

# **The Ottoman Empire, Russia, and International Law: The History and Theory Of**

When it comes to the history of international law, few periods are as intriguing and complex as the interactions between the Ottoman Empire and Russia. Spanning centuries of diplomatic maneuvering, conflicts, and treaties, this historical relationship tells a captivating story of power struggles, legal frameworks, and the shaping of international norms. In this article, we will delve deep into the history and theory of the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and international law, providing a comprehensive overview of this fascinating topic.

## **The Ottoman Empire: An**

The Ottoman Empire, founded in the 14th century, emerged as one of the most significant powers in world history. Stretching across three continents, it encompassed vast territories, including Anatolia, the Balkans, and the Middle East. With its capital in Constantinople, the empire ruled over diverse populations, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

From a legal perspective, the Ottoman Empire developed its own distinct system of governance and jurisprudence. Drawing inspiration from Islamic law, known as Shariah, and adapting it to the empire's needs, the Ottoman legal system provided a framework for administration, taxation, and social affairs. As the empire expanded, it faced numerous challenges, both internally and externally, requiring it to engage with other powers and navigate the intricacies of international law.

**From Slaves to Prisoners of War: The Ottoman Empire, Russia, and International Law (The**



## History and Theory of International Law)

by Chuck Jackson(Kindle Edition)

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### **Russia: The Eastern Giant**

Across its northern borders, the Ottoman Empire had one significant rival: Russia. As Europe's largest and most expansive empire, Russia posed a constant threat to Ottoman territorial integrity. Over the centuries, these two powers clashed repeatedly, engaging in numerous wars and territorial disputes.

For Russia, expanding southwards and gaining control over Ottoman territories became a strategic imperative. However, such ambitions required legal justifications, as international law played an essential role in defining the legitimacy of territorial acquisitions. Consequently, both the Ottoman Empire and Russia found themselves immersed in the realm of international law, shaping their actions and presenting their cases to the international community.

### **The Congress of Vienna and the Eastern Question**

The 19th century brought significant changes to the Eastern Question, the term referring to the complex issues surrounding the declining Ottoman Empire and the power struggles that ensued. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1856,

the Crimean War came to an end, leaving Russia defeated and the Ottoman Empire bruised but intact. This marked a turning point in the international perception of the Ottoman Empire and its legal standing.

The Congress of Vienna, held in 1815, sought to establish a balance of power in Europe after the Napoleonic Wars. However, the Eastern Question remained largely unresolved, as the Ottoman Empire managed to preserve its territorial integrity despite numerous attempts by Russia and other powers to dismantle it.

In the aftermath of the Crimean War, international law, as practiced and discussed in international forums, came to play an increasingly significant role in dealing with the Eastern Question. Diplomatic negotiations, peace treaties, and international conferences became the platforms where powers, including the Ottoman Empire and Russia, made their legal arguments, advancing their claims and responding to challenges.

## **The Role of Treaties and Legal Frameworks**

Throughout history, treaties have played a crucial role in shaping international law and resolving conflicts between states. In the case of the Ottoman Empire and Russia, treaties became intricate legal instruments governing their relations and defining the boundaries of acceptable behavior. From the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774 to the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878, these agreements demonstrate the complex dynamics between the two powers and the broader international community.

Additionally, legal frameworks, such as the principles of national self-determination and the rights of minorities, emerged during the interactions between the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and other European powers. These

principles, while still evolving and subject to interpretation, laid the foundation for later developments in international law and human rights.

## **The Legacy: Impact on International Law and Theory**

The history of the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and international law has left a lasting impact on the development of legal theory and international norms. The interactions between these two powers shaped the understanding of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the rights of states and individuals.

Moreover, the legal arguments presented during this period influenced the evolution of international law as a discipline. Scholars from various countries engaged in debates regarding state responsibility, the laws of war, and the obligations of states towards their citizens. The experiences of the Ottoman Empire and Russia contributed to these discussions, offering unique insights into the challenges faced by expanding empires.

The history and theory of the interactions between the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and international law provide a fascinating glimpse into the complexities of diplomatic relations and legal frameworks. From territorial disputes to treaty negotiations, these two powers shaped the development of international norms and the understanding of sovereignty. By examining this historical context, we gain valuable insights into the evolution of international law and its ongoing relevance in the modern world.

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The Ottoman-Russian wars of the eighteenth century reshaped the map of Eurasia and the Middle East, but they also birthed a novel concept - the prisoner of war. For centuries, hundreds of thousands of captives, civilians and soldiers alike, crossed the legal and social boundaries of these empires, destined for either ransom or enslavement. But in the eighteenth century, the Ottoman state and its Russian rival, through conflict and diplomacy, worked out a new system of regional international law. Ransom was abolished; soldiers became prisoners of war; and some slaves gained new paths to release, while others were left entirely unprotected. These rules delineated sovereignty, redefined individuals' relationships to states, and prioritized political identity over economic value. In the process, the Ottomans marked out a parallel, non-Western path toward elements of modern international law. Yet this was not a story of European imposition or imitation-the Ottomans acted for their own reasons, maintaining their commitment to Islamic law. For a time even European empires played by these rules, until they were subsumed into the codified global law of war in the late nineteenth century. This story offers new perspectives on the histories of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, of slavery, and of international law.



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