

A THIRD ROME?: Catherine the Great's "Greek Project"

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Catherine the Great's imperial ambition is underscored by her many successful land acquisitions; however, Catherine's imperial aspirations are also underscored by the imperial endeavors that did not entirely come to fruition, an example being her "Greek Project." Catherine the Great's Greek Project entailed the overthrow of Russia's long-time enemy, the Ottoman Empire, and the re-establishment of a Russian-supported "third Rome." Long thought by historians to be an idealistic fantasy, this essay argues that the Greek Project was a genuine geopolitical strategy in Catherine's strategic arsenal and heavily influenced Russia's diplomatic relationships vis-à-vis the great powers of Europe.

Catherine II's rule of Russia is defined by her many political successes, primarily in the realm of foreign policy. Catherine's reign saw the strengthening of Russian imperial influence throughout its acquired territories as well as attempts to exert imperial influence in territories she aspired to conquer. These desired territories were mainly those held by the decaying, former great power of Southeastern Europe: the Ottoman Empire. Such attempts were just a small component of a much larger plan, known to the imperial court as Catherine's "Greek Project." The Greek Project was a quixotic goal that consisted of expelling the Turks from Europe and reinstating the Byzantine Empire to its former glory under the hegemony of Russia. The ultimate goal of the Greek Project, the capture of the former Byzantine capital of Constantinople, was never fully actualized. Despite this disappointment, which appears to constitute the Greek Project as an idealistic failure, the project was a lucrative geopolitical strategy. But how exactly did a romantic notion such as the Greek Project manifest in the strategy of Russian foreign policy? Catherine II's Greek Project heavily influenced Russian imperial pursuits at the expense of other European power players, primarily the Ottoman Empire. The influence of the project in Russian foreign policy manifested in the events of the First Russo—Turkish War (1768—1774), the annexation of Crimea, and the Second Russo—Turkish War (1787—1792).

The existing scholarship concerning the Greek Project is vibrant, ranging from works that discuss the Russian perspective to works that evaluate the significance of the project upon other European great powers. Hugh Ragsdale's "Montmorin and Catherine's Greek Project: Revolution in French Foreign Policy" is an example of scholarship that evaluates the project's consequences for states other than Russia, with the primary focus of this work being how Russia's entrance into the Mediterranean caused France to rethink its longstanding alliance with the Ottoman Porte.¹ Likewise, Isabel de Madariaga's "The Secret Austro—Russian Treaty of

¹ Hugh Ragsdale, "Montmorin and Catherine's Greek Project: Revolution in French Foreign Policy," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 27, no. 1 (Janviers—Mars 1986): 27—44.

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1781” and Matthew Mayer’s “The Price for Austria’s Security: Part I. Joseph II, the Russian Alliance, and the Ottoman War, 1787—1789” analyze how the Greek Project helped to reconfigure an alliance between Russia and Austria.² The scholarly foundation for this essay includes—in addition to the study mentioned previously—works that examine general trends of Catherinian foreign policy, such as Isabel de Madariaga’s *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, Alan Fisher’s *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1772—1782*, and Bryan Davies’s *The Russo—Turkish War, 1768—1774: Catherine II and the Ottoman Empire*.³ This repository of scholarship illuminates the geopolitical position of Russia during Catherine’s reign.

Under the dominion of Catherine, Russia evolved into a major force in Eurasian geopolitics. The former dominant force in southeastern Eurasia—the Ottoman Empire—was in decline throughout Catherine’s reign. The Ottoman Empire, an Islamic state pushing into the middle of Christian Europe, rose to prominence with its conquest of the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 1453 C.E. The fall of the Byzantine Empire at the hands of the Ottomans marked the end of “Roman” civilization, as the Byzantine Empire was the eastern portion of the Roman Empire that maintained sovereignty after the western portion fell to Germanic invaders. During its rise to power, the Byzantine Empire had been a trading partner of the early Russian state; the Russian people even acquired its Orthodox Christian religion from the influence of its Byzantine neighbors. From 1453 on, the Ottomans controlled much of the former lands of the Roman Empire, much to its Christian neighbors’ dismay. The Russians, meanwhile, became the only independent Orthodox Christian polity, which amplified the Russian sentiment that its empire was the scion of its coreligionists, the Byzantines.

