at Constantinople, *White* was instructed to warn the Ottoman government:

"Make him [the sultan] understand that, whatever he may hear to the contrary, England maintains her old traditional policy towards Turkey, desires to see it strong and independent, with Constantinople safe. But, much as we value a safe and friendly Constantinople, equally should we fear and dislike one which was virtually under Russian control: and that is the sort of contingency which might indeed drive us to consider our position and to ask how we are to safeguard our eastern communications."⁷⁾

Meanwhile, the Russian position in Bulgaria deteriorated even further. The *Kaulbars* mission proved a fiasco⁸⁾. In November the general returned to Russia and diplomatic relations were broken between the two countries. The Russian government now turned its attention to the National Assembly which had just been elected and attacked its competence to chose a prince. In his conversations with *Morier* on the subject, *Giers* emphasized the Russian desire to see a regular government established in Sofia, but he believed that this goal "could only be attained by means of an assembly freely elected and representing the true opinion of the country — not one elected under a state of seige and a system of terror, which would be composed of the creatures of a government violently hostile to Russia"⁹⁾. The Regency was also a prime target of

⁷⁾ *Iddesleigh* to *White*, FO 364/1, private, Foreign Office, September 22, 1886.

⁸⁾ When visiting *Giers* in October, *Morier* found the foreign minister "in a state of the deepest depression. In the course of a long conversation he allowed me to infer, though he did not say so in so many words that the mission of General *Kaulbars* had proved a total failure, and he fairly admitted that he did not see how the matter was to end, or how Russia was to extricate herself from the position she had got into". *Giers* further remarked that some saw the solution of the present problem "in a total abandonment by Russia of Bulgaria, and all her concerns, as a country deep dyed in ingratitude, against which the Slav mother should shake off the dust of her feet". *Morier* to *Iddesleigh*, FO 65/1262, No. 366 most confidential, St. Petersburg, October 13, 1886. For a long report on the *Kaulbars* mission see also *Morier* to *Iddesleigh*, FO 65/1263, No. 433 confidential, St. Petersburg, December 6, 1886.

⁹⁾ *Morier* to *Iddesleigh*, FO 65/1264, cypher Tel. No. 154, St. Petersburg, October 1, 1886. In January, 1887 *Giers* commented: "... nothing could be more unconstitutional than the present status of Bulgaria. The Regency was unconstitutional, the Ministry

attack. *Giers* maintained that Russia could not deal with the Bulgarian regents "two of whom he declared to have been turned out of Russia for advanced Socialist opinions, and with whom it was impossible to treat"¹⁰). Pressure also continued to be exerted on the Ottoman government to persuade it to act to assert its rights in Sofia.

At the same time that it denied the legality of the Bulgarian assembly, the Russian government itself sought a suitable candidate to suggest for the vacant throne of Bulgaria. In October *Giers* confessed to *Morier* that this search "was his despair for the more the Emperor tried to discover one, the more difficult did the work of selection appear"¹¹). Many possibilities were discussed, including Prince *Nicholas of Montenegro* and the *Duke of Oldenburg*, until finally Prince *Nicholas of Mingrelia* became the Russian candidate. The Bulgarian Assembly's first choice of the tsar's brother-in-law, Prince *Waldemar of Denmark*, was not approved in St. Petersburg and the prince declined the offer. The Mingrelian candidature was pressed continually in the next months, but with little success. The British government declared its strong opposition on repeated occasions¹²).

By the end of 1886 it became clear that a diplomatic front was in the process of formation directed against possible Russian military action in Bulgaria. In contrast to the unification crisis of the previous year, it was now clear that the Three Emperors' Alliance would not withstand this new strain. Although no formal agreement had been made between Britain and Austria-Hungary, it was apparent that their lines of policy ran together. *Salisbury's*

was unconstitutional, and the whole tendency of Russian action was to restore a constitutional state of things." *Morier to Salisbury*, FO 65/1295, No. 11, St. Petersburg, January 14, 1887.

¹⁰) *Dering to Iddesleigh*, FO 65/1263, No. 445, St. Petersburg, December 15, 1886. Later *Giers* further criticized the Bulgarian ministers, especially *Stambulov*, declaring them "the dregs of the Russian Seminaries and Universities, the allies and protectors of the Nihilists . . . men with whom Russia could never make terms". *Morier to Salisbury*, FO 65/1329, No. 3, January 4, 1888.

¹¹) *Morier to Iddesleigh*, FO 65/1262, No. 378 confidential, St. Petersburg, October 20, 1886.

¹²) The Mingrelian candidature is discussed at length in the British despatches. In December *Iddesleigh* wrote that the Russian chargé in London, *Butenev*, had said that the tsar supported this candidate "not because he had any special affection for him, but because he knew that he could rely upon him to do the work which Russia wanted done". *Iddesleigh to Dering*, FO 65/1255, No. 340, Foreign Office, December 30, 1886. In a conversation with *Giers's* associate, *Jomini*, *Morier* reminded him that "he originally broke the news of the Mingrelian candidature to me in the following word: "Je vais vous annoncer une candidature qui est parfaitement sérieuse mais qui je dois avouer frise l'Offenbach". *Morier to Salisbury*, FO 65/1295, No. 26 confidential, St. Petersburg, January 17, 1887. See also: *Iddesleigh to White*, FO 78/3867, No. 354, Foreign Office, November 10, 1886; *White to Iddesleigh*, FO 78/3876, No. 561 secret, Constantinople, November 12, 1886; *Morier to Iddesleigh*, FO 65/1262, No. 404, St. Petersburg, November 15, 1886; *Iddesleigh to Morier*, FO 65/1255, No. 297a, Foreign Office, November 15, 1886; *Morier to Salisbury*, FO 65/1295, No. 11, St. Petersburg, January 14, 1887.

Guildhall speech of November 9 and the declarations of the Austrian foreign minister, Count *Gustav Kalnoky*, expressed a common will to oppose Russian action in Bulgaria.

