

## THE CRIMEAN WAR

The Crimean War (October 1853 – February 1856) was a conflict in which Russia lost to an alliance of France, the United Kingdom, the Ottoman Empire and Sardinia. The immediate cause involved the rights of Christian minorities in the Holy Land, which was controlled by the Ottoman Empire.

The French promoted the rights of Catholics, while Russia promoted those of the Eastern Orthodox Christians. The longer-term causes involved the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the unwillingness of the United Kingdom and France to allow Russia to gain territory and power at Ottoman expense. It has widely been noted that the causes, in one case involving an argument over a key, have never revealed a "greater confusion of purpose" yet led to a war noted for its "notoriously incompetent international butchery".

While the churches eventually worked out their differences and came to an initial agreement, both Nicholas I of Russia and Napoleon III refused to back down. Nicholas issued an ultimatum that the Orthodox subjects of the Empire be placed under his protection. Britain attempted to mediate, and arranged a compromise that Nicholas agreed to. When the Ottomans demanded changes, Nicholas refused and prepared for war. Having obtained promises of support from France and Britain, the Ottomans officially declared war on Russia in October 1853.

The war opened in the Balkans when Russian troops occupied provinces in modern day Romania and began to cross the Danube. Led by Omar Pasha, the Ottomans fought a strong defensive battle and stopped the advance at Silistra.



Cossack Bay, Balaklava. A building next to which is a pile of baskets and a holding pen with horses at the landing place on the cattle pier with several ships at dock in Balaklava harbor, also bell tents at water's edge and the landscape of the hills in the background. Cossack Bay, Balaklava.

A separate action on the fort town of Kars in eastern Turkey led to a siege, and a Turkish attempt to reinforce the garrison was destroyed by a Russian fleet at Sinop.

Fearing an Ottoman collapse, France and the UK rushed forces to Gallipoli. They then moved north to Varna in June, arriving just in time for the Russians to abandon Silistra. Aside from a minor skirmish at Constanta there was little for the allies to do. Karl Marx quipped that "there they are, the French doing nothing and the British helping them as fast as possible".



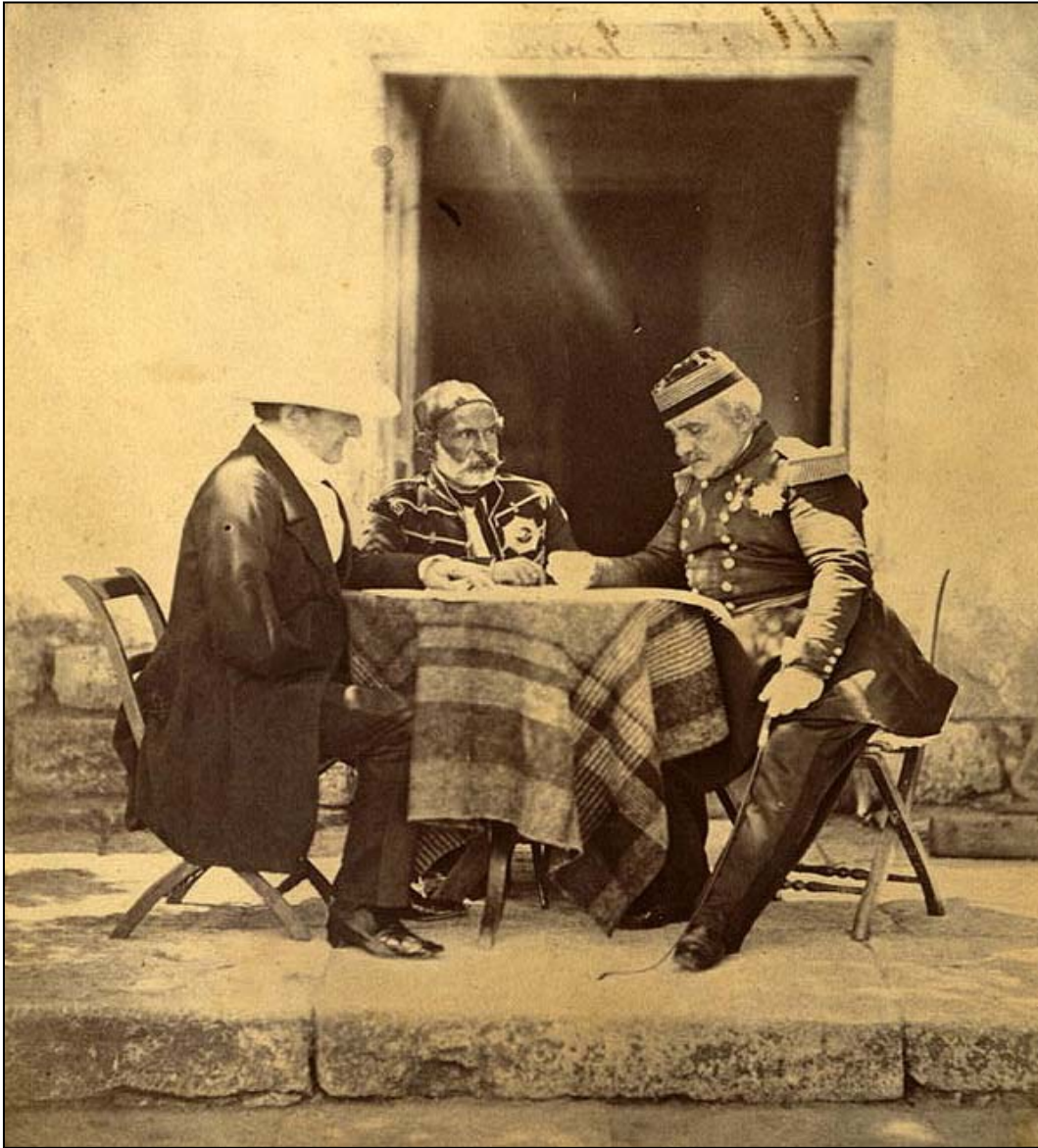
**Balaklava Harbor, the cattle pier.**

Frustrated by the wasted effort, and with demands for action from their citizens, the allied force decided to attack the centre of Russian strength in the Black Sea at Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula. After extended preparations, the forces landed on the peninsula in September 1854 and fought their way to a point south of Sevastopol after a series of successful battles. The Russians counterattacked on 25 October in what became the Battle of Balaclava and were repulsed, but at the cost of seriously depleting the British Army forces. A second counterattack, ordered personally by Nicholas, was defeated by Omar Pasha. The front settled into a siege and led to horrible conditions for troops on both sides. Smaller actions were carried out in the Baltic, the Caucasus, the White Sea and in the North Pacific.

Sevastopol fell after eleven months, and formerly neutral countries began to join the allied cause. Isolated and facing a bleak prospect of invasion from the west if the war continued, Russia sued for peace in March 1856. This was welcomed by France and the UK, where the citizens began to turn against their governments as the war dragged on. The war was officially ended by the Treaty of Paris, signed on 30 March 1856.