By the time Catherine the Great ascended the Russian throne in 1762, the idea that Russia was the rightful heir to the Byzantine identity was not a new one. Russia was the only independent state to practice the Orthodox religion of Greece and the Kievan Grand Prince Vladimir had married a Byzantine princess Anna Porphyrogenita in 989 C.E. contributing to the notion that the Russian heir was also Greek’s.⁴ The romantic thoughts of Russia expelling the Turks from Europe and reinstating the Byzantine monarchy had been a dream of countless tsars before Catherine: even Peter the Great sought to drive the Turks and Tatars out of Europe.⁵ Catherine’s efforts, however, had greater success. Catherine and her closest advisors devised a complex plan consisting of military strategies aimed at overthrowing the weakening Ottoman Empire and solidifying Russia’s place as the dominant power in southeastern Europe. This plan would later be known as Catherine’s Greek Project and greatly influenced foreign policy towards the Ottoman Turks, especially regarding

² Isabel de Madariaga, “The Secret Austro—Russian Treaty of 1781,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 38, no. 9 (1959): 114—145; Matthew Mayer, “The Price for Austria’s Security: Part I. Joseph II, the Russian Alliance, and the Ottoman War, 1787—1789,” *The International History Review* 26, no. 2 (2004): 257—299.

³ Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981); Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1772—1783* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970); Bryan L. Davies, *The Russo—Turkish War, 1768—1774: Catherine II and the Ottoman Empire* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

⁴ Rulers of Muscovy, what became the modern Russian state, saw themselves as the heirs to Kievan Rus. See Andrei Zorin, “Russians as Greeks: Catherine II’s ‘Greek Project’ and the Russian Ode of the 1760s—70s,” *By Fables Alone: Literature and State Ideology in Late Eighteenth— and Early Nineteenth—Century Russia*, ed. David M. Bethea (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 27.

⁵ Hugh Ragsdale, “Evaluating the Traditions of Russian Aggression: Catherine II and the Greek Project,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 66, no. 1 (January 1988): 91.

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its territories near the western Russian border. The prime goal of the Greek Project, to reinstate the Byzantine monarchy with Catherine's grandson Constantine as emperor, was never realized. However, Russia did gain a newfound imperium status in southeastern Europe because of the influence of this project on its strategies during the First Russo—Turkish War.

The early implementation of the Greek Project defined Russian influence following their actions in the First Russo—Turkish War. Catherine's desire to influence expanding territories caused conflict abroad and would eventually erupt into violence, officially starting the First Russo—Turkish War. The historian Vera Proskurina asserts that the Turks resented Russia's burgeoning dominance in regional politics and that the tensions that arose from the resentment led to a declaration of war.⁶ The war was an opportunity to set ideas of the Greek Project into motion. One of the main components of the Greek Project was that Greek Orthodoxy justified Russia's claim that it was the rightful leader of Greek Orthodox communities. Because of Russia's religious connection to Greece, Catherine felt it was Russia's duty to "liberate" Orthodox people under Ottoman control. Such rhetoric came to Catherine in part by her close confidant, and fellow enlightened philosophe, Voltaire who urged Catherine through an ode to "revenge Greece [and] drive out the unworthy."⁷ Catherine capitalized upon this Russian "responsibility" when crafting her military strategy for the war. Under the command of Alexei Orlov, a Russian naval fleet was sent into the Mediterranean to take the war to the Turks, as the war had previously been fought in the Russian territory of Ukraine.⁸ Though this was a military maneuver, it also had political significance. As a part of the Greek Project, the Russian entrance into the Mediterranean region was intended to incite all Orthodox peoples within the region—which consisted of the Greeks and Southern Slavs—into rebellion against their Ottoman oppressors.⁹ The sight of the Greeks' Orthodox savior, Russia, was expected to rally the Greeks to their liberator's side and interrupt the Turks' war efforts in the West. Despite the military successes that the Russians gained in the Mediterranean, such as the success at Chesme and the acquisition of some Aegean islands, Catherine had overestimated the support she would receive from the Greeks.¹⁰ The Greeks were of little military assistance to the Russians, and Orlov even complained to Catherine that the Greeks were "incline[d] to their servility and frivolity."¹¹

Nevertheless, the events of the war in the Mediterranean catapulted the Russian Empire to the forefront of geopolitics in southeastern Europe, a region in which Russia previously had little influence. Catherine's success in occupying a number of the Aegean islands resulted in Russia gaining a crucial foothold in the maritime trade of the Mediterranean; likewise, the Russian presence in the Mediterranean gave Russia diplomatic access to the Arab rulers of the Levant.¹² This

⁶ Proskurina, "War in Greek Garb," 154.