The winter and spring of 1886—87 marked a period of crisis and tension in international affairs. The Bulgarian events were almost overshadowed by growing concern over the deterioration in Franco-German relations. The first six months of 1887 were thus characterized by unusual diplomatic activity. In February the Triple Alliance was renewed on terms more favorable to Italy. In February and March the first Mediterranean agreements were concluded between Britain, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Spain; their intention was the preservation of the status quo in the Mediterranean, Adriatic and Black seas. They were directed particularly against the extension of French control in North Africa. Closely connected with the Bulgarian crisis was the failure of both Austria-Hungary and Russia to agree to the continuation of the Three Emperors' Alliance, which came up for renewal at this time. As a partial replacement *Bismarck* and *Paul Shuvalov*, the Russian ambassador in Berlin, in June, 1887 completed the negotiations on the Reinsurance Treaty. In this agreement Germany received the assurance of Russian neutrality in case of a French attack; in return, Germany gave her support to the Russian interests in the Near East. In regard to Bulgaria, Russia gained recognition for her "preponderant and decisive" interests and German assurance of support against the restoration of *Alexander of Battenberg*. Germany agreed also to assist Russian endeavors to establish a "regular and legal government" in Bulgaria. However, the conclusion of the second Mediterranean agreements in December hindered any possibility that Russia might act even with the Reinsurance Treaty. Britain, Italy and Austria-Hungary now joined to preserve the *status quo* in the Near East and to block any Russian moves in Bulgaria. By the end of 1887 a diplomatic deadlock had thus been reached. Russia was faced with the combination of Britain, Austria-Hungary, and Italy who cooperated in common actions at Constantinople. The ostentatious support which *Bismarck* gave Russia in the Near East was qualified by the fact that it had been made clear in previous years that in event of war Germany would never allow Russia to inflict a real defeat on Austria-Hungary¹³). Although the Russian diplomats did not know the terms of the Triple Alliance or the

¹³) In November, 1886 in a conversation with the British ambassador in Berlin, Sir *Edward Malet*, *Bismarck* expressed the hope that should Russia invade Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary would not oppose the action. "At all events", *Bismarck* continued, "we should not assist her were she to do so; our relations with Austria do not bind us to that — we wish that she should maintain herself as she is. Her existence is necessary to us for the European equilibrium. We cannot allow her to disappear, or to be essentially weakened... We do not want her to go to war, because we should be obliged to interfere to prevent her from being essentially weakened. We cannot permit the vacuum in Europe which such an event would create..." *Malet* to *Iddesleigh*, FO 364/3, No. 455 most confidential, Berlin, November 12, 1886.

Mediterranean agreements (or *Bismarck's* role in their formation), they were quite aware of the real cooperation between the three powers and of the impossibility of relying on German support in a serious crisis.

The impasse in diplomacy was paralleled by a similar military situation. From the fall of 1886 through 1887 two conflicts which could possibly lead to general European involvement were widely discussed — a war between France and Germany, and a military occupation by Russia of Bulgaria leading to complications with Britain and Austria-Hungary. After the failure of the *Kaulbars* mission, it appeared that the Russian government would either have to promote internal revolt or resort to a military occupation should it wish to restore its influence in Bulgaria. Neither alternative was easy, but an invasion might unleash a major war. Russian armies could enter Bulgaria either through Rumania or by sea. A march through Rumania would, under the circumstances of the time, have led immediately to hostilities with Austria-Hungary. The German attitude toward that state assured that even if the Russian armies proved victorious, the Russian government would be unable to secure gains at Habsburg expense which would compensate for the cost of a war. The second alternative, a sea attack, could be defeated by a combined action of the British and Turkish fleets, or the British fleet alone, should the sultan allow it to pass through the Turkish Straits or should it force passage. Even if the Turkish government acted to prevent British entrance into the Black Sea, cooperation with the Ottoman Empire in policies detrimental to a Balkan Christian nation could have unfortunate results for general Russian policy.

In October, 1886 *Morier* discussed the Russian dilemma with *A. G. Jomini*, one of *Giers'* principal associates in the Foreign Ministry. *Jomini* feared the consequences should General *Kaulbars* be murdered in Bulgaria, an event which would virtually assure Russian intervention. *Morier*:

“asked how Russia could intervene materially, that is send Russian troops to occupy Bulgaria, and not in doing so commit an act of hostility against Turkey. He [*Jomini*] said Turkey had offered to occupy Eastern Rumelia if Russia would occupy Bulgaria, but that this was a proposition which it was impossible for Russia to entertain. To bring back the Turks into Roumelia would be giving the lie to all they had done. It was out of the question.”

Morier commented further on the Russian military problem:

“The whole tendency of Baron *Jomini's* language was to confirm me in the opinion that the Russian government thoroughly realize the danger involved in a military occupation, and that nowhere better than at the General Staff is the mistake committed by Russia, in giving up the Dobrudscha to Roumania, appreciated at its true value. Absolutely cut off from access by land to Bulgaria, except with the previous consent of Roumania, they feel that even if they could by a *coup de main* transport their two divisions from the Crimea to the Principality, these would, could the active alliance between Austria and England be realized — an alliance which does not now appear so impossible as a short time ago — be cut off from their base with hardly any strain at all

on the maritime forces of the allied Powers, — and their destruction be thereby ensured.”¹⁴⁾

The British military position was at first also difficult, particularly since it was not immediately apparent what Austria-Hungary would do in this second Bulgarian crisis. Turkish cooperation was similarly in question in view of the tendency of that power to lean at this time more toward St. Petersburg than London. As *Iddesleigh* wrote in a memorandum of October, 1886, the question was if Turkey “will not act herself, will she give us the power of acting by admitting our fleet into the Black Sea”? In an attempt to put pressure on the Ottoman government, *White* was instructed to deliver another warning:

“I think you may very well take some opportunity of hinting to the Sultan that if he allows Russia to gain such an ascendancy in Bulgaria as to appear to threaten the independence of Constantinople England will probably change her tactics, and try to safeguard her Eastern Empire by measures of her own, which would not be framed upon the old model. Our position in Egypt for instance might have to be reconsidered.”¹⁵⁾

The British attitude was made quite clear in St. Petersburg. In a conversation with *Gierys* in January, 1887 *Morier* discussed the concern felt in Britain over Russian actions:

“I observed that I viewed the general situation, quite independently of any momentary panic with profound alarm and that I had returned from my journey to England deeply depressed. His Excellency knew that I was *par excellence* a man of peace, not only in virtue of my professional diplomatic character as peacemaker, but as a layman . . . I had during my short stay in London seen many important political personages of all parties and many of my particular friends and coopinionists and I was struck with the unanimity which I saw prevailing that we were rapidly approaching a great and terrible crisis in the affairs of the world, where force not law would be the *ultima ratio*. That in this breaking forth of the waters the Eastern Question would come on for final settlement or unsettlement was regarded as self-evident and, coming as I did straight from St. Petersburg, I was naturally on all sides questioned as to what I believed were the intentions of Russia.”

Morier then assured *Gierys* that he had answered these enquiries by giving assurances that both the tsar and *Gierys* were desirous of peace.

“If, however, I had added, circumstances should force on war, then that war would not be an Emperor’s war or a Minister’s war but *the* national war so yearned for by the patriotic party with Constantinople as its *objectif*. In that case, had been the universal reply, the die will indeed be cast. There will be no alternative left for England but to rally round her such allies as will be

¹⁴⁾ *Morier* to *Iddesleigh*, FO 65/1261, No. 363 confidential, St. Petersburg, October 10, 1886. Also *Morier* to *Iddesleigh*, FO 65/1262, No. 376, St. Petersburg, October 18, 1886.

¹⁵⁾ *Iddesleigh* to *White*, FO 364/1, confidential, October 12, 1886. In February, 1887 *Salisbury* telegraphed: “My advice to the Sultan would be to keep on good terms with Russia, but above all things not to let the Bulgarian Regency fall if he can help it.” *Salisbury* to *White*, FO 78/4002, cypher Tel. No. 35 secret, Foreign Office, February 11, 1887.

ready to go with her and bar the Russian advance. I earnestly requested His Excellency to bear in mind that this language was not that of the Chauvinists, of whom we had plenty, but of men who were by no means *a priori* unfriendly to Russia and who quite admitted that like every other country she had ideal aspirations which she could not be expected to throw aside because they did not suit other people. They were spoken in sorrow and with the sentiment that one of those fearful predestined catastrophes was at hand which the best will and the most earnest desire could not avert and where men and Governments became mere tools in the hands of a blind destiny."¹⁶⁾

In a subsequent report *Morier* expressed his belief that Russia did not intend to take military action:

"The mistake into which European public opinion appears to me to fall in estimating the attitude of Russia, is that of supposing her entirely absorbed in the Bulgarian question as part of a campaign having the capture of Constantinople as its object. I have little hesitation in declaring my belief that this opinion is a wrong one, and that the plan of campaign does not for the present contemplate an advance on the Bosphorus by way of the Balkans, but, as I have often stated on previous occasions, the obtaining of practical control over the Porte with the ultimate object of striking at Constantinople by the Black Sea after it has been converted into a closed Russian Lake. The maintenance of Russian influence and prestige in the Balkan peninsula, and above all the obtaining of satisfaction for the wounded *amour propre* of the Czar, are undoubtedly matters of great and immediate interest, but not of real *paramount* importance: for, and this is a point which should always be borne in mind, it is the deep conviction of every Russian that as regards the oriental question he has time on his side and can afford to wait."

The major concern in Russia, continued *Morier*, was over the danger of a war between France and Germany. As a result of *Bismarck's* recent belligerent utterances "every Russian has asked himself what would be the effect upon his country of a France *saignée à blanc* and wiped out from the European forces. The prospect of a tête-à-tête in Europe with Germany is not one that commends itself to Russia: and it is natural that this should be the case."¹⁷⁾

Throughout the spring of 1887 the Bulgarian problem continued to remain in suspense. Although fears of a Russian invasion had died down, the precariousness of the position of the Bulgarian Regency in face of Russian hostility remained. Russian-British relations, however, improved. In July on the occasion of the successful settlement of another stage of the negotiations over Afghanistan, *Giers* appealed to *Morier* for closer ties between their countries, arguing that "if the Bulgarian question could only be got rid of, there was no reason why the most friendly relations should not be established

¹⁶⁾ *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1295, No. 26 confidential, St. Petersburg, January 26, 1887.

¹⁷⁾ *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1295, No. 57 confidential, St. Petersburg, February 23, 1887. Later in the year *Morier* saw the danger of a German-French clash as the reason why *Giers* sought a rapprochement with Britain on the Bulgarian question. Neither Britain nor Russia would wish to see either France or Germany eliminated as major powers. *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1298, No. 325, St. Petersburg, September 21, 1887.

between the two Governments.” Russian policy toward Bulgaria had changed, *Giers* continued:

“His Excellency again accentuated, as he has often done before, the difference between ‘now’ and three years ago. Then, he said, we were preponderant in Bulgaria: we had three hundred Russian officers in command of the Bulgarian Army. We have no wish to have one there now. The dominant feeling, with the exception of the extreme panslavists — and I think His Excellency was specially thinking of the Tsar — is one of disgust at the ingratitude of the Bulgarian people, and at the folly which made Russia shed so much blood and waste so much treasure on such people. Let them make the *amende honorable* and we shall be only too happy to leave them alone.”¹⁸⁾