Russia lost the war, and was forbidden from hosting warships in the Black Sea. The Ottoman vassal states of Wallachia and Moldavia became largely independent. Christians were granted a degree of official equality, and the Orthodox church regained control of the Christian churches in dispute.

The Crimean War was one of the first conflicts to use modern technologies such as explosive naval shells, railways and telegraphs. The war was one of the first to be documented extensively in written reports and photographs. As the legend of the "Charge of the Light Brigades" demonstrates, the war quickly became an iconic symbol of logistical, medical and tactical failures and mismanagement. The reaction in the UK was a demand for professionalism, most famously achieved by Florence Nightingale, who gained worldwide attention for pioneering modern nursing while treating the wounded.



FitzRoy Somerset (First Baron Raglan), Omar Pasha and Marshall Pelissier.

As the Ottoman Empire steadily weakened decade after decade, Russia stood poised to take advantage by expanding south. In the 1850s, the British, as well as the French, who were allied with the Ottoman Empire, were determined not to allow this to happen.

In some sense the Crimean war was predestined and had deep-seated causes. Neither Nicholas I nor Napoleon III nor the British government could retreat in the conflict for prestige once it was launched. Nicholas needed a subservient Turkey for the sake of Russian security; Napoleon needed success for the sake of his domestic position; the British government needed an independent Turkey for the security of the Eastern Mediterranean....Mutual fear, not mutual aggression, caused the Crimean war.

### **Russian expansionism**

Russia, as a member of the Holy Alliance, had operated as the "police of Europe", maintaining the balance of power that had been established in the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. Russia had assisted Austria's efforts in suppressing the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, and expected gratitude; it wanted a free hand in settling its problems with the Ottoman Empire the "sick man of Europe" The United Kingdom could not tolerate Russian dominance of Ottoman affairs, challenging the British domination of the eastern Mediterranean.

For over 200 years, Russia had been expanding southwards across the sparsely populated "Wild Fields" toward the warm water ports of the Black Sea that did not freeze over like the handful of other ports available in the north. The goal was to promote year-round trade and a year-round navy.

Pursuit of this goal brought the emerging Russian state into conflict with the Ukrainian Cossacks and then with the Tatars of the Crimean Khanate and Circassians. When Russia conquered these groups and gained possession of southern Ukraine, known as New Russia during Russian imperial times, the Ottoman Empire

lost its buffer zone against Russian expansion, and Russia and the Ottoman Empire fell into direct conflict. The conflict with the Ottoman Empire also presented a religious issue of importance, as Russia saw itself as the protector of Orthodox Christians, many of whom lived under Ottoman control and were treated as second-class citizens.



Map of Crimean War (in Cyrillic)

The United Kingdom's immediate fear was Russian expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, which the UK desired to preserve. The British were also concerned that Russia might make advances toward India, or move toward Scandinavia, or Western Europe. The Royal Navy also wanted to undermine the threat of a powerful Russian navy.

From the British perspective the Crimean war was fought for the sake of Europe rather than for the Eastern question; it was fought against Russia, not in favour of Turkey. The British fought Russia out of resentment and supposed that her defeat would strengthen the European Balance of Power.

It is often said that Russia was militarily weak, technologically backward, and administratively incompetent. Despite its grand ambitions toward the south, it had not built its railroad network in that direction, and communications were poor. The bureaucracy was riddled with graft, corruption and inefficiency and was unprepared for war. Its navy was weak and technologically backward; its army, although very large, was good only for parades, suffered from colonels who pocketed their men's pay, poor morale, and was out of touch with the latest technology developed by Britain and France. By the war's end, everyone realized the profound weaknesses of the Russian military, and the Russian leadership was determined to reform it.

### The immediate causes of the war

The immediate chain of events leading to France and the United Kingdom declaring war on Russia on 27 and 28 March 1854 came from the ambition of the French emperor Napoleon III to restore the grandeur of France. He wanted Catholic support that would come his way if he attacked Eastern Orthodoxy, as sponsored by Russia. The Marquis Charles de la Valette was a zealous Catholic and a leading member of the "clerical party," which demanded French protection of the Roman Catholic rights to the holy places in Palestine. In May 1851, Napoleon appointed La Valette as his ambassador to the Porte (the Ottoman Empire).

The appointment was made with the intent of forcing the Ottomans to recognise France as the "sovereign authority" over the Christian population. Russia disputed this attempted change in authority. Pointing to two more treaties, one in 1757 and the 1774 Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca, the Ottomans reversed their earlier decision, renouncing the French treaty and insisting that Russia was the protector of the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire.

Napoleon III responded with a show of force, sending the ship of the line Charlemagne to the Black Sea. This action was a violation of the London Straits Convention. Thus, France's show of force presented a real

threat, and when combined with aggressive diplomacy and money, induced the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmeçid I to accept a new treaty, confirming France and the Roman Catholic Church as the supreme Christian authority with control over the Roman Catholic holy places and possession of the keys to the Church of the Nativity, previously held by the Greek Orthodox Church.

Tsar Nicholas I then deployed his 4th and 5th army corps along the River Danube in Wallachia, as a direct threat to the Ottoman lands south of the river, and had Count Karl Nesselrode, his foreign minister, undertake talks with the Ottomans. Nesselrode confided to Sir George Hamilton Seymour, the British ambassador in Saint Petersburg:

*[The dispute over the holy places]* had assumed a new character—that the acts of injustice towards the Greek church which it had been desired to prevent had been perpetrated and consequently that now the object must be to find a remedy for these wrongs.

The success of French negotiations at Constantinople was to be ascribed solely to intrigue and violence—violence which had been supposed to be the ultimate ratio of kings, being, it had been seen, the means which the present ruler of France was in the habit of employing in the first instance.

As conflict emerged over the issue of the holy places, Nicholas I and Nesselrode began a diplomatic offensive, which they hoped would prevent either Britain's or France's interfering in any conflict between Russia and the Ottomans, as well as to prevent their ally.

Nicholas began courting Britain by means of conversations with the British ambassador, George Hamilton Seymour, in January and February 1853. Nicholas insisted that he no longer wished to expand Imperial Russia but that he had an obligation to the Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire. The Tsar next dispatched a highly abrasive diplomat, Prince Menshikov, on a special mission to the Ottoman Sublime Porte in February 1853.

By previous treaties, the sultan was committed "to protect the (Eastern Orthodox) Christian religion and its churches." Menshikov demanded a Russian protectorate over all 12 million Orthodox Christians in the Empire, with control of the Orthodox Church's hierarchy. A compromise was reached regarding Orthodox access to the Holy Land, but the Sultan, strongly supported by the British ambassador, rejected the more sweeping demands.

The British and French sent in naval task forces to support the Ottomans, as Russia prepared to seize the Danubian Principalities.

In February 1853, the British government of Lord Aberdeen, the prime minister, re-appointed Stratford Canning as British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Having resigned the ambassadorship in January, he had been replaced by Colonel Rose as *chargé d'affaires*. Lord Stratford then turned around and sailed back to Constantinople, arriving there on 5 April 1853. There he convinced the Sultan to reject the Russian treaty proposal, as compromising the independence of the Turks.