⁷ Voltaire XIII, *Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 13 (Paris, 1785), in Zorin, "Russians as Greeks," 31.

⁸ Davies, "*The Russo—Turkish War*," 111.

⁹ Zorin, "Russians as Greeks," 43.

¹⁰ Elena Smilianskaia, "Catherine's Liberation of the Greeks: High—Minded Discourse and Everyday Realities," *Word and Image in Russian History: Essays in Honor of Gary Marker*, eds. Maria Di Salvo, Daniel H. Kaiser, and Valerie A. Kivelson (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015), 75.

¹¹ Smilianskii et al., "*Rossiiia I Sredizemnomor'e*," 125; Davies, "*The Russo—Turkish War*," 155.

¹² Elena Smilianskaia, "'Protection' or 'Possession': How Russians Created a Greek Principality in 1770—1775," *Power and Influence in Southeastern Europe, 16th—19th*

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position not only weakened the Ottoman Porte but upset the balance of the Mediterranean “concert of powers,” which included the Italian states and Austria—Hungary with the emergence of the new Russian imperial power in the region. While the strategy did not necessarily perform as Catherine and her advisors had hoped, it demonstrates that Catherine’s conception of the Greek Project was a major influence upon Russian foreign policy during the First Russo—Turkish War, as Russia used Orthodox Christianity as a justification for being the agitator in the Mediterranean theatre of the war.

The First Russo—Turkish War ended in 1774 with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca. The war was a resounding defeat for the Ottoman Porte and a major victory for the Russian Empire. The victorious Russia had superior leverage when brokering the conditions of peace. Catherine used the concessions within the treaty to help realize some diplomatic goals of the Greek Project. The treaty named Russia as the protectorate of the Orthodox religion and gave Russia power to protect its clergy within Ottoman borders. The treaty set forth the following conditions for the Ottoman Empire:

The Sublime Porte promises to protect constantly the Christian religion and its churches, and it also allows the Ministers of the Imperial Court of Russia to make, upon all occasions, representations, as well in favor [sic] of the new church at Constantinople... as on behalf of its officiating ministers, promising to take such representations into due consideration... permission is given to the High Court of Russia... to erect... a public church of the Greek ritual...¹³

In boldly declaring that the Ottomans must protect the Christian religion and its churches, the Russian composer of the treaty enacted one of the main concepts of the Greek Project into international law.¹⁴ The conditions outlined in the treaty legitimized and gave legal precedence to the policy of Russia intervening on behalf of Orthodox Christians within Ottoman territories. By promising that officiating ministers of the Imperial Court of Russia would have their representations taken into “due consideration,” the Ottoman government conceded to a Russian Orthodox prerogative within the Sultan’s sovereign territory. This promise gave Russia unilateral legal justification to protect its coreligionists within Ottoman borders, an advantage that few European states retained.¹⁵ The implementation of this policy in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca was a major turning point in Russo—Turkish relations. Russia’s position regarding Orthodox Christians under Ottoman control would later justify Catherine’s annexation of Crimea, a further step toward fulfilling the Greek Project.

The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca that ended the First Russo—Turkish War also declared Crimea, an autonomous tributary of the Ottomans, an independent state from the Porte or Russia. Despite the treaty, the Ottomans and Western Europe suspected that Crimea would soon be annexed by Russia, which would ultimately be correct.¹⁶

Century, ed. Maria Baramova, Plamen Mitev, Ivan Parvev, and Vania Racheva (Berlin: Lit, 2013), 209.

¹³ Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774), in “*The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*,” ed. J.C. Hurewitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 95—96.

¹⁴ The Russian general Nicholas Repnin was the negotiating author of the treaty, while the Russian general Pyotr Rumyantsev signed the treaty on behalf of Catherine. See Davies, “*The Russo—Turkish War*,” 208.

¹⁵ The French gained the right to intervene in Ottoman affairs concerning Catholic churches during the reign of Francis I; likewise, Britain had claimed itself as the protector of Protestant Christians within the empire. See Benjamin Braude, ed., *Christians & Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Abridged Edition* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014), 43—44.

