



War in the East: A Military History of the Russo-Turkish War 1877-78

Quintin Barry

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When Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire in April 1877, it was the fifth time during the nineteenth century that hostilities had broken out between the two empires. On this occasion the other Great Powers had done all they could to prevent it, although public opinion in the West had been shocked by Turkey's brutal repression of the Bulgarian uprising. The war was to be fought in two distinct theaters. In Europe, as on previous occasions, the Russian objective was to cross first the Danube and then the formidable Balkan Mountains before striking for Constantinople. In Asia, over territory also contested many times before, the Russians aimed to seize Kars and then Erzerum. At first all went well for the invaders, the Turks making no serious attempt to hold the line of the Danube, while a thrust south by General Gourko succeeded in crossing the Balkans by a pass not previously considered practicable. At Plevna, however, the Russian advance stalled in the face of the determined defense of the place by the redoubtable Osman Pasha. In Asia, meanwhile, after initial success, the Russian advance was halted by defeat at Zevin. Poor strategic judgment on the part of the Turks led to their failure to take advantage of the opportunity provided by Osman, even after the Russians had suffered three bloody defeats at Plevna. Eventually, after the town was closely invested, it fell to the besiegers. In Asia, the Turks suffered a major defeat in the battle of God's Mountain, and were driven back to Erzerum, while Kars fell to a brilliant assault by the Russian forces. These defeats marked the beginning of the end for the Turks. By January 1878 the Russians were over the Balkans in force, and the last viable Turkish army was surrounded and captured at Shenovo. Armistice negotiations led to a suspension of hostilities and to the treaty of San Stefano. The other Great Powers had watched the conflict with mounting anxiety and were determined to moderate the terms of San Stefano which had imposed harsh conditions on the Ottoman Empire. This, following tortuous diplomatic negotiations, they succeeded in doing at the Congress of Berlin in July 1878. This book, the first military history of the war in English for over a century, traces the course of the campaigns, examining the many occasions on which the outcome of a battle might have gone the other way, and the performance of the combatants, both leaders and led. The book considers the extent to which the parties applied the lessons of recent wars, as well as the conclusions that could be drawn from the experience of combat with the latest weapons. It also explores the complicated motives of the Great Powers in general, and Britain in particular, in bringing about a final settlement, which postponed the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The author's detailed text is accompanied by an extensive number of black and white illustrations, an impressive color plate section containing reproductions of paintings by artists such as Vereshchagin, plus black and white and color battle maps. Extensive orders of battle are also provided.

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