The Leader of the Opposition in the British House of Commons, Benjamin Disraeli, blamed Aberdeen and Stratford's actions for making war inevitable, thus starting the process which would eventually force the Aberdeen government to resign in January 1855, over the war.

Shortly after he learned of the failure of Menshikov's diplomacy toward the end of June 1853, the Tsar sent armies under the commands of Field Marshal Ivan Paskevich and General Mikhail Gorchakov across the Pruth River into the Ottoman-controlled Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia.

Fewer than half of the 80,000 Russian soldiers who crossed the Pruth in 1853 survived. By far, most of the deaths would result from sickness rather than combat for the Russian army still suffered from medical services that ranged from bad to none. Russia had previously obtained recognition from the Ottoman Empire of the Tsar's role as special guardian of the Orthodox Christians in Moldavia and Wallachia. Now Russia used the Sultan's failure to resolve the issue of the protection of the Christian sites in the Holy Land as a pretext for Russian occupation of these Danubian provinces.

Nicholas believed that the European powers, especially Austria, would not object strongly to the annexation of a few neighbouring Ottoman provinces, especially considering that Russia had assisted Austria's efforts in suppressing the Hungarian Revolution in 1849. In July 1853, the Tsar sent his troops into the Danubian Principalities. The United Kingdom, hoping to maintain the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against the expansion of Russian power in Asia, sent a fleet to the Dardanelles, where it joined another fleet sent by France.

Sultan Abdul Mecid I formally declared war on Russia and proceeded to the attack, his armies moving on the Russian army near the Danube later that month. Russia and the Ottoman Empire massed forces on two main fronts, the Caucasus and the Danube. Ottoman leader Omar Pasha managed to achieve some victories on the Danubian front. In the Caucasus, the Ottomans were able to stand ground with the help of Chechen Muslims led by Imam Shamil.

### Chronology of major battles of the war

- Battle of Sinop, 30 November 1853
- Siege of Petropavlovsk, 30–31 August 1854, on the Pacific coast
- Battle of Alma, 20 September 1854
- Siege of Sevastopol, 25 September 1854 to 8 September 1855
- Battle of Balaclava, 25 October 1854 (*see also* Charge of the Light Brigade and The Thin Red Line)
- Battle of Inkerman, 5 November 1854
- Battle of Eupatoria, 17 February 1855
- Battle of the Chernaya (aka "Traktir Bridge"), 16 August 1855
- Sea of Azoff naval campaign, May to November 1855
- Siege of Kars, June to 28 November 1855

### Battle of Sinop

The European powers continued to pursue diplomatic avenues. The representatives of the four neutral Great Powers—the United Kingdom, France, Austria and Prussia met in Vienna, where they drafted a note that they hoped would be acceptable to both the Russians and the Ottomans.

The peace terms arrived at by the four powers at the Vienna Conference were delivered to the Russians by the Austrian Foreign Minister Count Karl von Buol on 5 December 1853. The note met with the approval of Nicholas I; however, Abdülmeçid I rejected the proposal, feeling that the document's poor phrasing left it open to many different interpretations. The United Kingdom, France, and Austria united in proposing amendments to mollify the Sultan, but the court of St. Petersburg ignored their suggestions.

The UK and France then set aside the idea of continuing negotiations, but Austria and Prussia did not believe that the rejection of the proposed amendments justified the abandonment of the diplomatic process. The Russians sent a fleet to Sinop in northern Anatolia. In the Battle of Sinop on 30 November 1853 they destroyed a patrol squadron of Ottoman frigates and corvettes while they were anchored in port. Public opinion in the UK and France was outraged and demanded war. Sinop provided the United Kingdom and France with the *casus belli* ("cause for war") for declaring war against Russia. On 28 March 1854, after Russia ignored an Anglo-French ultimatum to withdraw from the Danubian Principalities, the UK and France formally declared war.

### First hostilities

The Russian destruction of the Turkish fleet at the *Battle of Sinop* on 30 November 1853 sparked the war (painting by Ivan Aivazovsky).

### Dardanelles

Britain was concerned about Russian activity and Sir John Burgoyne senior advisor to Lord Aberdeen urged that the Dardanelles should be occupied and throw up works of sufficient strength to block any Russian move to capture Constantinople and gain access to the Mediterranean Sea. The Corps of Royal Engineers sent men to the Dardanelles while Burgoyne went to Paris, meeting the British Ambassador and the French Emperor. The Lord Cowley wrote on 8 February to Burgoyne "Your visit to Paris has produced a visible change in the Emperor's views, and he is making every preparation for a land expedition in case the last attempt at negotiation should break down."

Burgoyne and his team of engineers inspected and surveyed the Dardanelles area in February, being fired on by Russian riflemen when they went to Varna. A team of sappers arrived in March and major building works commenced on a seven-mile line of defence designed to block the Gallipoli peninsula. French sappers were working on one half of the line which was finished in May.

### Peace attempts



Nicholas felt that, because of Russian assistance in suppressing the Hungarian revolution of 1848, Austria would side with him, or at the very least remain neutral. Austria, however, felt threatened by the Russian troops in the Balkans.

On 27 February 1854, the United Kingdom and France demanded the withdrawal of Russian forces from the principalities; Austria supported them and, though it did not declare war on Russia, it refused to guarantee its neutrality. Russia's rejection of the ultimatum caused the UK and France to enter the war. Russia soon withdrew its troops from the Danubian principalities, which were then occupied by Austria for the duration of the war. This removed the original grounds for war, but the UK and France continued with hostilities.

Determined to address the Eastern Question by putting an end to the Russian threat to the Ottoman Empire, the allies in August 1854 proposed the "Four Points" for ending the conflict, in addition to the Russian withdrawal:

- Russia was to give up its protectorate over the Danubian Principalities;
- The Danube was to be opened up to foreign commerce;
- The Straits Convention of 1841, which allowed only Ottoman and Russian warships in the Black Sea, was to be revised;
- Russia was to abandon any claim granting it the right to interfere in Ottoman affairs on behalf of Orthodox Christians.

These points (particularly the third) would require clarification through negotiation, but Russia refused to negotiate. The allies including Austria therefore agreed that the UK and France should take further military action to prevent further Russian aggression against the Ottoman Empire. The United Kingdom and France agreed on the invasion of the Crimean peninsula as the first step.

### **Battles**

The Danube campaign opened when the Russians occupied the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in May 1853, bringing their forces to the north bank of the river Danube. In response, the Ottoman Empire also moved its forces up to the river. It established strongholds at Vidin in the west, and Silistra, which was located in the east, near the mouth of the Danube.

The Turkish/Ottoman move up the Danube River was also of concern to the Austrians, who moved forces into Transylvania in response. However, the Austrians had begun to fear the Russians more than the Turks. Indeed, like the British, the Austrians were now coming to see that an intact Ottoman Empire was necessary as a bulwark against the Russians. Accordingly, the Austrians resisted Russian diplomatic attempts to join the war on the Russian side. Austria remained neutral in the Crimean War.

