



VMUN 2021

The Crimean War, 1852

CRISIS BACKGROUND GUIDE



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Dear Delegates,

Firstly, on behalf of the entire JCC team, I would like to extend a warm welcome to VMUN 2021. Although we may not be able to meet in person this year, it is my hope that the JCC can thrive in this new, virtual environment, separated yet connected.

My name is Ben Kang, and it is my pleasure to direct the JCC this year. On the team, I am also joined by Richard Chen, Adam Dawood, Hannah Baumgard, Peter Zhang, Harvey Riches, and Chris Shojania. They are all incredibly competent individuals whom I have absolute confidence in, they are the ones that will make the JCC an unforgettable experience.

The Joint Crisis Committees at VMUN have always provided some of the most nuanced, exhilarating, and challenging debates that can be had in Model UN. Composed of two simultaneously running subcommittees whose decisions will immediately affect the crisis at hand, the JCC will see two rival committees pitted firmly against one and another, resulting in a suspenseful, volatile, and undoubtedly exciting experience.

This year, both committees will follow the Crimean War, taking the sides of a Russian bloc and a European-Ottoman coalition bloc. As one of the most devastating yet seldom-known conflicts of the 19th century, the Crimean War takes place in a complicated time in European history, when a nexus of liberalizing European reform, Russian military might, and Ottoman instability come together to form a destructive conflict.

Remember: delegates in the JCC do not follow history—they write it. For the crisis, it will not be history that dictates the eventual outcome, but rather, your lasting actions. There is no course to be set, no path to be paved; it is in the palm of your hands to seize the day.

Best Regards,

Ben Kang
JCC Director

Position Paper Policy

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page, and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For the Joint Crisis Committees, position papers are mandatory, especially for a delegate to be considered for an award.

Formatting

Position papers should:

- Include the name of the delegate, his/her country, and the committee
- Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
- Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
- Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit)

Due Dates and Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by midnight on January 22nd, 2021. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email, to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as your last name, your first name — Position Paper. Please do not add any other attachments to the email or write anything else in the body.

Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Position Paper award.

The email address for this committee is jcc@vmun.com.

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The Crimean War, 1852

Overview

The date is January 6th, 1852. A period of relative peace has descended upon Europe over the past four decades since the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. Following the Congress of Vienna—the post-Napoleonic Wars conference to determine the terms of lasting peace in Europe—a delicate balance of power was created, referred to today as the Concert of Europe.¹ The Concert of Europe established a broad agreement of self-restraint and mutual protection between major European powers, ushering in a golden age of peace from 1815 onwards.

Yet today, such lasting European peace stands at a crossroads. In recent decades, the Russian Empire has built itself up to be Europe's military hegemon, now having the largest standing army on the continent. Since his ascension to power in 1825, Nicholas I, an ultra-conservative reactionary, has sought to maintain domestic and regional stability at all costs, vowing to crush any revolutionary sentiment within Russia and Europe.² Thus, in past decades, uprisings both in Russia and further afield, such as in Hungary, Poland, and the Netherlands, have often been met by armed Russian opposition, going so far as to earn Nicholas the nickname "the gendarme of Europe."³ However, while these interventions have been framed under the guise of maintaining European stability, fears of further Russian expansion have also been reignited among other powers on the continent.⁴

Conversely, in the preceding decades, a rise in ethnic nationalism has fuelled uprisings within the Ottoman Empire, weakening an empire which once was at the threshold of European dominance, laying siege to the walls of Vienna. Today, deemed the "Sick Man of Europe," the Ottoman Empire is too occupied with economic strife and domestic instability to stand up for itself on the foreign stage.⁵

Thus, the prospect of a weakened Ottoman government and increased Russian jingoism form the crux of the so-called "Eastern Question," which increasingly plagues European powers: what will happen to the Balkans and Anatolia should the Ottoman Empire collapse?⁶ With the Ottoman Empire's state of decline exposing a lack of government control and rampant domestic instability, as well as a resurgent Russia wishing to expand its influence beyond its borders, it may well be that war is on the horizon.

At this time, the actions each side must take are clear. The Ottomans must look to bridge the divide between the Turkish-Muslim ruling class and a diverse array of minorities, find new mechanisms to stimulate the stagnant

¹ Matthew Rendall, "Restraint or Self-Restraint of Russia: Nicholas I, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, and the Vienna System, 1832-1841," *The International History Review* 24, no. 1 (2002): 37-63.

