

# *A Thesis of the Impact of Greek Independence on International Relations in Europe*

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**Abstract:** After more than three hundred years of Ottoman rule, Greece's independence movement broke out in 1821, which naturally had its own profound internal and external factors, including the centuries-long accumulation of strength of the Greek nation and the continuous involvement of extraterritorial powers, and this paper focuses on the international relations between the European powers and the Greek independence movement.

## **1. Introduction**

The independence of Greece was a major event in the international politics of the 19th century. The French Revolution ushered in a turbulent "age of revolution" and a wave of nationalism, originating in Western Europe, swept across the continent. However, while most national liberation movements failed at a time when feudalism and authoritarianism were still dominant, the independence of Greece was the first successful nationalist movement on the European continent. This event also kicked off the independence movement of the oppressed peoples in the Ottoman Empire, thus bringing to the surface the "Eastern Question" that permeated the international relations of modern Europe. Due to the geostrategic value of Greece, the European powers fiercely fought for the independence of Greece, which was eventually realized by the Greeks with the help of the European powers. Through the study of the relationship between the European powers and the Greek independence movement, we can have a more comprehensive and clearer understanding of the course of the birth of the modern Greek nation-state, which will help us to understand the history of Greece as a whole; on the other hand, it has considerable reference significance for the many national independence movements under the intervention of the great powers afterward.

The study of international relations during the Greek War of Independence can provide us with a historical basis for clarifying the present-day Greek-Turkish conflict and for recognizing the strategic value of Greece in the modern Mediterranean world. On the one hand, ever since Greek independence, the Greek-Turkish dispute over the belonging of the islands in the Aegean Sea and their maritime boundaries has never ceased. This dispute has intensified in recent years over the ownership of maritime resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, with Greece and the European Union on the one hand, and Turkey on the other, in a tense and potentially uncontrollable situation. To understand the cause of the current Greek-Turkish conflict, it is appropriate to look back to the Greek War of Independence 200 years ago. On the other hand, Greece was the first EU country to sign the "Belt and Road" memorandum of cooperation, and is also China's bridgehead into the EU.

There are few books and thematic studies on modern Greece in China, so a study of the country's modern history will help us add some knowledge about this country with a splendid ancient civilization and an ill-fated recent past.<sup>[1]</sup>

## **2. The Near Eastern Rivalry of the European Powers and the Greek Independence Movement**

After the fall of Constantinople, the Greeks lived as one of the conquered peoples under the Ottoman Millet system. Because of their long dominance in the Eastern Roman Empire, the Greeks continued to enjoy a special position within the Ottoman Christian Millet. The Greek bishops monopolized the position of the Orthodox Patriarchate, exercising authority over Christians in the empire, and the Greek Phanar, who surrounded the Patriarchate, extended their economic and cultural reach to all parts of Europe by means of this privilege, which in effect made them serve as a bridge between the empire and the West. In this process, the Greeks established close ties with the great European powers such as Britain, France and Russia, which became the external conditions for the success of the Greek independence movement.

Since the time of Kievan Rus', Russia had been deeply influenced by Greek culture, and after the fall of Eastern Rome, Moscow succeeded Constantinople as the spiritual center of the Orthodox world. Since the accession of Peter the Great, Russia's ambitions for foreign expansion had grown along with its power. The Balkan Peninsula, inhabited by a large number of Slavic peoples of the same language and race as Russia, was the main focus of Russia's expansion, and Greece was the key to Russia's control of the Balkan Peninsula and its advance to Constantinople. Conversely, the Greeks likewise hoped to develop their political and economic power under Russian patronage and eventually achieve full national independence.

Britain's ties with Greece were founded on Britain's Near Eastern policy. As a colonial empire with large overseas commercial interests, Britain's first demand in the Mediterranean was to control the sea lines of communication. The control of the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea not only enabled Britain to protect its Near Eastern commercial interests,<sup>[2]</sup> but also ensured that the route to India via the Isthmus of Suez would be open, and that the Russian navy's southward movement through the Black Sea could be monitored, thus ensuring Britain's maritime supremacy. After that, Britain paid more attention to the Near East in order to protect the maritime lifeline to India, and Anglo-Greek ties became closer.

The French-Greek connection was based on a deeper intellectual foundation. The two outstanding intellectuals of the Greek nation, under the influence of French Enlightenment thought, combined the theoretical propositions of the Enlightenment thinkers with the actual situation of the Greek nation, and outlined a clear blueprint for the cause of independence for the bewildered Greeks. Subsequently, the idea of the Revolution was introduced to native Greece with Napoleon's expansion in the Near East, prompting the Greek national independence movement to evolve from a blueprint on paper to an armed insurrectionary movement. The French Revolution taught the Greeks that it was only right for the people to rise up and overthrow their rulers if they violated the principle of popular sovereignty. After the fall of Napoleon's empire, the reactionary Bourbons continued to pursue their expansionist course in order to restore France's status as a great power, and the Near East, including Greece, once again became an arena of Anglo-French rivalry.