Following the Ottoman ultimatum in September 1853, forces under the Ottoman general Omar Pasha crossed the Danube at Vidin and captured Calafat in October 1853. Simultaneously, in the east, the Ottomans crossed the Danube at Silistra and attacked the Russians at Oltenița. The resulting Battle of Oltenița was the first engagement following the declaration of war.

The Russians counterattacked, but were beaten back. On 31 December 1853, the Ottoman forces at Calafat moved against the Russian force at Chetatea or Cetate, a small village nine miles north of Calafat, and engaged them on 6 January 1854. The battle began when the Russians made a move to recapture Calafat. Most of the heavy fighting, however, took place in and around Chetatea until the Russians were driven out of the village. Despite the setback at Chetatea, on 28 January 1854, Russian forces laid siege to Calafat. The siege would continue until May 1854 when the Russians lifted the siege. The Ottomans would also later beat the Russians in battle at Caracal.

In the spring of 1854 the Russians again advanced, crossing the Danube River into the Turkish province of Dobruja. By April 1854, the Russians had reached the lines of Trajan's Wall where they were finally halted. In the centre, the Russian forces crossed the Danube and laid siege to Silistra from 14 April with 60,000 troops, the defenders with 15,000 had supplies for three months. The siege was lifted on 23 June 1854. The English and French forces at this time were unable to take the field for lack of equipment.

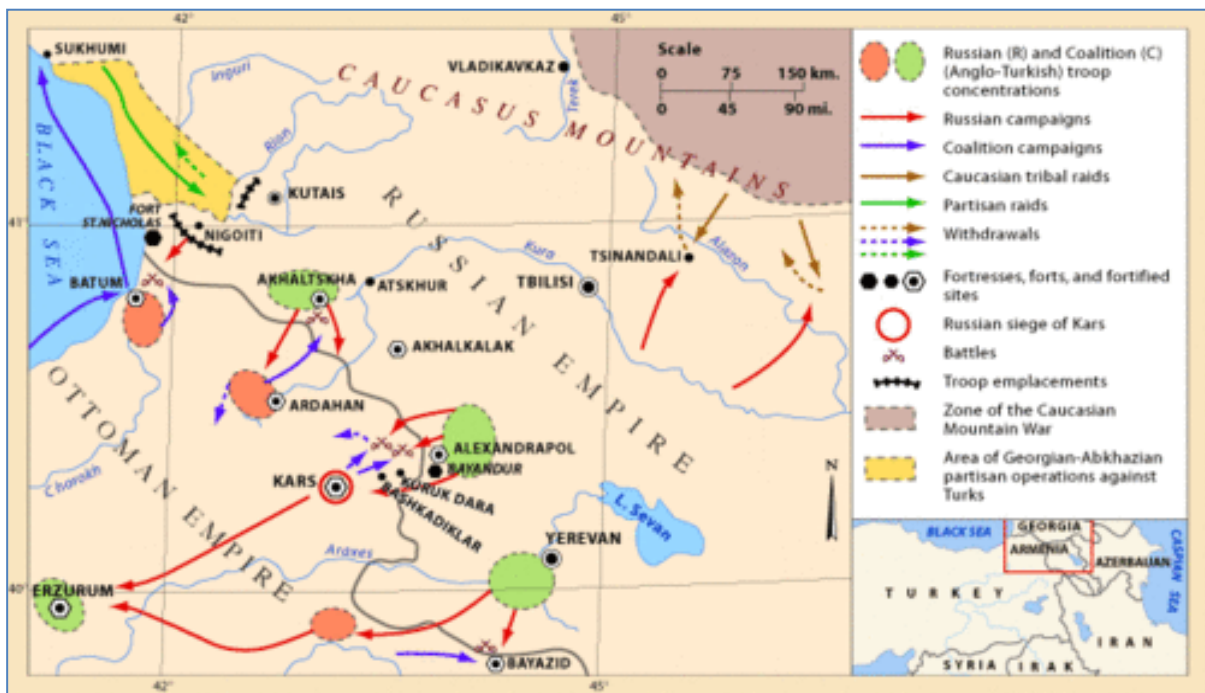
In the west, the Russians were dissuaded from attacking Vidin by the presence of the Austrian forces, which had swelled to 280,000 men. On 28 May 1854 a protocol of the Vienna Conference was signed by Austria and Russia. One of the aims of the Russian advance had been to encourage the Orthodox Christian Serbs

and Bulgarians living under Ottoman rule to rebel. However, when the Russian troops actually crossed the River Pruth into Moldavia, the Orthodox Christians still showed no interest in rising up against the Turks.

Adding to the worries of Nicholas I was the concern that Austria would enter the war against the Russians and attack his armies on the western flank. Indeed, after attempting to mediate a peaceful settlement between Russia and Turkey, the Austrians entered the war on the side of Turkey with an attack against the Russians in the Principalities which threatened to cut off the Russian supply lines. Accordingly, the Russians were forced to raise the siege of Silistra on 23 June 1854, and begin abandoning the Principalities. The lifting of the siege reduced the threat of a Russian advance into Bulgaria.

In June 1854, the Allied expeditionary force landed at Varna, a city on the Black Sea's western coast (now in Bulgaria). They made little advance from their base there. In July 1854, the Turks under Omar Pasha crossed the Danube into Wallachia and on 7 July 1854, engaged the Russians in the city of Giurgiu and conquered it. The capture of Giurgiu by the Turks immediately threatened Bucharest in Wallachia with capture by the same Turk army. On 26 July 1854, Tsar Nicholas I ordered the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Principalities. Also, in late July 1854, following up on the Russian retreat, the French staged an expedition against the Russian forces still in Dobruja, but this was a failure.

By then, the Russian withdrawal was complete, except for the fortress towns of northern Dobruja, while their place in the Principalities was taken by the Austrians, as a neutral peacekeeping force. There was little further action on this front after the autumn of 1854 and in September the allied force boarded ships at Varna to invade the Crimean Peninsula.



Caucasus front during the Crimean War





Balacava looking seawards, the Commandant's house in the foreground. Balaklava looking seaward showing general view of the landscape and buildings with the Commandant's house in the foreground, behind which, to the right, is the ordnance wharf and the harbor with a line of ships receding to the middle distance, and in the upper left corner, the remains of the old Genoese castle perched on the hills that line the harbor.

The naval operations of the Crimean war commenced with the dispatch, in the summer of 1853, of the French and British fleets to the Black Sea region, to support the Ottomans and to dissuade the Russians from encroachment. By June 1853, both fleets were stationed at Besikas bay, outside the Dardanelles. With the Russian occupation of the Danube Principalities in October, they moved to the Bosphorus and in November entered the Black Sea.