² Nicholas Riasanovsky, "'Nationality' in the State Ideology during the Reign of Nicholas I," *The Russian Review* 19, no. 1 (1960): 38-46.

³ Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 46-98.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Fatma Müge Göçek, "Ethnic Segmentation, Western Education, and Political Outcomes: Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Society," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 3 (1993): 507-538.

⁶ Steven W. Sowards, "Lecture 10: The Great Powers and the 'Eastern Question,'" In *Twenty-Five Lectures on Modern Balkan History* 1996. <http://www.lib.msu.edu/sowards/balkan/lecture1.html>, 5 January 1999.

Ottoman economy, and modernize their antiquated military.^{7,8} Conversely, the Russians should have their eye set on expanding the domain of the Empire, gaining an advantage on the seas against the naval power of Britain, and balancing the economic toll of supplying a large army.⁹

Most of all, it will be up to both sides to make—or break—alliances with the other major European powers. With Western European powers continuing to keep a close eye on both Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the great powers are united in one effort: maintaining the Concert of Europe.¹⁰ And they may go to great lengths to make that happen.

Timeline

July 21, 1774 — After the Ottoman army is obliterated in the Russo-Ottoman War (1768-1774), the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji is signed, forcing the Ottomans to pay heavy reparations.¹¹

February 14, 1804 — The First Serbian Uprising begins, as Serbs living under Ottoman rule revolt. With support from Russia, the revolt ushered in an age of continuous ethnic nationalism and rebellion against the Ottoman government.¹²

December 12, 1812 — With his armies decimated and forced to retreat, Napoleon's invasion of Russia ends in disaster, as the Grande Armée leaves Russian territory. With the decline of French military might, Russia's status is elevated to that of a continental military hegemon.¹³

March 1, 1814 - November 20, 1815 — With the impending conclusion of the decades-long Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna—a series of diplomatic meetings between the victors of the Napoleonic Wars—is held, beginning with the signing of the Treaty of Chaumont. The Congress provides Europe with a long-term plan to ensure regional stability, known as the Vienna System, which aimed to maintain and uphold a balance of power within Europe.¹⁴

April 23, 1815 — Having achieved de facto independence for over a decade, partial de jure autonomy is formally granted to the Serbs and recognized by the Ottomans, resulting in the establishment of the semi-independent Principality of Serbia in 1817.¹⁵

⁷ Göçek, "Ethnic Segmentation, Western Education, and Political Outcomes: Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Society," 507-538.

⁸ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

⁹ Alexander Baykov, "The Economic Development of Russia," *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 7, no. 2 (1954): 137-149.

¹⁰ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

¹¹ Roderic H. Davison, "'Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility': The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered," *Slavic Review* 35, no. 3 (1976): 463-483.

¹² Lawrence P. Meriage, "The First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813) and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Eastern Question," *Slavic Review* 37, no. 3 (1978): 421-439.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kyle Lascurettes, *The Concert of Europe and Great-Power Governance Today: What Can the Order of 19th-Century Europe Teach Policymakers About International Order in the 21st Century?* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2017).

¹⁵ Meriage, "The First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813) and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Eastern Question," 421-439.

February 21, 1821 — Inspired by the success of the Serbs in achieving semi-independence, the Greeks begin their War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire, with Russian materiel support.¹⁶

April 26, 1828 — Alongside the Greek War of Independence, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828 begins, sparked over years of Russian support for Serbian and Greek independence. As a result of the Ottoman defeat a year later, Moldavia and Wallachia become protectorates of the Russian Empire, and Greek independence is recognized by the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷

December 21, 1832 — After the 1831 defection of Egypt, the empire's most powerful eyalet (an administrative division similar to a province), the Ottoman army is crippled at the Battle of Konya in the First Ottoman-Egyptian War. However, last-second Russian military aid halts the Egyptian advance. Consequently, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi is signed between Russia and the Ottomans, giving the Russians control of access in and out of the Black Sea.¹⁸

June 29, 1839 — The Ottoman Empire moves to reclaim land lost to Egypt six years prior, beginning the Second Egyptian-Ottoman War. However, the Ottoman invasion force is crushed in Syria, and the Empire narrowly avoids collapse after the subsequent death of Sultan Mahmud II and the defection of the entire Ottoman Navy. The Empire is only saved by rapid intervention from Austria, Britain, Prussia, and Russia, who force Egypt to capitulate.¹⁹