## **3. European Great Power Diplomacy and the Greek War of Independence**

In the 1820s, both internal and external conditions were ripe for the Greek independence movement. On the one hand, by virtue of Russian patronage and the privileges enjoyed by the Greeks within the Christian millets of the Ottoman Empire, the Greeks had amassed considerable political and economic power, which was a prerequisite for the revolt; on the other hand, the

Ottoman Empire had suffered many blows from Russia since the 18th century, and in the early 19th century was hit by the wave of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic conquests, so that the empire's rule in the frontier was already on the rocks, as exemplified by the rebellion of Ali Pasha of Anina and the rise of Muhammad Ali in Egypt. The revolt of Ali Pasha of Anina and the rise of Muhammad Ali in Egypt are examples. However, the fact that the organizational core of the revolt, the Society of Friendship, was founded in Russia, and that most of the native Greek leaders of the revolt, especially the Phanar, were influenced by Britain and France, made it inevitable that the movement for Greek national independence would bear the stamp of the Great Powers from the very beginning.

At the beginning of the revolt, the Greek insurgents, although they had made some gains in the Peloponnese, faced the risk of having their revolutionary gains strangled at any time by the Turkish rulers. At this time, faced with the call for help from the insurgents, Tsar Alexander I of Russia chose to engage in so-called European coordination with Britain and Austria and refused to support Greece. This was dictated by Russia's own ambivalence. On the one hand, the Russian Tsar claimed to be the "natural protector" of all Slavs and Orthodox Christians in the Balkans; on the other hand, Russia was the bulwark of the Vienna System, which was designed to maintain and restore all the feudal reactionary regimes in Europe that had been subverted by the Napoleonic Wars. From this standpoint, Russia was hostile to all national democratic revolutions against the established order of the Vienna system, including, of course, the Greek independence movement.

After George Canning took charge of British diplomacy in 1822, the adjustment of British policy towards Greece profoundly changed the course of the Greek independence movement. Britain put forward the policy of "opposing intervention" and "recognizing Greece as a belligerent party", practically abandoning the so-called Vienna System of the so-called unanimity of the great powers in European coordination, and took the lead in participating in the Greek War of Independence. Britain made this adjustment against a profound background of the times. First, unlike Castlereagh, who insisted on European coordination and friendship with Russia, George Canning regarded Russia as a potential rival of Britain, and believed that with the development of the situation, Russia would certainly be involved in the Greek independence movement, while maintaining the formal integrity of the Ottoman Empire was the cornerstone of Canning's Near Eastern policy. Secondly, in 1822, independence movements broke out in Latin America, affecting the whole of Central and South America. The "Holy Alliance" formed by Russia, Prussia and Austria was at this time planning to intervene in the independence movement of Latin America across the ocean under the banner of "orthodoxy", which was contrary to the interests of Britain. Britain's aim was to support the independence of the Latin American countries from Spanish colonial rule, and then, through Britain's strong capital-exporting ability, to occupy the commodity markets and raw material production areas of these newborn countries and to incorporate them into Britain's sphere of influence. Out of this major strategic consideration, Britain formally proposed to the three Holy Alliance countries the policy of "anti-intervention", the essence of which was still to safeguard British hegemony. During the period 1822-1827, the struggle in Greece was a recurring one between the two sides, with the Greek Revolutionary Army unable to advance effectively and the Turkish army unable to extinguish the flames of the Greek Revolution, which was struggling to move forward under the leadership of the Greek government.

The entry of Ibrahim's army into Greece in 1825 was an important turning point in the Greek independence movement. The dispatch of his son Ibrahim into Greece by the Egyptian governor Ali aroused the common concern of the British and Russian powers. Firstly, the "barbarization plan" formulated by Ibrahim was not only a serious violation of the principle of humanitarianism, but also an attempt to subvert the birthplace of Western civilization; secondly, Ali could fight against the Ottoman government for a long period of time and dominate the area because of France's backing

behind him, and Britain and Russia did not expect to see France dominating the Near East by virtue of its henchmen. The Petersburg Protocol of 1826 and the Treaty of London of 1827 reflected the will of Britain and Russia to cooperate, which in turn led to the total destruction of the Ottoman navy in the Battle of Navarino.