During this period, the Russian Black Sea Fleet was operating against Ottoman coastal traffic between Constantinople (currently named Istanbul) and the Caucasus ports, while the Ottoman fleet sought to protect this supply line. The clash came on 30 November 1853 when a Russian fleet attacked an Ottoman force in the harbour at Sinop, and destroyed it at the Battle of Sinop. The battle outraged opinion in UK, which called for war.

There was little additional naval action until March 1854 when on the declaration of war the British frigate *Furious* was fired on outside Odessa harbour. In response an Anglo-French fleet bombarded the port, causing much damage to the town. To show support for Turkey after the battle of Sinop, on the 22nd of December 1853, the Anglo-French squadron entered the Black Sea and the steamship HMS *Retribution* approached the Port of Sevastopol, the commander of which received an ultimatum not to allow any ships in the Black Sea.

In June, the fleets transported the Allied expeditionary forces to Varna, in support of the Ottoman operations on the Danube; in September they again transported the armies, this time to the Crimea. The Russian fleet during this time declined to engage the allies, preferring to maintain a "fleet in being"; this strategy failed when Sevastopol, the main port and where most of the Black Sea fleet was based, came under siege.

The Russians were reduced to scuttling their warships as blockships, after stripping them of their guns and men to reinforce batteries on shore. During the siege, the Russians lost four 110- or 120-gun, three-decker ships of the line, twelve 84-gun two-deckers and four 60-gun frigates in the Black Sea, plus a large number of smaller vessels. During the rest of the campaign the allied fleets remained in control of the Black Sea, ensuring the various fronts were kept supplied.

In April 1855, they supported an invasion of Kerch and operated against Taganrog in the Sea of Azov. In September they moved against Russian installations in the Dnieper estuary, attacking Kinburn in the first use of ironclad ships in naval warfare.



**Landing place, Ordnance Wharf, Balaklava, Genoese Castle.**

The Russians evacuated Wallachia and Moldavia in late July 1854. With the evacuation of the Danubian Principalities, the immediate cause of war was withdrawn, and the war might have ended at this time.

However, war fever among the public in both the UK and France had been whipped up by the press in both countries to the degree that politicians found it untenable to propose ending the war at this point. Indeed, the coalition government of George Hamilton-Gordon, 4th Earl of Aberdeen fell on 30 January 1855 on a no-confidence vote as Parliament voted to appoint a committee to investigate mismanagement of the war.



Men seated by railroad bed under construction next to Balaklava harbor. Landing place, railway stores, Balaklava, looking up the harbour.

French and British officers and engineers were sent on 20 July on HMS Fury, a wooden Bulldog-class paddle sloop, to survey the harbour of Sevastopol and the coast near it, managing to get close to the harbour mouth to inspect the formidable batteries. Returning, they reported that they believed there were 15,000–20,000 troops encamped. Ships were prepared to transport horses and siege equipment was both manufactured and imported.

The Crimean campaign opened in September 1854. 360 ships sailed in seven columns, each steamer towing two sailing ships. Anchoring on 13 September in the bay of Eupatoria, the town surrendered, and 500 Marines landed to occupy it. This town and bay would provide a fallback position in case of disaster.

The ships then sailed east to make the landing of the allied expeditionary force on the sandy beaches of Calamita Bay on the southwest coast of the Crimean Peninsula. The landing surprised the Russians, as they had been expecting a landing at Katcha; the last-minute change proving that Russia had known the original battle plan. There was no sign of the enemy, and the men were all landed on 14 September. It took another four days to land all the stores, equipment, horses and artillery.

The landing was north of Sevastopol, so the Russians had arrayed their army in expectation of a direct attack. The allies advanced and on the morning of 20 September came up to the Alma river and the whole Russian army. The position was strong, but after three hours, the frontal attack had driven the Russians out of their dug in positions with losses of 6000 men. The Battle of the Alma had 3,300 Allied losses. Failing to pursue the retreating forces was one of many strategic errors made during the war, and the Russians themselves noted that had they pressed south that day they would have easily captured Sevastopol.

Believing the northern approaches to the city too well defended, especially due to the presence of a large star fort and because Sevastopol was on the south side of the inlet from the sea that made the harbour. Sir John Burgoyne, the engineer advisor, recommended that the allies attack Sevastopol from the south.

This was agreed by the joint commanders, Raglan and St Arnaud. On 25 September the whole army marched southeast and encircled the city to the south. This let them set up a new supply centre in a number of protected inlets on the south coast. The Russians retreated into the city.

The Allied army relocated without problems to the south and the heavy artillery was brought ashore with batteries and connecting trenches built so that by 10 October some batteries were ready and by 17 October when the bombardment commenced, 126 guns were firing, 53 of them French.

The fleet at the same time engaged the shore batteries. The British bombardment worked better than the French, who had smaller calibre guns. The fleet suffered high casualties during the day.

The British wanted to attack that afternoon, but the French wanted to defer the attack. A postponement was agreed, but on the next day the French were still not ready. By 19 October the Russians had transferred some heavy guns to the southern defences and outgunned the allies.



**View of Balaklava from the top of Guard's Hill. Harbor with tent encampments in the foreground, ships in the harbor and, on a hill in the background, ruins of the old Genoese castle.**

Reinforcements for the Russians gave them the courage to send out probing attacks. The Allied lines, beginning to suffer from cholera as early as September, were stretched. The French, on the west had less to do than the British on the east with their siege lines and the large nine-mile open wing back to their supply base on the south coast.

### **Battle of Balaclava**

A large Russian assault on the allied supply base to the southeast, at Balaclava was rebuffed on 25 October 1854. The Battle of Balaclava is remembered in the UK for the actions of two British units. At the start of the battle, a large body of Russian cavalry charged the 93rd Highlanders, who were posted north of the village of Kadikoi. Commanding them was Sir Colin Campbell. Rather than 'form square', the traditional method of repelling cavalry, Campbell took the risky decision to have his Highlanders form a single line, two men deep.

Campbell had seen the effectiveness of the new Minie rifles, with which his troops were armed, at the Battle of the Alma a month before, and was confident his men could beat back the Russians. His tactics succeeded. From up on the ridge to the west, *Times* correspondent William Howard Russell saw the Highlanders as a 'thin red streak topped with steel', a phrase which soon became the 'Thin Red Line.'