July 13, 1841 — The London Straits Convention is held, re-establishing the Ottoman Empire's power to close the Turkish Straits to all warships. This allows the Ottoman Empire to block Russian naval access to the Mediterranean, considerably hampering the power of the Russian Navy.²⁰

March 15, 1848 — As part of the European Revolutions of 1848, the Hungarian Revolution begins. The Revolution pushes the Austrian Empire to the brink of collapse after several military defeats; however, after Austria's last-ditch appeal for help, Russian military aid crushes the revolution.²¹

September 1848 — A diplomatic row erupts between the Austro-Russian alliance and the Ottoman Empire, with the Sublime Porte—the central government of the Ottoman Empire—rejecting demands to hand over Hungarian revolutionaries. This refusal garnered significant Ottoman popularity among the European populace.²²

January 6, 1852 — The start of the crisis committee.

¹⁶ Frederick F. Anscombe, "The Balkan Revolutionary Age," *The Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 3 (2012): 572-606.

¹⁷ Alexis Heraclides and Ada Dially. *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 105-133.

¹⁸ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ahmed Şükrü Esmer, "The Straits: Crux of World Politics," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 2 (1947): 290-302.

²¹ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

²² Ibid.

Historical Analysis

European History (1792-1815)

Between 1792 and 1815, the Napoleonic Wars took place in Europe. The wars spanned to the extremities of Europe and involved every major European power, resulting in an estimated 3.5 to 7 million military and civilian casualties over the course of 12 years.^{23, 24} Thus, when one of the bloodiest series of wars in European history came to an end in 1815, it was clear that armed conflict had taken its toll on all European powers. With Europe stuck in a constant state of war for the past two decades—first with the French Revolutionary Wars and later the Napoleonic Wars—armed conflicts had not only exacted a devastating toll in terms of human life but had also tremendously strained European economies. Public debt, taxes, and inflation soared as a consequence of decades-long military overspending. As a result, European political tones in the immediate aftermath of the war shifted from reactionary jingoism to a desire to build lasting peace, in order to lower military expenditures and free up atrophied European economies.²⁵

Once Napoleon's impending defeat became clear in 1814, steps were made to create a plan for lasting European peace. Starting with the signing of the Treaty of Chaumont in March 1814, European coalition powers agreed to work as a collective body in impending post-war negotiations.²⁶ Then, meeting at the First Treaty of Paris in May 1814, Austria, Britain, Prussia, Russia, and later, France bestowed upon themselves the status of "great powers," naming themselves the nations to set and enforce the terms of European peace.²⁷ Next, in 1815, the great powers convened at the Congress of Vienna, where a long-term plan for European stability, known as the Vienna System, was agreed upon and set in motion.²⁸

With the Vienna System, an informal decision-making body—constituted by leading diplomats of the great powers—was created, where the great powers would consult with each other and decide as a collective how to address the continent's foremost security threats. As the leading statesmen of the time were conservatives, lasting peace was thought to come hand-in-hand with maintaining the political and territorial status quo. Thus, in the following years and decades, the great powers collectively opposed nationalism for its effects in fueling revolution and suppressed revolutionary movements for their tendency to spread and cause wars.

For example, widespread European intervention in 1830—both in suppressing France's July Revolution and the Belgian Revolution—were undergirded by this principle; the thinking was, if the old conservative governments were to fall to radically liberal revolutionaries, not only would Europe's continued delicate balance of powers be thrown into question, but revolutionary fervor could potentially also spread among the great powers' domains.

²³ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars: An International History 1803–1815* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

²⁴ David Gates, *The Napoleonic Wars 1803–1815* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 272.

²⁵ Kevin O'Rourke, "The worldwide economic impact of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars," *Journal of Global History* no. 1, (2006): 123–149.

²⁶ Lascurettes, *The Concert of Europe and Great-Power Governance Today: What Can the Order of 19th-Century Europe Teach Policymakers About International Order in the 21st Century?*

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Richard B. Elrod, "The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System," *World Politics* 28, no. 2 (1976): 159-174.

Effectively, under the Vienna System, the great powers were to support each other's regimes in maintaining stability and order, and to achieve this, nationalism and revolutionary fervor, the drivers of disorder, were to be collectively opposed and suppressed.²⁹ However, while the great powers of Europe pledged to uphold a balance of powers and maintain stability on the continent, beyond the continent's borders, their expansionist ambitions soon resurfaced in the Ottoman Empire.