In 1827, after the Battle of Navarino, Greek independence was on the verge of being realized, but it was interrupted by European diplomacy. In 1829, Russia forced the Ottoman Empire to grant Greece independence by force, but as the Russian army was already at the end of its strength, it could only accept British and French mediation, and Britain, France and Russia jointly created the "limited independence" of Greece. The British, French and Russians together created the "limited independence" of Greece. The rulers of Greece were appointed by the Great Powers, and a large number of Greek territories and nationals remained under the Ottoman rule. The European Powers sacrificed the interests of both Greece and the Ottoman Empire for the "limited independence" of Greece in their own interests, which sowed the seeds for the continuous conflicts between Greece and Turkey.

#### **4. The Impact of Greek Independence on International Relations in Europe**

Firstly, the independence of Greece allowed the Ottoman ruling class to take a serious look at its own weaknesses and move towards a path of comprehensive learning from the West. Before the independence of Greece, the Ottoman Empire had faced many localized crises of rule, such as the Serbian revolt, the challenge of Ali Pasha of Egypt to the central authority, the Russian invasion of the empire's frontiers, etc. But the independence of Greece was the first case in which the establishment of a national state was realized through an uprising and the intervention of a great power, which was undoubtedly a great shock to the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. Against this background, Mahmud II and the conservative religious class, which had always resisted change, joined forces to eliminate the Konrad group, which had hindered the reforms, and hoped that the country could be enriched and strengthened by learning from the West.

Secondly, the compromise between the European powers led to the emergence of a large number of historical problems in post-independence Greece, the most important of which was the territorial problem and the resulting Greek-Turkish conflict. The contrast between the pre-independence vision of a "Greater Greek Empire" and the post-independence reality of a "Lesser Greece" as defined by the Great Powers prompted the emergence of a wave of Greek nationalism that focused on territorial recovery, namely the "Great Ideal". "MegaliIdea. Under the guidance of the MegaliIdea, the Greeks endeavored to break through the borders drawn by the powers, to recover the Greek homeland with its glorious history, and to establish a Magna Graecia that would include all Greek-speaking inhabitants. The Ionian Islands, Crete and the islands of the Aegean Sea were successively returned to the Greek motherland. These accomplishments spurred the evolution of Greek nationalism into expansionism after World War I. The Greek defeat in the Greek-Turkish War not only buried Greece's ambition for a "Greater Hellenic Empire", but resulted in Kemal leading the Turks into the modern world, leading to the Greek-Turkish conflict that continues to this day.<sup>[3]</sup>

Thirdly, the successful independence of Greece stimulated national separatist ideas within the empire, which evolved into a full-blown frontier crisis. Greece's secession from the Ottoman Empire triggered a great distrust of Christians among the rulers of the empire, and the deprivation of a large number of rights within the Millet system by the sultan, and the deteriorating situation of Christians within the empire, forced the rest of the countries to follow the path of Greece and seek national independence with the help of external forces. The small Balkan states, represented by Serbia, followed the example of Greece, and with the help of Russia, one by one, through armed revolts of their own people, they became independent, and finally dismantled the "European Turkey". In addition, the Ottoman government could not reach the rest of the frontier areas because the core of the empire was threatened by the powers and the revolts. A group of local powerhouses,

represented by Muhammad Ali of Egypt, rose up one after another, holding military and political power, waiting to deal a fatal blow to the Ottoman Empire when it was on its last legs. After the independence of Greece, the Ottoman army and navy suffered a heavy blow, Ali took the opportunity to launch two Egyptian-Turkish wars, which made Egypt become the most powerful country in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Fourthly, the independence of Greece completed the Europeanization of the "Eastern Question". The "Eastern Question", the connotation of which is the question of what should be done in the East, is a proposition completely built in the context of Western centrism. When the Ottoman Empire was in its prime, the Western powers were tired of dealing with the expansion of the Sultan's army, and the connotation of the "Eastern Question" actually became the question of how the West should deal with the East. 18th century onwards, the strength of the East and the West was decreasing, and the position of offense and defense was changing. Since the 18th century, the "Eastern Question" has become an international event of how the Western powers divided up the huge legacy of the Ottoman Empire. The evolution of the "Eastern Question" was also the process of the Ottoman Empire's joining the European international system, from being the antagonist of the European international system, to being forced to be involved in it, to taking the initiative to utilize the rules of the European international system to safeguard its own interests, and the Greek Independence Movement was one of the milestone events. The Greek event formally upgraded the "Eastern Question" from a regional issue in Eastern or Central Europe to an international issue concerning the whole of Europe, in which Britain, France, Russia, Prussia, Austria and other major powers were involved, and the Ottoman Empire, intentionally or unintentionally, had already become a member of the European international system. "The Eastern Question" became the completion of the Europeanization process.