The election of *Ferdinand of Coburg* in July, 1887 and his subsequent arrival in Sofia commenced the third Bulgarian crisis. The Russian government, firmly adhering to its previous policy of denying the validity of the acts of the National Assembly, refused to accept *Ferdinand*, although he appealed for Russian approval¹⁹⁾. There was, however, little further that the Russian government could do. As before, the cooperation of Austria-Hungary, Britain and Italy at Constantinople was firm; in their public addresses *Salisbury*, *Kalnoky*, and the Italian foreign minister, *Francesco Crispi*, spoke in the same manner. The open German support was not sufficient to counteract this front. Before the Coburg election the Russian government had proposed that the powers nominate a provisional regent who would be sent to Bulgaria to supervise the election of a new National Assembly and the choice of a prince. This suggestion remained the Russian solution to the Bulgarian problem through 1887. A candidate was also offered: General *K. G. Ernroth*, a Finn who had previously been both Bulgarian minister of war and foreign minister under *Alexander of Battenberg*, and who was at the time undersecretary to the Ministry of Finland. *Giers* praised him to *Morier* “as a man of iron will, singularly endowed with the gifts necessary to govern a politically demoralized community like that of Bulgaria, perfectly able to cope with the elements of anarchy and disorder there, and with Panslav intrigues here, and withal a first rate administrator and organizer. He admitted that he was not beloved

¹⁸⁾ *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1297, No. 260 confidential, St. Petersburg, July 26, 1887. In a postscript to this despatch, *Morier* added: “I have omitted a point in M. de *Giers*’ conversation not a little characteristic of what I believe to be one of the Emperor’s personal preoccupations in connection with the present state of the Bulgarian question — viz the amount of money which it costs him. After all, observed his Excellency, there is, amongst many others, an excellent reason why we want the matter settled. The present state of things is costing us a much larger amount of money than we care to spend. All these Bulgarian patriots who come to us have to be kept and fed. A thousand francs a month to one, and fifteen hundred francs to another mounts up, and we hope to see the day of their repatriation.”

¹⁹⁾ Russia held that both the election and the assumption of power were illegal. Britain agreed that the assumption of power was in contradiction to the treaties, but not the election. *Salisbury* to *Morier*, FO 65/1300, Tel. No. 110, Foreign Office, August 12, 1887.

by the Bulgarian politicians and positively hated by the Russian Pan-slavs . . ."20)

Immediately after the election of *Ferdinand*, the Russian government again sought to persuade the Ottoman government to act in its capacity as the suzerain power in Bulgaria. It was hoped that the Porte would send a commissioner to Sofia who would prevent *Ferdinand* from assuming the position to which he had been elected. The way would thus be cleared for the naming of a temporary regent by the powers. Russian pressure in Constantinople to obtain this objective was strongly supported by Germany²¹). As in the previous month, *Giers* again tried to gain British cooperation²²). However, the British government, backed by Italy and Austria-Hungary, remained firm in its rejection of the appointment of a regent. The British considered it impossible that Russia could suggest a name on which both states could agree²³). Moreover, the basic disagreement persisted on the legality of the existing Bulgarian Regency. Britain naturally wished to consider it the government preferred by the Bulgarian people; cooperation with Russia in its ouster was declared impossible because of "the difficulty which any English minister would find in giving formal support to a policy of opposition to the expressed wish of the Bulgarian population"²⁴). The Russian government, of course, attacked the legitimacy of the Regency and the National Assembly, which, *Giers* declared, "owed its existence to the unscrupulous use by the party in power of every form of terrorism and such vulgar electioneering agencies as stout sticks and sandbags"²⁵).

Even after the final abdication of *Alexander of Battenberg*, his re-election and return were often discussed. This possibility was strongly opposed, as had been shown, on the Russian side; his exclusion was one of the terms of the Reinsurance Treaty. In a conversation with *Morier* in March, 1887, *Jomini* cited such an event as one which could lead to the occupation of Bulgaria. *Jomini*, *Morier* wrote:

". . . observed to me that I could feel quite assured that Russia would never send a man to Bulgaria except in the event of the revolutionary stream there bursting all barriers and the Sobranie proclaiming the independence of the

²⁰) *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1298, No. 268A, Oranienbaum, August 2, 1887. *Giers* told *Morier* that when he had discussed *Ernroth* with *Bismarck*, the German minister commented: "What a pity to waste such a man in such a wretched post as that you wish him to occupy in Bulgaria, instead of employing him in a sphere more worthy of such excellent qualities."

²¹) *White* to *Salisbury*, FO 78/3999, No. 281 secret, Therapia, August 19, 1887.

²²) *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1298, No. 287 secret, St. Petersburg, August 17, 1887.

²³) *Salisbury* to *Morier*, FO 65/1294, No. 236, Foreign Office, August 19, 1887.

²⁴) *Salisbury* to *Morier*, FO 65/1294, No. 239, Foreign Office, August 22, 1887.

²⁵) *Morier* replied with the remark that "Russia had given Bulgaria her liberty, but with the strict injunction not to use it". *Giers*, laughing, said that he would abide by an unbiased expression of Bulgarian opinion. He also said that *Ferdinand* was unacceptable to Russian public opinion because of his Catholic faith. *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1298, No. 294, St. Petersburg, August 24, 1887.

Country and electing Prince Alexander as King, an event, he observed which would be immediately followed by a rising in Macedonia. He seemed convinced that this was the ultimate point to which the immunity granted to the Regents was leading them and in that case, he observed, the barriers on the Russian side would also burst and nothing would be strong enough to restrain the national party in Russia, at whatever cost and risk, from mingling in the fray."²⁶⁾

Because of the diplomatic and military deadlock, the Bulgarian issue slowly declined in importance. On November 2, 1887 *Giers* commented that "nothing would induce Russia to cut the Gordian knot by forcible means — such as occupation or military threats. Deep as was the humiliation inflicted on her by the present state of things, she would continue in her attitude of negative expectancy"²⁷⁾. The conclusion of the second Mediterranean Agreement in December, 1887 strengthened the front formed against possible Russian action. Russian diplomatic pressure, however, continued to be exercised in Constantinople. In March, 1888 the Russian government succeeded in obtaining a Turkish declaration on the illegality of the election of *Ferdinand of Coburg*. The Bulgarian question thereafter ceased to be a major issue in European diplomacy. In 1896 after the dismissal and assassination of *Stambolov*, and after it was assured that *Ferdinand's* son would be Orthodox, the Russian government resumed diplomatic relations with Bulgaria and thereby recognized the government of Prince *Ferdinand*²⁸⁾.