Ottoman History (1774-1839)

Since the peak of its military and political dominance in the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire has been in a state of decline. In 1774, decades of economic progress were abruptly halted after the Ottoman army's catastrophic defeat in the Russo-Ottoman War (1768-1774). Forced to sue for peace and to later sign the highly unfavourable Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji, the Sublime Porte handed over the Crimean Khanate to Russia, ceded valuable ports in the Black Sea, named Russia the protector of Christians in the Ottoman Empire, and agreed to pay heavy reparations to the Winter Palace.³⁰

The Ottoman Empire's defeat in 1774 had lasting effects beyond such immediate concessions. As a result of heavy reparations and the sheer cost of raising an army, empty Ottoman coffers forced the government to levy harsher taxes and cut government services, actions that increasingly enraged the populace.³¹ Furthermore, having been defeated in yet another Russo-Ottoman War (1787-1792) just over a decade later and facing similar consequences to the first war, anger soon boiled over among the Ottoman Empire's Serb population.³²

This discontent came at a time when, across the Mediterranean, mass political and social upheaval from the French Revolution had led to the creation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. The Declaration granted all men universal, equal, and inalienable human rights and heralded an age of growing liberalism within Europe. Still, this growth was not limited to Europe; globally, the Declaration enlightened the marginalized in places with antiquated social structures, like the Ottoman Empire.³³

²⁹ Enno E. Kraehe, "A Bipolar Balance of Power," *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (1992): 707-715.

³⁰ J. R., "The Background of Russo-Turkish Relations," *The World Today* 2, no. 2 (1946): 57-65.

³¹ Davison, "'Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility: The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered,'" 463-483.

³² Anscombe, "The Balkan Revolutionary Age," 572-606.

³³ Ibid.



Figure 1. Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.³⁴

For minority groups living under Ottoman rule—such as the Serbs, Greeks, and Armenians—the triumph of the French Revolution, the ensuing promises of the Declaration, and the liberation of the lower class became an intense source of inspiration for their own liberation. Having long been treated as second-class citizens by the powerful Turkish-Muslim ruling class of the Ottoman government, Serbs under Ottoman suzerainty rebelled in 1804, marking the beginning of an era of continuous ethnic nationalism and revolt within the Ottoman Empire.³⁵ In the case of the 1804 Serbian uprisings, the revolt, although initially localized, grew into a war of independence. Although the Russian Empire overtly provided support to the Serbs, the uprising was quelled only nine years later, in 1813.³⁶

The damage to the Sublime Porte had been done. The Serbs had not only set up a de facto independent government for nine years, but more critically, had demonstrated that liberation through armed conflict with the central government—whose armies were once viewed as invincible—was now viable. Going forward, this reality would have devastating consequences for the Sublime Porte. As many other discontented minorities reasoned, if the Serbs could survive a war with the Ottoman war machine for almost a decade, so could they. Further, the success of the Second Serbian Uprising in 1817, which would lead to de jure Serbian autonomy from the Ottomans, reinforced the belief that revolution could be successful.³⁷ Thus, in 1821, just three years after the Second Serbian Uprising, the Greek War of Independence erupted across the Aegean Sea. Almost simultaneously, the tributary state of Wallachia also rose in revolt. Then, in 1832, Bosnian *ayans* (landlords) revolted in the Great Bosnian Uprising, followed by the Bektashi Muslims of Albania in 1833. By the mid-1830s, the entirety of the Balkans had descended into chaos, convincing onlookers—both Ottoman minorities and foreign powers—that

³⁴ Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier, *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, circa 1789. oil on panel, 71 x 56 cm. Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

³⁵ Anscombe, "The Balkan Revolutionary Age," 572-606.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

the Sublime Porte was crumbling.³⁸ The Ottoman Empire was simply unable to maintain domestic peace, let alone stand against the prying ambitions of the great powers.