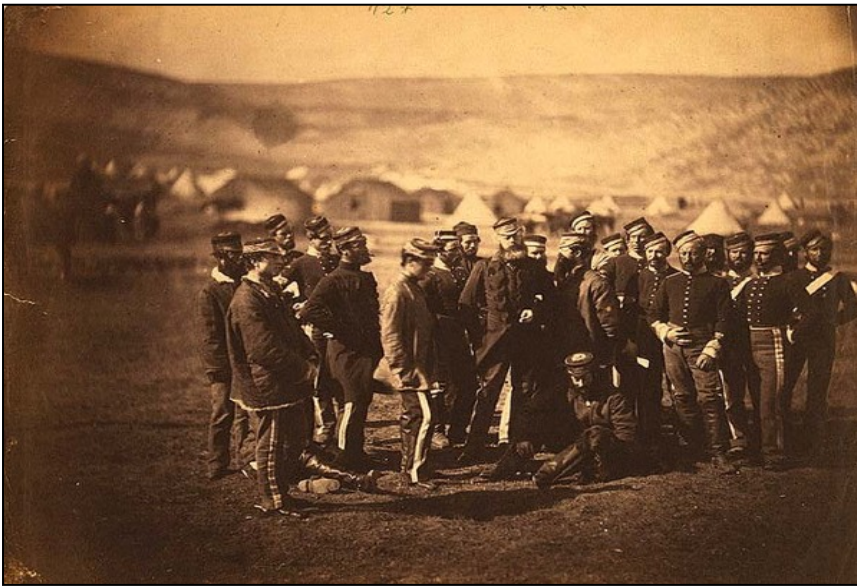
Soon after, a Russian cavalry movement was countered by the Heavy Brigade, who charged and fought hand-to-hand until the Russians retreated. This caused a more widespread Russian retreat, including a number of their artillery units.

When the local commanders failed to take advantage of the retreat, Lord Raglan sent out orders to move up. The local commanders ignored the demands, leading to the British aide-de-camp personally delivering a quickly written and confusing order to attack the artillery. When the Earl of Cardigan questioned what they referred to, the aide-de-camp pointed to the first Russian battery he could see – the wrong one.

Cardigan formed up his unit and charged the length of the Valley of the Balaclava, under fire from Russian batteries in the hills. The charge of the Light Brigade caused 278 casualties of the 700-man unit. The Light Brigade was memorialized in the famous poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Charge of the Light Brigade."

Although traditionally the charge of the Light Brigade was looked upon as a glorious but wasted sacrifice of good men and horses, recent historians say that the charge of the Light Brigade did succeed in at least some of its objectives. The aim of any cavalry charge is to scatter the enemy lines and frighten the enemy off the battlefield. The charge of the Light Brigade had so unnerved the Russian cavalry, which had previously been routed by the Heavy Brigade, that the Russian Cavalry was set to full-scale flight by the subsequent charge of the Light Brigade.

The shortage of men led to the failure of the British and French to follow up on the Battle of Balaclava which led directly to a much more bloody battle, the Battle of Inkerman. On 5 November 1854, the Russians attempted to raise the siege at Sevastopol with an attack against the allies which resulted in another allied victory.



Colonel Doherty, officers & men of the 13th Light Dragoons, including Colonel Doherty, Cornet Danzil Chamberlayne, Captain Jenyns, and veterinary-surgeon Thomas Towers.

#### **Winter of 1854–55**

Winter, and a deteriorating supply situation on both sides of troops and materiel, led to a halt in ground operations. Sevastopol remained invested by the allies, while the allied armies were hemmed in by the Russian army in the interior.

On 14 November a storm sank thirty allied transport ships including HMS *Prince* which was carrying a cargo of winter clothing. The storm and heavy traffic caused the road from the coast to the troops to disintegrate into a quagmire, requiring engineers to devote most of their time to its repair including quarrying stone.

A tram-road was ordered. It arrived in January with a civilian engineering crew; however it was March before it was sufficiently advanced to be of any appreciable value. An Electrical telegraph was also ordered, but the frozen ground delayed its installation until March, when communications from the base port of Balaklava to the British HQ was established. The Pipe-and-cable-laying plough failed because of the hard frozen soil, but even so 21 miles of cable were laid.

**Railway officials, Messrs. Swan, Cadell, Middleton, Howse, & Kellock.**

In February 1855, the Russians attacked the allied base at Eupatoria, where an Ottoman army had built up and was threatening Russian supply routes. The battle saw the Russians defeated and led to a change in command. The strain of directing the war had taken its toll on the health of Tsar Nicholas. The Tsar, full of remorse for the disasters he had caused, caught pneumonia and died on 2 March.

The troops suffered greatly from cold and sickness, the shortage of fuel led them to start dismantling their defensive Gabions and Fascines.

The sanitary commission. Dr. John Sutherland is sitting on table, facing right, and Robert Rawlinson, sitting on chair. Council of War held at Lord Raglan's Head Quarters, the morning of the successful attack on the Mamelon.



### Siege of Sevastopol

The Allies had had time to consider the problem. The French being brought around to agree that the key to

the defence was the Malakoff. Emphasis of the siege at Sevastopol shifted to the British left, against the fortifications on Malakoff hill.

In March, there was fighting by the French over a new fort being built by the Russians at Mamelon, located on a hill in front of the Malakoff. Several weeks of fighting saw little change in the front line, and the Mamelon remained in Russian hands.

In April 1855, the allies staged a second all-out bombardment, leading to an artillery duel with the Russian guns, but no ground assault followed.

On 24 May 1855, sixty ships containing 7000 French, 5000 Turkish and 3000 British troops set off for a raid on the city of Kerch east of Sevastopol in an attempt to open another front on the Crimean peninsula and to cut off Russian supplies. When the allies landed the force at Kerch, the plan was to outflank the Russian army. The landings were successful, but the force made little progress thereafter.



Mortar batteries in front of Picquet house Light Division.

Many more artillery pieces had arrived and been dug into batteries. In June, a third bombardment was followed after two days by a successful attack on the Mamelon, but a follow-up assault on the Malakoff failed with heavy losses. During this time the garrison commander, Admiral Nakhimov fell on 30 June 1855. Raglan having also died on 28 June. In August, the Russians again made an attack towards the base at

Balaclava, defended by the French, newly arrived Sardinian and Ottoman troops. The resulting battle of Tchernaya was a defeat for the Russians, who suffered heavy casualties.



Lieutenant General Sir George Brown G.C.B. & officers of his Light Division staff Major Hallewell, Colonel Brownrigg, orderly, Colonel Airey, Captain Pearson, Captain Markham, Captain Ponsonby.

For months each side had been building forward rifle pits and defensive positions, which resulted in many skirmishes. Artillery fire aiming to gain superiority over the enemy guns. September saw the final assault. On 5 September, another French bombardment (the sixth) was followed by an assault by the French Army on 8 September resulting in the capture of the Malakoff by the French, and following their failure to retake it, the collapse of the Russian defences. Meanwhile, the British captured the Great Redan, just south of the city of Sevastopol. The Russians retreated to the north, blowing up their magazines and the city fell on 9 September 1855 after a 337-day-long siege.