¹⁶ Fisher, *Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, 57.

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After Crimea's inhabitants revolted against the Russian—backed Crimean Khan, Şahin Giray, Catherine promptly annexed the region in 1783.¹⁷ The Greek Project influenced Catherine's subsequent decision to annex Crimea since that act was one of the first projected goals of the plan. The formulation of the plan was put to paper by Catherine's personal secretary, A.A. Bezborodko, who saw the annexation of Crimea as an integral part of achieving the ultimate goal of taking Constantinople.¹⁸ Crimea was of strategic importance to Russian imperial interests: taking the region gave Russia access to the Black Sea, allowing the empire to build a navy with greater access to Western Europe. In the context of the Greek Project, the acquisition of Crimea gave Russia territory adjacent to the Ottoman capital allowing for the conquering of the city of Constantinople with a short sea voyage. The significance of the plan by this time was known to Western European powers. They feared that with the annexation of Crimea, no obstacles were in the way of Russia continuing on to conquer Constantinople.¹⁹ The annexation of Crimea also alarmed Ottoman officials because it allowed the Russians to extend their influence further into Turkish territories, such as in the Ottoman territory of Georgia in the Caucasus, another Orthodox society.²⁰ This fear was not unreasonable, as expanding Russian influence into Ottoman territory was one of the central facets of the Greek Project. Annexing Crimea was, to Catherine, the channel by which the project would be realized.

The importance of annexing Crimea in carrying out Catherine's project was reiterated to her by her advisors. One of the most ardent supporters of the Greek Project, Prince Grigory Potemkin, urged Catherine to take advantage of the chance that stood before her. In a letter written to Catherine in the winter of 1782, Potemkin begged the empress to seize Crimea. He asserted that the Turks' survival, or decimation, depended upon the decision to take the peninsula. He declared that Catherine had the opportunity to unleash a "powerful blow" against the Turks and that she must take it, or else she would later lament her reluctance.²¹ Potemkin knew that the Russian annexation of Crimea would be an unimaginable loss to the Ottomans. The further weakening of the Ottoman Empire could not happen without the loss of its Tatar allies in Crimea. Thus, the final stage of the Greek Project, the taking of Constantinople, would not be possible without a Russian hold upon the Crimean Peninsula and the Black Sea. The weakening of the Ottomans, while a major part of the project, was also a general Russian foreign policy goal independent of the Greek Plan. However, it is Potemkin's next words that reveal that the Greek Project, not just military aspirations, overwhelmingly informed his opinion regarding Crimea. Potemkin states "Kherson in the Tauride! From you piety flowed to us... watch how Catherine II introduces to you anew the meekness of Christian rule."²² This statement is a direct reference to the religious element of the Greek Project. According to medieval chronicles, the first Russian leader to convert to Orthodoxy, Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev, had done so in the Crimean region of Kherson.²³ From this

¹⁷ In her official statement regarding the annexation of Crimea, Catherine states this rebellion as a justification for why Crimea must become a part of the Russian Empire. See "Manifesto of Catherine II on the Annexation of Crimea to Russia." DWAX, accessed October 27, 2021.

¹⁸ Ragsdale, "*Traditions of Russian Aggression*," 93.

¹⁹ Fisher, "*Russian Annexation of the Crimea*," 137.

²⁰ Fisher, "*Russian Annexation of the Crimea*," 153.

²¹ Douglas Smith, ed., "*Love & Conquest: Personal Correspondence of Catherine the Great and Prince Grigory Potemkin*" (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 124.

²² Smith, "*Love & Conquest*," 124.

²³ Mara Kozelsky, "Ruins into Relics: The Monument to Saint Vladimir on the Excavations of Chersonesos, 1827—57," *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (2004): 655.

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conversion, so followed the widespread adherence to the Orthodox religion in Russia. By appealing to a religious rationale, Potemkin was implying that Crimea was Russia's legitimate patrimony. He was attempting to persuade Catherine to bring back the Orthodox religion to the region that had righteously given Russia its "piety" centuries before. In stating that Catherine could reintroduce Crimea to the "meekness of Christian rule," Potemkin is attempting to persuade Catherine to overthrow the Islamic yoke. This overture embodies the entire essence of the Greek Project: Russia was righteously the protectorate of all ancestral Orthodox lands. Thanks to these urgings by Potemkin and the formulations of her other advisors, Catherine decided to annex Crimea. Clearly, the Greek Project was a major motive for the annexation. With the reluctant acceptance of the annexation by the Ottomans, Catherine, her advisors, and her allies continued to plan the course that the Greek Project would take in foreign policy.