The Concert of Europe, having provided conditions ripe for rapid European industrialization and economic growth in the past two decades, now gave rise to a new form of expansionism—one not limited to Europe. With many of the great European powers now seeking new markets and sources of raw material beyond the continent's border, the Ottoman Empire emerged as a very appealing opportunity.³⁹ When the Ottoman Empire's most powerful eyalet, Egypt, also rebelled in 1831, an opportunity arose for the great powers to—as Emperor Nicholas I of Russia famously put it—exploit the “Sick Man of Europe.”⁴⁰

The 1830s thus marked a decade of continuous European interference and intervention in the Ottoman Empire. In 1830, under the trumped-up justification of a French ambassador's death, the French army landed on the shores of Algiers and promptly wrested control of the Ottoman vassal state from the Sublime Porte. In 1834, after a humiliating Ottoman defeat to a now-independent Egypt, the Sublime Porte was forced to sign the exploitative Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi with Russia.⁴¹ Then in 1839, with the Ottoman army suffering another defeat to the Egyptian eyalet in the Second Egyptian-Ottoman War, Britain gained control of Ottoman Cyprus, in exchange for military support they had given to the Ottomans during the war.⁴²

In retrospect, this convergence of imperialist ambition against the Ottoman Empire in the 1830s was a reaction to the fragility of the Ottoman government—a government incapable of quelling seemingly minor revolts.⁴³ Thus, a question must be posed as to why these internal revolts presented such a great challenge for the Ottomans to put down, given the empire's supposed numerical and technological superiority. In reality, poor governance, aging institutions, and ethnic divisions made it increasingly difficult—despite the empire's vast resources—to put down these revolts. Foreign interference often exacerbated these problems, as European powers often had a vested interest in the Ottoman empire's stability.

Although not responsible for the origins of the Sublime Porte's troubles, one of Europe's great powers was often behind such exploits—the power whom the Ottoman Empire most consistently quarreled with, fought against, and ironically also sought help from: Russia.

Russian History

In the European Theatre (1815-1849)

In the aftermath of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, not only did Europe's political landscape shift to a desire for peace, but perhaps more significantly, the balance of military hard power shifted as well. With France—the long-

³⁸ Anscombe, "The Balkan Revolutionary Age," 572-606.

³⁹ Elrod, Richard B. "The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System." *World Politics* 28, no. 2 (1976): 159-74. doi:10.2307/2009888.

⁴⁰ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

⁴¹ Rendall, "Restraint or Self-Restraint of Russia: Nicholas I, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, and the Vienna System, 1832-1841," 37-63.

⁴² Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

⁴³ Ibid.

time military hegemon of Europe—toppled in 1815, Russia now stood as Europe’s foremost military power, and as a consequence, was eyed by the other great powers as Europe’s likeliest instigator of another continental war.⁴⁴

However, the great powers now had to act as a collective—within the Concert of Europe established through the Vienna System—in order to uphold the balance of powers within Europe. As detailed previously, the great powers had to work in tandem to maintain the political and territorial status quo to fulfill such a goal. This was done through informal diplomatic meetings wherein leading diplomats would coordinate a unified response on behalf of all the great powers. However, over the coming decades, it became clear that this shared obligation did not work in practice; irreconcilable differences emerged in the interpretation of the system, while in other cases, the system being used as a thinly-veiled justification for ulterior motives—something that would become increasingly clear under the new Russian emperor.⁴⁵

In 1825, Nicholas I ascended to the throne of the Russian Empire after the passing of his brother, Emperor Alexander I. Yet before Nicholas was to even take the throne, he was confronted with his first crisis as Russia’s head of state.⁴⁶ A group of some 3,000 revolutionaries, composed of officers and soldiers of the Imperial Russian Army, refused to pledge allegiance at Nicholas’ swearing in. As a result, Nicholas ordered the insubordinate soldiers and officers to be shelled and bombed—a crude and embarrassing response for the new emperor. This incident would leave an indelible impact on the young emperor, and would last with him throughout his reign, as he vowed to never again see such revolutionary fervor and pledged to maintain stability at all costs within Russian and Europe.⁴⁷

Therefore, in the coming years of his reign, Russia’s foreign policy in Europe was guided by two factors: one being Nicholas’ ultra-conservative reactionary political leanings, and the other being Russia’s commitment to the Vienna System. Having instituted the doctrine of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality as the dominant imperialist ideology in Russia—which aimed to both establish unity under Orthodox Christianity and reinforce the absolute authority of the Emperor—Nicholas was no stranger to crackdowns on dissent. Since taking the throne, he had effectively converted Russia to a police state, severely restricting basic education and academic thought in alignment with this doctrine. Those who opposed were persecuted. Given that the Vienna System involved maintaining stability within Europe, the concept was extremely popular with Nicholas, who ruthlessly carried out the terms of the Vienna System in the decades to follow; Russia would attempt to subvert and hinder nationalist groups, in addition to intervening in revolutionary conflicts.⁴⁸