Throughout the years under discussion British policy was clear: the Bulgarian situation was to be used to check Russian advances in the Balkan peninsula. The entrance of Russian troops into Bulgaria was regarded as particularly dangerous because it was feared that this move would be a first step toward the occupation of Constantinople and the Straits, and on this issue Britain was prepared to go to war. The acquisition by Russia of the sole predominating position in the Ottoman government was also feared. To carry out her policy of blocking Russia, Britain needed allies. She therefore cooperated successfully with Austria-Hungary and Italy in the Mediterranean agreements, pacts which had the added value of strengthening the British hand against a French advance in North Africa. The British actions also had the backing of *Bismarck*, who by 1887 was faced with the difficult task of attempting at one and the same time to appear to support the Russian position in the Balkans, but in

²⁶⁾ *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1296, No. 97 confidential, St. Petersburg, March 23, 1887. When *Morier* later brought up the question of what would happen should a new assembly re-elect *Alexander of Battenberg*, *Giers* admitted that Russia could not recognize either this selection or that of *Ferdinand*. "Dans tous les cas, il faudra des exclusions", *Giers* commented. *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1298, No. 320 most confidential, St. Petersburg, September 20, 1887.

²⁷⁾ *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1299, No. 363 confidential, St. Petersburg, November 2, 1887.

²⁸⁾ See Charles Jelavich, *Russo-Bulgarian Relations, 1892—1896: With Particular Reference to the Problem of the Bulgarian Succession: Journal of Modern History*, XXIV, No. 4, December, 1952, pp. 341—351.

fact to prevent Russia from taking any positive steps to advance her interests. British policy was thus in this period quite successful. At the Congress of Berlin Britain had prevented Russia from sponsoring a Great Bulgaria which would have dominated the Balkans and exerted a profound influence on the Ottoman government. By 1888 Britain had advanced a step further in her eastern policy. By this time Russia had lost the predominant political position in Bulgaria which had been her single real gain in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877/78.

Throughout the Bulgarian crisis, with the possible exception of the period of Liberal control from February to August, 1886, British policy had been consistent and clear. *Salisbury*, despite criticism of his actions from prominent British statesmen, kept a firm control over foreign affairs. His most noteworthy critic was Lord *Randolph Churchill* who wished the British government to put first weight on its interests in Asia and to seek an accommodation with Russia over the conflicting interests at Constantinople and in the Balkan peninsula. In a series of letters written to *Churchill* in September and October, 1886, immediately after the abdication of *Alexander of Battenberg*, *Salisbury* emphasized the importance of the defense of the Straits:

“Like you . . . I am not happy about foreign affairs, but not entirely for the same reason. I do not wholly take your view about our attitude towards Russia. I consider the loss of Constantinople would be the ruin of our party and a heavy blow to the country: and therefore I am anxious to delay by all means Russia’s advance to that goal. A pacific and economical policy is up to a certain point very wise: but it is evident that there is a point beyond which it is not wise either in a patriotic or party sense — and the question is where we shall draw the line. I draw it at Constantinople.”²⁹⁾

Churchill, in reply, did not oppose the goal itself, but rather the means to its attainment: “We can, I think”, he wrote, “perfectly defend Constantinople by going in for the independence of Bulgaria; and we can best obtain that independence by persuading Austria to take the lead.”³⁰⁾

It is interesting to note that a similar disagreement over the basic aims and methods of British foreign relations existed between the two ambassadors principally responsible for carrying out British policy in the Bulgarian question, Sir *Robert Morier* and Sir *William White*. In November, 1885, after the union, *Morier* first defended the Russian position of a return to the *status quo ante*. Like *Churchill*, he argued: “. . . our Asiatic concerns are for me *en première ligne* — our rivalry with Russia in Europe *en seconde ligne*, and very far behind.”³¹⁾ In a later letter he modified his first opinion on the British

²⁹⁾ Winston S. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, London, 1951, p. 520.

³⁰⁾ R. *Churchill* to *Salisbury*, Treasury Chambers, Whitehall, S. W., October 3, 1886. *Ibid.*, p. 521. See also *Staal* to *Giers*, private letter, London, September 19/October 1, 1886.

³¹⁾ *Morier* to *White*, St. Petersburg, November 19, 1885. H. Sutherland Edwards, *Sir William White*, London, 1902, pp. 230—231.

policy toward Bulgaria, but he continued to emphasize that the Bulgarian issue was not worth a war with Russia:

“If we can help to build up these people [the Balkan Christians] into a bulwark of independent states and thus screen the sick man at Constantinople from the fury of the northern blast, for God’s sake do it — *as long as you do it in the natural course of business, and called thereto in your character as one of the great European signatories, but don’t go for it as a special British Mission . . . Don’t forget that for us, after all, India is the *dernier mot*, and that we must never so *embourber* ourselves in Europe as to lose our liberty of action in Asia.*”³²⁾

White, in contrast, argued for the new British policy of the support, under some circumstances, of the Christian Balkan states. “The future European Turkey”, he wrote, “to Adrianople, at any rate — must, sooner or later, belong to the Christian races.” As for Asia:

“I feel, of course, that all these things may have a *contrecoup* in Asia, but we cannot shape our course in Europe by purely Asiatic considerations. Of course, our great interests are there; but we still have European duties and a European position, and even European interests.”³³⁾

There were, therefore, considerable differences of opinion within the British government, but these disharmonies did not paralyze British action or divert Britain from adopting the course of action probably best suited to her own national self-interest as a world imperial power. It will also be noted

³²⁾ *Morier* to *White*, St. Petersburg, December 27, 1885. *Ibid.*, pp. 237.