After the annexation of Crimea in 1783, tensions between Russia and the Porte steadily increased. The Ottomans, displeased with the outcome of the First Russo—Turkish War and the Russian annexation of Crimea, declared war against Russia again in 1787.²⁴ The circumstances of the Second Russo—Turkish War were a product of the Greek Project, as it had become a significant influence upon Catherine's foreign policy. However, unlike the First Russo—Turkish War, Russia was not the lone opponent against the Turks. Some years earlier, in 1781, Catherine had signed a treaty with Austria's Joseph II, aligning Russia with Austria in the event of war with the Porte.²⁵ The treaty was codified by a series of secret letters between Catherine and Joseph II. The alliance between Russia and Austria was one of secrecy because the new alliance was in direct opposition to an earlier alliance between Russia and Prussia.²⁶ Catherine could not implement her grand plan if she did not have the support of a portion of the great powers of Europe. Russia's alliance with Austria provided Catherine with not only the military might undertake the project, but also bolstered Russia's geopolitical standing within Europe since they now had a powerful ally who supported vanquishing the Ottoman Empire. Likewise, the Austro—Russian alliance strengthened Russia's imperial reputation. The alliance was constructed around the idea of the Greek Project, with the annexation of Crimea being the first "scene" of the plan.²⁷ In the event of the success of the project, Austria would receive the Ottoman territories of Moldavia and Wallachia, and Russia would receive the majority of former Byzantine lands.²⁸ The advantages of an Austro—Russian alliance against other European powers brought Catherine and Joseph II together, but an alliance developed around the mutually beneficial policy of the Greek Project is what kept the royals and their respective countries together.

Before the outbreak of the war, Catherine invited Joseph to tour her newly acquired region of Crimea. The Ottomans saw this as a provocation, believing that the two monarchs were creating plans to divide the Ottoman territory between them on that visit.²⁹ After the Ottomans declared war against Russia in 1787, Austria swiftly declared war on the Porte, as was stipulated by the 1781 treaty. The Austro—Russian alliance against the Turks was a major threat to the other great powers of Europe, namely the Ottoman's long—time ally France.³⁰ A negative shift in French feelings

²⁴ de Madariaga, "*Russia in Age of Catherine*," 395.

²⁵ de Madariaga, "Secret Austro—Russian Treaty," 116.

²⁶ de Madariaga, "Secret Austro—Russian Treaty," 114.

²⁷ de Madariaga, "Secret Austro—Russian Treaty," 133.

²⁸ de Madariaga, "Secret Austro—Russian Treaty," 133—38.

²⁹ Mayer, "Price for Austria's Security," 262.

³⁰ Ragsdale, "Montmorin and Catherine's Greek Project," 28.

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towards its Ottoman ally had secretly taken over French foreign policy that had occurred with the Austro—Russian alliance’s goal of expelling the Turks from Europe becoming public. The French ambassador to Russia, the Comte de Ségur, communicated this secret shift in thinking to the Austrian ambassador Count Cobenzl. Count Cobenzl reported to Prince Potemkin that the French court was ready to cooperate if the two countries wished to push matters into a “complete expulsion of the Turks from Europe.”³¹ Undoubtedly, the worry of the exclusion of France from the benefits of a partitioned Ottoman Empire arose within French politics due to the Austro—Russian alliance and the Greek Project being made public. The possibility of a triple alliance between Austria, Russia, and France was, however, quelled when the French Revolution began. Though ultimately a failure, this potential alliance was indicative of how the plan’s influence on Catherine’s foreign policy benefited Russia by facilitating the gradual transformation of long—standing European great power alliances in favor of Russia’s interests. According to the Austrian ambassador, due to the advantages of the present war, “it [was] entirely satisfactory... to hold onto the agreement of the cherished great project.”³² So the Austro—Russian alliance against the Porte continued.