In 1830, the great powers were called upon to maintain stability in France and the Netherlands, who were dealing with significant revolutionary movements in the July Revolution and Belgian Revolution respectively. The prospect of uprooted stability meant the Russian army was called upon to quash both revolts, as part of the great powers’ joint response. However, with cholera ravaging the Russian army, the Emperor was unable to mobilize his own troops and instead illegally conscripted troops from Congress Poland; Poland was supposedly

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Lascurettes, *The Concert of Europe and Great-Power Governance Today: What Can the Order of 19th-Century Europe Teach Policymakers About International Order in the 21st Century?*

⁴⁶ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ s.v., "Russian Empire," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, August 8, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russian-Empire>.

autonomous by law but in reality, the country was under direct Russian control. Nevertheless, such blatant abuse of power fuelled widespread anger across Poland, and soon boiled over into the November Uprising in Poland—later brutally crushed as well.⁴⁹

The next decade saw the Winter Palace take an even more active role in crushing revolts, whether domestically, in Europe, or in Anatolia. Between 1830 and 1849, the Russian army crushed 378 domestic serf uprisings, intervened in the Second Egyptian-Ottoman War, and rescued Austria from the brink of collapse in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. These actions, all told, gained Nicholas I a nickname: the "gendarme (policeman) of Europe".⁵⁰

However, the trend of Russian interventionism was not without consequences. With Russia's capability to muster what was—by far and away—the largest standing army in Europe, scrutiny and suspicion among the other great powers targeting the Winter Palace heightened as Russian intervention in conflicts through the decades intensified. While it was easily justifiable to be marching Russian troops through Europe to maintain stability, Russian expansionist ambitions on other fronts—whether in East Asia, the Caucasus, or the Balkans—was unmistakable.⁵¹ In Asia, for example, the Russian war machine had subjugated the entirety of the Kazakhs and other central Asian populations by the 1850s—save for the Khanates of Turkestan.⁵²

Conflict with the Ottoman Empire (1815-1841)

With the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars and consequent establishment of the Vienna System in 1815, Russian expansionism could no longer realistically progress any further west. Thus, the Winter Palace shifted towards two other long-term objectives: one, to cross Transcaucasia and counter British imperialist ambitions in Central Asia; and two, modernizing the Russian navy to counter British naval dominance. As advisors to Nicholas reasoned, if Russia wished to become a leading colonial power, Britain's present hegemony over much of the world had to be minimized. Thus, Russia would have to reclaim the oceans, where Britain exercised unquestioned dominance.

⁴⁹ Mark Brown, "The Comité Franco-Polonais and the French Reaction to the Polish Uprising of November 1830," *The English Historical Review* 93, no. 369 (1978): 774-793.

⁵⁰ s.v., "Russian Empire."

⁵¹ Hina Khan, "Russian Expansionism in Central Asia and the Region's Response," *Pakistan Horizon* 49, no. 2 (1996): 33-57.

⁵² Ibid.



Figure 2. Map of the Western Black Sea at the time of the Crimean War.⁵³

However, this reclamation hinged on the modernization of Russia's outdated navy, and perhaps more crucially, the securing of a port suitable for a new navy. Most Russian ports froze over during the winter, rendering them useless for a mobile and dynamic navy. Furthermore, the empire's only major warm-water port, Sevastopol (shown in Figure 2 with a star), was on the Black Sea. Thereby, the port's use was restricted due to Ottoman control of the Dardanelles—the sole point of access to the Black Sea. Obviously, the Ottoman Empire would never allow free passage to a massive contingent of the Russian navy. Without another option, the Russians decided that the only feasible course of action would be to force the Ottomans to allow Russian naval access to the Black Sea.⁵⁴

While the prospect of war with the Ottomans simply to secure naval access may have appeared illogical to other European powers, invading the ailing "Sick Man of Europe" represented not just a chance for the Winter Palace to free the Russian navy, but also the ability to expand into another region. This thought was further reinforced by Tsar Peter the Great's influential secret will, which outline steps for Russia to achieve world domination. Step Nine—"to progress as much as possible in the direction of Constantinople and India"—was of particular influence to the Winter Palace, hardening Nicholas' resolve to take action in the coming years.⁵⁵

In April 1815, Russian efforts to destabilize the Ottoman Empire commenced, as the Winter Palace supplied the rebelling Serbs with materiel in the Second Serbian Uprising. Despite the revolt succeeding a mere two years later, Russia continued to meddle in Ottoman affairs, sending arms and supplies to aid the Greek War of Independence against the Ottomans. When the Ottomans appeared to be gaining the upper hand on the Greeks, the Winter Place initiated its own armed conflict with the Sublime Porte, starting the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828. As the Greek revolution was still ongoing, the Ottoman government was overwhelmed and eventually forced to both recognize Greek independence and sue for peace at a loss against the Russians.⁵⁶

⁵³ "The Crimean War," *Ron's View*, March 26, 2012, <https://ronsvie.org/2012/03/26/the-crimean-war/>.