³³⁾ *White* to *Morier*, Constantinople, December 7, 1885. *Ibid.*, pp. 233, 234. Despite their disagreements *Morier* and *White* were close friends and frequent correspondents. *Morier* was generous in his appreciation of *White*’s diplomatic talents. Both men were controversial figures in their time. *Morier* had served for about ten years in the German states and had won the animosity of *Bismarck*, who evidently refused to consider his appointment as ambassador to Berlin. He was thus popular in France. Both Liberal foreign secretaries, *Granville* and *Rosebery*, disliked him. *Granville*, who considered him “unfit for either Constantinople or St. Petersburg”, commented in 1884 that: “It would serve the Sultan right to give him *Morier* . . .” (*The Political Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville, 1876—1886*, ed. A. Ramm, Oxford, 1962, vol. II, pp. 227, 256). In March, 1886, *Rosebery* wrote to Queen *Victoria*: “It is no consolation to Lord *Rosebery* to read in *The Times* this morning that Sir *R. Morier* has given one of the most successful balls of the season . . . or to hear from Sir *R. Morier* that the Czar is greatly pleased with Lord *Rosebery*’s method of conducting business, of which indeed, owing to *R. Morier*’s proceedings, the Czar can know nothing.” (*R. R. James, Rosebery, London, 1963, p. 194*). *White*, whose diplomatic career was unusual in many respects, became, upon receiving his appointment as ambassador to Constantinople, the first Catholic to attain this rank since the Reformation. He was known as a friend of Germany and had won French opposition. The Russian officials disliked *White* and much preferred his predecessor, Sir *Edward Thornton*. They apparently even tried to block *White*’s appointment to Constantinople. (*Colin L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886—1891, Oxford, 1957, pp. 49, 50*). In contrast, they found *Morier* very sympathetic. In general, the Russian government preferred to deal with Liberal rather than Conservative ministries.

that there was no disagreement on the basic premise that British policy must be directed to the defense of her empire, particularly India; the problem was the method by which this aim could be accomplished. British success is best measured by the improvement of her general diplomatic position in 1888 as compared to 1885. Internal unity on questions of foreign policy gave Britain strength.

Quite the contrary situation characterized the Russian government. At this time a large degree of confusion and division existed not only over Bulgarian affairs, but over the wider issue of the value of the German alliance for Russian foreign relations. Moreover, in strong contrast to Britain, where the foreign secretary and the foreign office had effective control over foreign policy, in Russia the tsar often used agencies other than his own ministry for the conduct of international relations, a situation that ultimately weakened the Russian position abroad. Although *Alexander III* made the final decisions in foreign affairs and thus carried the ultimate responsibility, he was personally weak and indolent, open to conflicting views and pressures. He also had an extraordinarily strong sense of personal honor, an emotion of great significance in his determination of policy towards Bulgaria. The words *amour propre* and statements on the necessity of satisfying the tsar's wounded feelings recur often in the conversations of Russian officials with *Morier*. In fact, in reviewing the events of the period the strong impression is left that it was essentially the tsar's rancor and stubbornness which prevented an arrangement or a reconciliation between Russia and Bulgaria. It must be remembered, however, that despite his many strong declarations on the Bulgarian question, the tsar in the end followed a middle course. The policy adopted in the three crises — the exertion of pressure on the Porte, cooperation with the other powers, and, finally, the acceptance of an attitude of "negative expectation" — was the moderate solution. On the one extreme, the tsar was pressed by those who wished either to occupy Bulgaria or to promote even more actively internal revolution; on the other side, some, with *Giers* among them, would have liked to have made some sort of accommodation first with *Alexander of Battenberg* and then with the Regency. Agreement with the prince was always stopped short by the tsar's personal dislike of his cousin.

Despite the fact that a military solution was not resorted to by *Alexander III*, the situation from 1885 to 1888 was highly precarious. *Morier* clearly recognised the importance of the tsar's sensitivity to matters of personal honor and the extreme danger of the adoption of overly provocative policies in the Bulgarian question. In 1888 in commenting on a proposal by Baron *Blanc*, the Italian ambassador in Constantinople, that Austria, Britain and Italy follow a more determined course of action, *Morier* expressed his strong disapproval in words which are also applicable to the events of the previous three years.

"I should not have written this Despatch, nor have undertaken the ungrateful task of criticizing the programme of a statesman, for whom I feel so much regard as I do for Baron Blanc, were it not that I deemed it my duty, as a

Public Servant, whose special business it has been to ascertain on the spot the true forces at work in Russia, to express in the strongest manner possible my dissent from this appreciation of the situation. I have had the honour in previous despatches to state my conviction that Russia was not contemplating offensive action against Europe, or the taking of any step in the direction of initiating war. I have said that, humiliating as, rightly or wrongly, she considers her present exclusion from all intervention in the Balkan peninsula to be, and however derogatory to her honour and to the Orthodox feeling of her vast population the presence as *de facto* sovereign of the country of an Austrian Catholic Prince, she had made up her mind to look on passively at the *status quo* and await the turn of the wheel rather than provoke a war to which the Czar is personally averse, and for which his military and financial advisers know she is not prepared. But I have on more than one occasion pointed out, and I wish strongly to repeat this now, that this passive attitude might any day be changed for a blind rush into war if a direct provocation were addressed to her in reference to her permanent position in the East. If the psychological conditions of the sultan's mind are of such vast importance in the eyes of Baron Blanc as to justify the risk of setting Europe in a blaze to modify them to the advantage of the Austrian and Italian embassies on the Bosphorus, I may claim that those of the Czar are equally worth attending to, and I have no hesitation in affirming that having made them my study, as Baron Blanc has made those of the Padishah his, a clear challenge for supremacy in the Balkans by Austria would mean war at any price and any risk."