## 5. Conclusion

From a historical point of view, Greek civilization, through the succession of Macedonians, Romans and Byzantines, became one of the major cornerstones of modern Western civilization. Since the Renaissance, classical Greek culture has been the banner hoisted by the humanists until the 18th century, before the independence of Greece, when Romanticism, with its aim of imitating Greco-Roman art, swept across Europe. As a result, the land known as "Greece" has a heavy weight on the whole of Europe, and people imbued with Greek culture are found all over the continent, from St. Petersburg to London, from Milan to Berlin. Such historical, cultural and religious ties also made Greece's destiny inevitably bound up with the European powers that were deeply influenced by her.

From a practical point of view, the European powers and Greece were inextricably linked by interests. Russia's ambition was to control the whole of Eastern Europe, to occupy "Constantinople", to control the two straits of the Black Sea, to break through Britain's maritime hegemony, so as to establish "spiritual rule" over the whole Orthodox world; Britain, on the other hand, valued Greece's geo-strategic value as a place where Europe and Asia met, and hoped that by controlling Greece, it would be possible for her to gain control over the whole of the world. Britain, on the other hand, valued the geopolitical value of Greece at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and hoped that by controlling Greece, it could firmly control the shipping routes to India in Britain's hands; France, on the other hand, paid attention to Greece out of the consideration of colonial expansion. After the 19th century, the Near East was a priority for its expansion. Because of its special relationship with Egypt, France also became an important party influencing the direction of the situation in Greece. As the balance of power between the Ottoman Empire and the West continued to fall out of balance, the so-called "Eastern Question" arose, which was triggered by the Greek Independence Movement, which became an arena for the Great Powers to play in, with the involvement of the European powers.

From the very beginning, the Greek rebels had pinned their hopes on Russia, but the Tsar did not

support Greece for various reasons, and then they turned to Britain. With Britain's financial support, the Greek government was established and the Greek army was provided with stable military expenses. More importantly, Britain gave legitimacy to the Greek revolt as an "insurrection" which was not allowed under the Viennese system. With the recognition of Greece by the British government, people from all over Europe organized themselves to participate in the cause of Greek independence, which was about to become a reality after the British, French, and Russians destroyed the Ottoman navy in 1827, but the new British government chose to keep Greece as a vassal of the Ottoman Empire. The Greeks turned again to Russia and France, and the Russo-Turkish War gave Greece independence, but also forced the Greeks to accept a foreigner, a German prince from Bavaria, as the ruler of their new country. At the same time, the powers compromised with each other in the negotiation of Greece's boundaries, creating a great deal of historical difficulties between Greece and the Ottoman Empire that poison the landscape even to this day.

The independence of Greece was gained on the basis of its own strength (military and diplomatic struggle), against the background of the Russo-Turkish War and the diplomatic intervention of the Great Powers. The process of its independence reflects a common feature of the regularity of the independence and development of small and vulnerable peoples in Eastern Europe.

1) The weak and small peoples of Eastern Europe were in modern history surrounded by several European Powers - Russia, France, Great Britain, Austria and Prussia - and their independence and development were inevitably influenced by these Powers. The intervention of the great powers, especially Russia's blows against Turkey in the Russo-Turkish War, objectively favored the cause of liberation of the Balkan peoples. However, this intervention in the interests of the great Powers also had a serious negative impact on the development of the Balkan peoples. The independence of the small Balkan nations was nothing but a derivative of the struggle of the great powers. When the Balkan Peninsula became the battlefield of the direct conflict of the great powers, these small and weak nations would invariably fall victim to the politics of the great powers, as the two Balkan wars and the First World War amply proved.

2) The independence and development of the small and weak nations are mainly achieved through their own struggles and efforts. Independence and development are impossible without the heroic struggles and persistent efforts of those who came before and those who came after them. This was true not only for Greece, but also for the national liberation struggles of Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria.

3) In the era of power politics, it is very difficult for a small and weak nation to achieve national independence through armed struggle alone, and it is also difficult for it to control its own destiny. It is necessary to know how to skillfully make use of the contradictions among the big powers, and instead of relying on a certain big power, it is necessary to carry out multilateral diplomacy and conduct a favorable and moderate struggle. Without George Canning's recognition of the Greek Revolution, without the British, French and Russian allied forces coming directly down to deal a heavy blow to the Ottoman Empire, and without the Russo-Turkish war that pressed Istanbul, the independence of Greece would have been totally inconceivable.

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