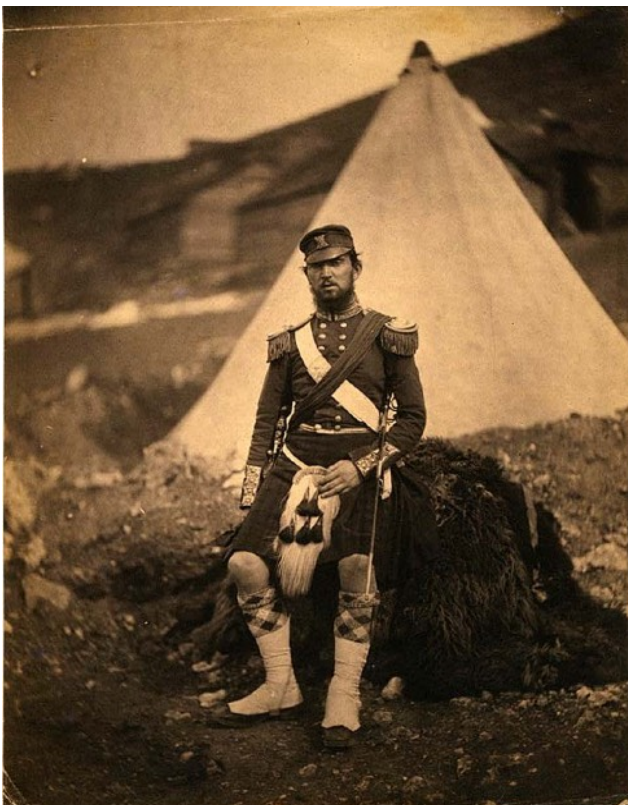
At this point, both sides were exhausted, and no further military operations were launched in the Crimea before the onset of winter. The main objective of the siege, the destruction of the Russian fleet and docks took place over winter. On 28 February multiple mines blew up the five docks, the canal and three locks.



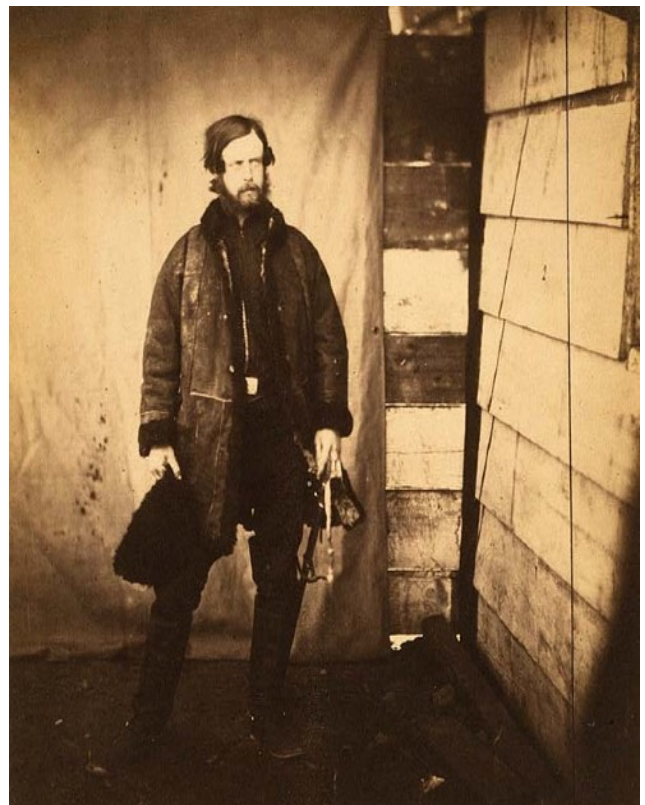
Camp of the 4th Dragoons, convivial party, French & English. One Gioard smoking a pipe, two Zouaves, and Mrs. Rogers in front of a hut.



During the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale and her team of nurses cleaned up the military hospitals and set up the first training school for nurses in the United Kingdom.



**Captain Cuninghame, 42nd Royal Highland Regiment.**



**Captain Lord Balgonie, Grenadier Guards.**





Officers of the 90th Regiment of Foot (Perthshire Volunteers) Light Infantry.

### **Azov campaign**

In the spring 1855, the allied British-French commanders decided to send an Anglo-French naval squadron into the Azov Sea to undermine Russian communications and supplies to besieged Sevastopol. On 12 May 1855, British-French warships entered the Kerch Strait and destroyed the coast battery of the Kamishevaya Bay. On 21 May 1855, the gunboats and armed steamers attacked the seaport of Taganrog, the most important hub near Rostov on Don. The vast amounts of food, especially bread, wheat, barley, and rye that were amassed in the city after the outbreak of war were prevented from being exported.

The Governor of Taganrog, Yegor Tolstoy, and lieutenant-general Ivan Krasnov refused the ultimatum, responding that "Russians never surrender their cities". The British-French squadron bombarded Taganrog for 6½ hours and landed 300 troops near the Old Stairway in downtown Taganrog, but they were thrown back by Don Cossacks and a volunteer corps.

In July 1855, the allied squadron tried to go past Taganrog to Rostov on Don, entering the Don River through the Mius River. On 12 July 1855 HMS *Jasper* grounded near Taganrog thanks to a fisherman who moved buoys into shallow water. The Cossacks captured the gunboat with all of its guns and blew it up. The third siege attempt was made 19–31 August 1855, but the city was already fortified, and the squadron could not approach close enough for landing operations. The allied fleet left the Gulf of Taganrog on the 2th September 1855, with minor military operations along the Azov Sea coast continuing until late autumn 1855.

As in the previous wars the Caucasus front was secondary to what was happening in the west. Perhaps because of better communications western events sometimes influenced the east. The main events were the second capture of Kars and a landing on the Georgian coast. Several commanders on both sides were either incompetent or unlucky and few fought aggressively.

**1853:** There were four main events. 1. In the north the Turks captured the border fort of Saint Nicholas in a surprise night attack (27/28 October). They then pushed about 20000 troops across the Cholok River border. Being outnumbered the Russians abandoned *Poti* and Redut Kale and drew back to Marani. Both sides remained immobile for the next seven months. 2. In the center the Turks moved north from Ardahan to within cannon-shot of Akhaltsike and awaited reinforcements (13 November).

The Russians routed them. The claimed losses were 4000 Turks and 400 Russians. 3. In the south about 30000 Turks slowly moved east to the main Russian concentration at Gyumri or Alexandropol (November). They crossed the border and set up artillery south of town. Prince Orbeliani tried to drive them off and found himself trapped.

The Turks failed to press their advantage, the remaining Russians rescued Orbeliani, and the Turks retired west. Orbeliani lost about 1000 men out of 5000. The Russians now decided to advance, the Turks took up a strong position on the Kars road and attacked. They were defeated in the battle of Başgedikler, losing 6000

men, half their artillery and all their supply train. The Russians lost 1300, including Prince Orbeliani. This was Prince Ellico Orbeliani whose wife was later kidnapped by Shamil at Tsinandali. 4. At sea the Turks sent a fleet east which was destroyed by Admiral Nakhimov at Sinope.

**1854:** The British and French declared war on 3 January. That spring the Anglo-French fleet appeared in the Black Sea and the Russians abandoned the Black Sea Defensive Line from Anapa south. N. A. Read, who replaced Vorontsov, fearing an Anglo-French landing in conjunction with Shamil and the Persians, recommended withdrawal north of the Caucasus. For this he was replaced by Baryatinsky. When the allies chose a land attack on Sebastopol any plan for a landing in the east was abandoned.