⁵⁴ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

⁵⁵ Dimitry V. Lehovitch, "The Testament of Peter the Great," *American Slavic and East European Review* 7, no. 2 (1948): 111-124.

⁵⁶ Anscombe, "The Balkan Revolutionary Age," 572-606.

Yet, these successes did not mark the end of Russian interference in the Ottoman Empire. Crucially, the Winter Palace had not yet secured control of the Dardanelles. In 1833, the decimation of the Ottoman army during the Egyptian-Ottoman War led the Sublime Porte to plead for foreign aid, to which the Winter Palace responded. Unfortunately for the Sublime Porte, Russian aid did not come without strings attached, as the Winter Palace asked the Ottomans to sign a tremendously lopsided treaty in exchange. The Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, signed under the guise of formalizing an alliance between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, allowed Russia the power to close the Dardanelles at any time, unbeknownst to any of the great powers.⁵⁷

However, by signing the treaty, Russia had overstepped the boundaries of the great powers' suspicion—that indeed Russia's ultimate goal was to destabilize and eventually invade the Ottoman Empire. If the Ottoman Empire were to fall into Russian hands, the great powers reasoned that the Winter Palace would have a launchpad to world domination, as they would gain control of both crucial ports and another angle to penetrate Europe. Thus, despite Russia having actively intervened to preserve the European balance of powers, the country's sly geopolitical maneuvering in fuelling revolts and negotiating treaties with the Ottomans was too much to bear for the other great powers.

Soon, with the Ottoman army once again crushed by Egypt during the Second Egyptian-Ottoman War and the subsequent death of Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II in 1839, it appeared that the Empire would collapse. The Sublime Porte now had no clear leader, and Egypt had a straight road to Constantinople. In this situation, faced with imminent Russian invasion, the other great powers of Europe intervened, with Austrian, Prussian, and British support for the Sultan ensuring that Russia would not take advantage.⁵⁸ In 1841, in response to the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, the London Straits Convention was convened, wherein Austrian, British, French, and Prussian delegations successfully pressured Russian diplomats into yielding Russia's power to restrict access to the Dardanelles, undoing almost three decades of Russian progress.⁵⁹

So, as questioned previously, why did the Ottoman Empire have so much trouble in quashing these revolts? Certainly, aging institutions, corrupt and ineffective governance, and ethnic fragmentation formed the basis of the Ottomans' troubles, but the Winter Palace's meddling in Ottoman affairs augmented some of the Empire's already open wounds.

Current Situation

The Revolutions of 1848

Just four years ago, Europe witnessed a new wave of revolutionary upheaval—one of a magnitude not seen since the tumultuous French Revolution a half century prior. Known as the Revolutions of 1848, revolutionary fervor spread throughout Europe, with revolts broadly focused on replacing the old monarchical regimes of Europe with new liberal constitutional monarchies. With uprisings taking place in over 10 duchies, states, and empires—

⁵⁷ Rendall, "Restraint or Self-Restraint of Russia: Nicholas I, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, and the Vienna System, 1832-1841," 37-63.

⁵⁸ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

⁵⁹ Ahmed Şükrü Esmer, "The Straits: Crux of World Politics," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 2 (1947): 290-302.

including France and the Austrian Empire—it appeared that continent-wide liberalizing reform, whether in the realm of suffrage or various other freedoms, was on the horizon.⁶⁰

Yet, just as quickly as revolutionary governments had risen, almost all had been suppressed within a year. Faced with the writing on the wall, repressive monarchies like Russia united with other existing governments to crush continental-wide revolt. As revolutionaries were unable to further work out internal divisions, the Revolutions of 1848 passed with minimal long-term political change, although the political climate within Europe would be forever altered. Many long-standing monarchies and various other autocratic regimes, in the aftermath of the revolutions, would integrate elements of revolutionary policy, aware of their government’s vulnerability to the changing opinions of the masses. One country which did see a mass overhaul in leadership, however, was France; the country’s 1848 February Revolution had deposed King Louis-Philippe and installed Louis Napoleon as the country’s first President.⁶¹