The war saw familiar techniques utilized by Catherine in the First Russo—Turkish War. Like nearly ten years earlier, Catherine attempted to incite Orthodox Ottoman subjects into rebellion against the Porte, a strategy emphasized in the Greek Project. Catherine appealed to Ottoman subjects within the Danuban provinces and urged them to join the Russians against the Ottomans, and she once again attempted to send a Russian fleet into the Mediterranean.³³ Like the first war, the strategy did not yield the results that Catherine had anticipated. International pressure from Britain and Sweden ended the second Mediterranean expedition before it began.³⁴ The war saw various victories for the Russian troops. The strategically important Ottoman fort Ochakov was taken by Potemkin, and the Russians were able to push through to the Dniester River.³⁵ The Russian troops continued to advance upon the Ottoman forces. The Russians even marched upon the city of Constantinople, an endeavor undeniably influenced by Catherine’s desire to reinstate the glory of the Byzantine Empire, but they could not hold the city.³⁶ Despite these successes, mounting problems for both Austria and Russia led to the beginning of peace talks with the Porte. The fear of intervention from other European powers in the conflict, mainly Great Britain and Prussia, persuaded Catherine and Joseph to make peace. The war ended with the signing of a treaty in 1792 in the Moldavian town of Jassy. While the terms of the treaty delivered Moldova and Wallachia back into Ottoman hands, the treaty redefined the boundaries of the two empires. The Treaty of Jassy gave Russia the left bank of the Dniester and Kuban rivers.³⁷ Because of this, Russia gained land in what is now Ukraine. While the outcome of the war was not the conquest of Constantinople nor

³¹ Cobenzl to Potemkin, 18/7 January 1788, in Ragsdale, “Traditions of Russian Aggression,” 107.

³² Cobenzl to court, 27 December 1787, in Ragsdale, “Traditions of Russian Aggression,” 109.

³³ de Madariaga, “*Russia in Age of Catherine*,” 400.

³⁴ Britain refused to allow Catherine to use British ports or navigate through British waters to reach the Mediterranean. Sweden, in an attempt to recover from its previous losses to Russia in the Great Northern War, attacked a Russian fort. See de Madariaga, “*Russia in Age of Catherine*,” 401.

³⁵ de Madariaga, “*Russia in Age of Catherine*,” 405.

³⁶ Timothy C. Dowling, ed., *Russia at War: From the Mongol Conquest to Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Beyond*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC—CLIO, 2014), 841.

³⁷ Treaty of Jassy (1792), in *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*, ed. J.C. Hurewitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 107.

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the decimation of the Ottoman Empire, the war did weaken the Porte and boost Russia's image as a burgeoning imperial power in southeastern Europe, as evidenced by the alarm exhibited by other great powers and their subsequent intervention. From the alliances formed in preparation for the war to the tactics and strategies used throughout the war, it is evident that the Greek Project influenced Catherine's actions.

While the actual implementation of the Greek Project never fully materialized, it is clear that its conception had a tremendous effect on its creator and her policy. Catherine never abandoned her precious project, but merely postponed it when faced with difficulty. Ultimately, her dream of the reinstatement of a Greek monarchy never unfolded and effectively died with the death of the empress herself in 1796, as her successor Paul was vehemently against the Greek Project.³⁸ Catherine's Greek Project has long been considered a fantasy, an unattainable feat that Russia could have never achieved. Yet the influence that the plan held in Catherine's foreign policy demonstrates that it was tangible—at least in the minds of Catherine and her allies. The study of Catherine II's Greek Project demonstrates just how influential idealistic ambitions have been in history. The study of the project demonstrates that historians cannot discount grand aspirations because they did not actualize. Rather this study exhibits that historians should closely study historical agents' aspirations and goals as they help broaden our understanding of how and why historical events occurred. The Greek Project's influence on Catherine's foreign policy resulted in the advantageous addition of Crimea to the Russian Empire, the reformulation of the boundary between Russia and the Porte, and the further weakening of the Porte's influence within Europe. Likewise, the project's influence on Catherine's foreign policy aided Russia in becoming an imperial power with immense influence in the Mediterranean, forming significant alliances that transformed the geopolitical situation of Europe, and bolstering Russia's reputation as a threatening global power in Europe. Catherine was a shrewd, skilled political manipulator. Her Greek Project held tremendous significance in Catherine's arsenal of foreign policy tactics demonstrating that the project was not just a fantasy, but rather a realistic course of action.

³⁸ Ragsdale, "Traditions of Russian Aggression," 113.

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