In November, 1886, *Morier* continued, *Bismarck* had made overtures to Russia, promising her benevolent neutrality in an Austrian-Russian war in return for a similar promise in case of a Franco-German conflict. Recently, German assurances had been given that Russia was "free to go ahead in the Principalities, even if it should involve her in war with Austria, so long as it is a local war and no vital part of Austria were menaced". The Russians, however, saw no point in fighting Austria if they could not "reap the reward of victory". Thus despite the German offers:

"The Emperor in whose sole hands are the issues of war was never tempted. His Majesty's determination to avoid war being one of the most solid facts of the present situation. But, as I pointed out in my Despatch no. 364 of the 2d November 1886 this determination is subject to the very important condition that no direct affront, no direct challenge, the refusal to accept which would involve national dishonour, be offered him. In such a case I believe that there would be a sudden outburst of passion, blind to all consequences, unamenable to the dictates of reason, tearing down all before it, and giving Austria an excellent opportunity 'of shewing her capacity for self help'. Yet to give just such provocation as this in order to win the smiles of the Sultan is the advice proffered to her by her Macchiavellian ally."³⁴)

The division within Russia and the disapproval of the Foreign Ministry of many of the tsar's decisions was made clear to *Morier* in his conversations with the Russian officials. He reported, for instance, that the tsar's expulsion of *Alexander of Battenberg* from the Russian army in 1885 had surprised his

³⁴) *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1331, No. 212 most secret, St. Petersburg, June 13, 1888.

ministers and was not completely approved³⁵). In December, 1885, *Jomini*, known for his frank and candid speech, declared that the Bulgarian union should be recognized and that he had always felt that this was the only possible solution³⁶). Later, in 1886, he expressed his disagreement with the Emperor's reply to the prince's appeal. "The only hope of getting out of the intolerable *imbroglio*", he believed, was a reconciliation but "que voulez-vous, la volonté de l'Empereur c'est une barre de fer." *Morier* heard that *Vlangali*, another close associate of *Giers*, held similar views³⁷). In 1887 *Giers* told *Morier* "that his own wish had been for a reconciliation with the latter [Prince Alexander] when he telegraphed to the Czar"³⁸).

Not only was the position of the Foreign Ministry weakened by the fact that policy was often carried on through other channels, but the position of *Giers* as foreign minister was difficult because of the predominating role of the tsar in foreign relations. In no way does the position of *Giers* compare with that of *Bismarck* or *Salisbury*, who in fact as well as in name conducted the foreign affairs of their nations. Moreover, throughout his career *Giers*, as is true of any man in a similar position, had to deal with rivals for his post. Previously, *Saburov* had attempted to use the revival of the Three Emperor's Alliance to advance himself; in 1885 White believed that *Nelidov* hoped to exploit the Bulgarian crisis to gain for himself the post of foreign minister³⁹). Within the Foreign Ministry *Mohrenheim*, the Russian ambassador in Paris, and even *Jomini*, worked against *Giers* in certain affairs⁴⁰). In general, outside of the Ministry, he was opposed by the national and Panslav groups who would have preferred a foreign minister who was not of a Swedish-German background and Protestant in faith. *Giers*' firm support of a policy of alliance with the German powers increased his unpopularity in these circles. It was from this section of Russian society that *Giers* suffered the strongest attack on his position. In 1886 and 1887 he was in real danger of being forced out of

³⁵) *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1219, No. 384C secret and confidential, St. Petersburg, November 11, 1885.

³⁶) *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1219, No. 435 secret, St. Petersburg, December 21, 1885.

³⁷) *Morier* to *Iddesleigh*, FO 65/1261, No. 305, St. Petersburg, September 3, 1886.

³⁸) *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1298, No. 287 secret, St. Petersburg, August 17, 1887. *Morier* was thoroughly appreciative of *Giers*' moderate and pacific inclinations. For example, in 1885 he wrote that he believed that as long as *Giers* was in power "the main object of Russian policy will be to prevent the Eastern Question from being reopened in order that a European war may be avoided". *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1219, No. 400 secret, St. Petersburg, November 22, 1885. *Morier* believed that *Giers*' actions were influenced by his patriotism and his fear that Russia was not prepared for war. Moreover, if war came he would lose his position. *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1219, No. 401 secret, St. Petersburg, November 22, 1885.

³⁹) Smith, Sir William White, p. 17.

⁴⁰) For *Jomini*'s attitude toward alliance with the German powers see Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *Jomini and the Revival of the Dreikaiserbund: Slavonic and East European Review*, XXXV, No. 85, June, 1957, pp. 523—550.

office when the brilliant journalist, *M. N. Katkov*, published a series of articles in the *Moscow Gazette* strongly attacking the Foreign Ministry and the policy of alignment with Germany⁴¹).

The Russian apparent humiliation and obvious powerlessness in the Bulgarian crisis made many question the value of the Russian alignment with the German powers. The increasing tension between Paris and Berlin at this time introduced the added issue of the danger which would face Russia should Germany crush France in a new conflict. The entire issue of cooperation with Germany had also been in question after the Congress of Berlin. Thus *Katkov* in attacking Russian policy was expressing convictions felt by many, but in a more forceful and open manner. Moreover, he personally was in a strong position. His daughter was married to a son of Count *D. A. Tolstoi*, the minister of interior; he had a powerful friend in *Konstantin Pobedonostsev*. He had also known *Alexander III* before he became tsar and had access to him. At first, *Katkov* did not oppose close relations with Austria and Germany, but in the spring of 1886, in the face of Russian diplomatic failures, he turned to support instead the policy of "free hands". He believed that Russia should stand alone in international affairs and that the connection with Germany should be ended. His strongest article appeared in July, 1886 when he compared the visits of the Russian statesmen to Berlin with those of the Russian princes to the Tartar khans. Such an attack on Russian foreign policy was possible despite the strict press censorship because of the relative freedom allowed in this sphere in contrast to internal affairs where criticism was discouraged. *Katkov* at the same time carried on a private correspondence with *Alexander III*⁴²). Here he advocated a more active policy in Bulgaria and support for those who wished to overturn the Regency by force. However, finally, in March, 1887 *Katkov* went too far. At that time, in an article on Russian diplomacy, he revealed that a treaty between Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia did exist and that it was about to expire. Since the terms of the Three Emperors' Alliance were a closely guarded secret, despite the fact that the general alignment with the German powers was known, the tsar was furious. In addition, by this time *Katkov's* articles seemed to imply an attack on the tsar himself⁴³). *Alexander III* wished to deliver a first warning, which