The Failing Vienna System

The Revolutions of 1848 would strike a near-mortal blow to the lasting Concert of Europe. With many great powers forced to tend to their own internal uprisings simultaneously, the Vienna System’s loose mechanism for periodic great-power meetings was pushed aside for more pressing domestic priorities. Furthermore, due to the success of certain liberal revolutions—particularly, in France, and very nearly, in Prussia—many of the system’s leading conservative statesmen, who had facilitated meetings and upheld the agreement for decades, either resigned or were removed from office.⁶² Thus, in place of the stalwart conservative veterans whom the Vienna System had relied upon for several decades were newly appointed diplomats, with little knowledge of the nuances of the agreement—and even less experience with diplomatic negotiations with other great powers.⁶³ For example, France’s newly-elected President, Louis Napoleon, had an agenda of his own to fulfill in the realm of foreign affairs. In particular, Louis Napoleon sought to reassert French influence abroad—something which would put the great powers into conflict with one and another.⁶⁴

Initiating Crisis

Two years ago, in 1850, French President Louis Napoleon raised the question of the Holy Places in the Ottoman Empire. Wishing to restore glory to France as a continental power after a half-century of domestic turmoil, he posited that France—as the representative of the Catholic Church—had “sovereign authority” over the Holy Lands within the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, Louis Napoleon claimed that France held the right to protect

⁶⁰ Dean Kostantaras, *Nationalism and Revolution in Europe, 1763-1848* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 173-202.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Lascurettes, *The Concert of Europe and Great-Power Governance Today: What Can the Order of 19th-Century Europe Teach Policymakers About International Order in the 21st Century?*

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Christian minorities in the Empire, including both lands and minorities currently under the protection of the Orthodox Church.⁶⁵

As the Ottoman Empire's territory encompasses the most historically significant sites for Christianity—such as the Church of the Nativity and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre—control of these significant sites has traditionally been a strong point of contention between the two most powerful Christian denominations: the Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches.⁶⁶ With the Ottoman Empire being a primarily Islamic empire, these sites had little religious significance to the Sublime Porte, yet possessed tremendous gravity as a political football. Being the delegator of the sites and arbiter of privileges to the competing Catholic and Greek Churches for several centuries, the Sublime Porte approached the French President's claims carefully; the Ottomans were well aware of the potential for their actions to upset the Orthodox Church.⁶⁷

In this case, any Ottoman consideration could not have prevented President Louis Napoleon's next actions. In an immediate escalation of the dispute, France demanded that the Ottoman Empire return the Holy Places to the Catholic Church immediately.⁶⁸ Citing a coalition of other Catholic nations—supposedly supporters of the French cause—Louis Napoleon's dramatic and high-profile escalation would provoke a response from Russia.⁶⁹

Russia, whose population forms the vast majority of Orthodox Christians globally, rebuked the petition put forward by the French President. As Emperor Nicholas I had championed the domestic doctrine of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality throughout his reign, the protection of Orthodox Christianity was something the Russian Emperor cared deeply about. Russia itself carried the nickname: "defender of the Orthodox Church."⁷⁰ Thus, despite the seemingly trivial issues at hand—such as which church's clergy would get the key to the Great Church of Bethlehem or which church would get to hold services first—this controversy has recently turned into a point of bitter dissension between the two powers.⁷¹

Today, January 6, 1852, marks a nuclear escalation in this continuing saga of the Holy Land religious disputes. With the Ottoman Empire yet to make a decision on the matter, President Louis Napoleon has just dispatched the newly commissioned French capital ship, *Charlemagne*, to the Turkish Straits as a show of force. As a blatant violation of the London Straits Convention of 1841, it may well be that France is sending a message: war is on the horizon.⁷²

⁶⁵ Brison D. Gooch, "A Century of Historiography on the Origins of the Crimean War," *The American Historical Review* 62, no. 1 (1956): 33-58.

⁶⁶ Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, 46-98.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Gooch, "A Century of Historiography on the Origins of the Crimean War," 33-58.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Riasanovsky, "'Nationality' in the State Ideology during the Reign of Nicholas I," 38-46.

⁷¹ Gooch, "A Century of Historiography on the Origins of the Crimean War," 33-58.

⁷² Trevor Royle, "Crimea: The Great Crimean War, 1854-1856," *The English Historical Review* 15, no. 463 (2000): 1003-1004.

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