⁴¹) On the *Giers-Katkov* controversy see in particular, Irene Gruning, *Die russische öffentliche Meinung und ihre Stellung zu den Großmächten, 1878—1894*, Berlin, 1929, and Boris Nolde, *L'alliance franco-russe*, Paris, 1936, pp. 380—388, 447—461.

⁴²) See *M. N. Katkov i Aleksandr III, 1886—1887 gg.*: *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, XXXIII, 1933, pp. 58—85.

⁴³) *Morier* commented: "...not only in fact, as all those acquainted with the working of the Government machine know, is *M. de Giers* literally the Emperor's secretary, and the conscientious interpreter of His Majesty's will in all that concerns foreign policy, but that his position as such is perfectly known to, and appreciated by the public, the attempt therefore to separate him from His Imperial Master, and the accusing him of criminal treachery to his country in the conduct of the affairs

would have been damaging to the editor's prestige, but he was dissuaded by *Pobedonostsev*. Although *Katkov* now lost influence, *Giers* did not receive the open and public approval for his conduct of policy which he wished. Since he had been so severely criticized, *Giers* offered to resign. *Morier* reported:

"... M. de Giers on Tuesday the 29th ultimo asked the Czar to accept his resignation, or else, in some public manner, to prove to the world that his (M. de Giers') policy, and not that of Monsieur Katkoff, was the one adhered to by His Majesty. The Emperor declined to allow him to resign, and assured him that his confidence in him had never been greater. 'Were I to accept your resignation', His Majesty is reported to have said, 'it would be putting Katkoff in the right and you in the wrong.'"⁴⁴)

On March 30 *Giers* told *Morier*: "I placed myself in His Majesty's hands, and I can do no more than hope that he will give me the satisfaction which I think I have a right to." Although *Morier* was not certain about what had happened, he believed that *Katkov* was summoned to the tsar and reprimanded:

"... a reprimand of so severe a kind as effectively to stop the unbridled violence of the 'Moscow Gazette', as far as Germany and the policy of the German chancellor are concerned. From the impression however left upon me at my interview with M. de Giers today, and from the language of a colleague who had seen His Excellency just before I did myself, and who told me that he had again yesterday ineffectually tried to resign, I am led to believe that he has not even received that *minimum* of satisfaction which he deemed himself entitled to expect, and that he regards himself as worsted in his duel with the great Panslavist agitator."

Morier's suspicions that *Giers* had not received the type of approval he wished were strengthened in a subsequent conversation with *Jomini*, who was most pleased with the outcome of the affair.

"The Emperor had been most cordial to M. de Giers, and had assured him in the most positive manner that his confidence was unabated, and that the *Giers* policy, and not the *Katkoff* was the only true and genuine Imperial one. 'This assurance', Baron *Jomini* continued, 'was invaluable to us, as we really did not know ourselves whether His Majesty might not after all be encouraging M. *Katkoff* without our knowledge. On the other hand there is to be no scandal; nothing is to be allowed to ooze out into publicity. It is all to be arranged *en famille*. The Emperor has ordered a confidential 'enquête' to ascertain under whose inspiration M. *Katkoff* has been writing, and the whole thing will then blow over, and no bones will have been broken."

of his department, has, to Russian ears, all the ring of irons directed against the sacred person of the Czar." *Morier* also reported that relations between the tsar and *Katkov* had deteriorated because *Alexander* "has detected the patriotic editor in a grave attempt to get his patriotic efforts acknowledged in the shape of an enormous grant from the Treasury, in payment of ground of which he is possessed in Moscow, which is required for a gymnasium and which it appears had already been paid for". *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1296, No. 101, St. Petersburg, March 26, 1887.

⁴⁴) The following quotations on the *Katkov* affair are to be found in *Morier* to *Salisbury*, FO 65/1296, No. 119 confidential, St. Petersburg, April 6, 1887.

Jomini also defended *Katkov* as “the great conservative pillar of the Empire” and praised his services in “rallying the national forces, in a conservative spirit, round the throne”. *Katkov* subsequently died during the summer.

In June *Giers*' policy received practical confirmation with the signing of the Reinsurance Treaty. Nevertheless, criticism of cooperation with Berlin continued. In Bulgarian affairs the tsar continued to approve the utilization of underground methods to restore the Russian position in Bulgaria⁴⁵). After 1890, when the German government refused to continue the alignment, *Giers* was compelled to adopt the course of action favored by many of his opponents and to support a policy of alliance with France.

The events in Bulgaria in the years 1885—1888 thus had wide European repercussions and affected the internal as well as the external affairs of the great powers concerned. Britain and Russia, the states primarily considered here, were forced to reconsider their European and imperial interests; the issues involved and their ultimate effect on European diplomacy caused discussion and controversy in both countries. Although the immediate question of the unification of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia and of the recognition of Prince *Ferdinand* was settled by 1896, the conflicts concerning the Bulgarian crises of the years under discussion left a lasting impression on European international relations and contributed to the ultimate formation of the alliance system which existed at the beginning of the First World War.

⁴⁵) See *Avantjury russkogo . . .*, op. cit.