In the north, Eristov pushed southwest, fought two battles, forced the Turks back to Batum, retired behind the Cholok River and suspended action for the rest of the year (June). In the far south Wrangel pushed west, fought a battle and occupied Bayazit. In the center the main forces stood at Kars and Gyumri. Both slowly approached along the Kars-Gyumri road and faced each other, neither side choosing to fight (June–July).

On 4 August Russian scouts saw a movement which they thought was the start of a withdrawal, the Russians advanced and the Turks attacked first. They were defeated, losing 8000 men to the Russian 3000. 10000 irregulars deserted to their villages. Both sides withdrew to their former positions. About this time the Persians made a semi-secret agreement to remain neutral in exchange for the cancellation of the indemnity from the previous war.

**1855: Kars:** In the year up to May 1855 Turkish forces in the east were reduced from 120,000 to 75,000, mostly by disease. The local Armenian population kept Muravyev well-informed about the Turks at Kars and he judged they had about five months of supplies. He therefore decided to control the surrounding area with cavalry and starve them out. He started in May and by June was south and west of the town.

A relieving force fell back and there was a possibility of taking Erzerum, but Muravyev chose not to. In late September he learned of the fall of Sevastopol and a Turkish landing at Batum. This led him to reverse policy and try a direct attack. It failed, the Russians losing 8000 men and the Turks 1500 (29 September). The blockade continued and Kars surrendered on 8 November.

**1855: Georgian coast:** Omar Pasha, the Turkish commander at Crimea had long wanted to land in Georgia, but the western powers vetoed it. When they relented in August most of the campaigning season was lost. In September 8000 Turks landed at Batum, but the main concentration was at Sukhum Kale. This required a 100-mile march south through a country with poor roads. The Russians planned to hold the line of the Ingur River which separates Abkhazia from Georgia proper. Omar crossed the Ingur on 7 November and then wasted a great deal of time, the Russians doing little.

By 2 December he had reached the Tskhenis-dzqali, the rainy season had started, his camps were submerged in mud and there was no bread. Learning of the fall of Kars he withdrew to the Ingur. The Russians did nothing, and he evacuated to Batum in February of the following year.

### **Baltic theatre**

The Baltic was a forgotten theatre of the Crimean War. Popularisation of events elsewhere overshadowed the significance of this theatre, which was close to Saint Petersburg, the Russian capital.

In April 1854 an Anglo-French fleet entered the Baltic to attack the Russian naval base of Kronstadt and the Russian fleet stationed there. In August 1854 the combined British and French fleet returned to Kronstadt for another attempt. The outnumbered Russian Baltic Fleet confined its movements to the areas around its fortifications.

At the same time, the British and French commanders Sir Charles Napier and Alexandre Ferdinand Parseval-Deschenes—although they led the largest fleet assembled since the Napoleonic Wars considered the Sveaborg fortress too well-defended to engage. Thus, shelling of the Russian batteries was limited to two attempts in the summers of 1854 and 1855, and initially, the attacking fleets limited their actions to blockading Russian trade in the Gulf of Finland. Naval attacks on other ports, such as the ones in the island of Hogland in the Gulf of Finland, proved more successful. Additionally, allies conducted raids on less fortified sections of the Finnish coast.

Russia depended on imports - both for her domestic economy and for the supply of her military forces: the blockade forced Russia to rely on more expensive overland shipments from Prussia. The blockade seriously undermined the Russian export economy and helped shorten the war.

The burning of tar warehouses and ships led to international criticism, and in London the MP Thomas Gibson demanded in the House of Commons that the First Lord of the Admiralty explain "a system which carried on a great war by plundering and destroying the property of defenceless villagers".

In August 1855 a Franco-British naval force captured and destroyed the Russian Bomarsund fortress on Åland Islands. In the same month, the Western Allied Baltic Fleet tried to destroy heavily defended Russian dockyards at Sveaborg outside Helsinki. More than 1000 enemy guns tested the strength of the fortress for two days. Despite the shelling, the sailors of the 120-gun ship *Rossiya*, led by Captain Viktor Poplonsky, defended the entrance to the harbour. The Allies fired over 20,000 shells but failed to defeat the Russian batteries. A massive new fleet of more than 350 gunboats and mortar vessels was prepared, but before the attack was launched, the war ended.

Part of the Russian resistance was credited to the deployment of newly invented blockade mines. Perhaps the most influential contributor to the development of naval mining was a Swede resident in Russia, the inventor and civil engineer Immanuel Nobel (the father of Alfred Nobel).

Immanuel Nobel helped the Russian war effort by applying his knowledge of industrial explosives, such as nitro-glycerin and gunpowder. One account dates modern naval mining from the Crimean War: "Torpedo mines, if I may use this name given by Fulton to self-acting mines underwater, were among the novelties attempted by the Russians in their defences about Cronstadt and Sevastopol", as one American officer put it in 1860.

#### **White Sea theatre**

In autumn 1854, a squadron of three British warships led by HMS *Miranda* left the Baltic for the White Sea, where they shelled Kola (which was utterly destroyed) and the Solovki. Their attempt to storm Arkhangelsk proved unsuccessful.

#### **Pacific theatre**

Minor naval skirmishes also occurred in the Far East, where at Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula a British and French Allied squadron including HMS *Pique* under Rear Admiral David Price and a French force under Counter-Admiral Auguste Febvrier Despointes besieged a smaller Russian force under Rear Admiral Yevfimiy Putyatin.

In September 1854, an Allied landing force was beaten back with heavy casualties, and the Allies withdrew. The Russians escaped under the cover of snow in early 1855 after Allied reinforcements arrived in the region. The Anglo-French forces in the Far East also made several small landings on Sakhalin and Urup, one of the Kuril Islands

#### **Piedmontese Involvement**

Camillo di Cavour, under orders of Victor Emmanuel II of Piedmont-Sardinia, sent an expeditionary corps of 15,000 soldiers, commanded by General Alfonso La Marmora, to side with French and British forces during the war. This was an attempt at gaining the favour of the French, especially when the issue of uniting Italy would become an important matter. The deployment of Italian troops to the Crimea, and the gallantry shown by them in the Battle of the Chernaya (16 August 1855) and in the siege of Sevastopol, allowed the Kingdom of Sardinia to be among the participants at the peace conference at the end of the war, where it could address the issue of the *Risorgimento* to other European powers.

#### **Greece**

Greece played a peripheral role in the war. When Russia attacked the Ottoman Empire in 1853, King Otto of Greece saw an opportunity to expand North and South into Ottoman areas that had large Greek Christian majorities. However, Greece did not coordinate its plans with Russia, did not declare war, and received no outside military or financial support.

Greece, an Orthodox nation, had considerable support in Russia, but the Russian government decided it was too dangerous to help Greece expand its holdings. When the Russians invaded the Principalities, the Ottoman forces were tied down so Greece invaded Thessaly and Epirus. To block further Greek moves, the

British and French occupied the main Greek port at Piraeus from April 1854 to February 1857, and effectively neutralized the Greek army.

Greeks, gambling on a Russian victory, incited the large-scale Epirus Revolt of 1854 as well as uprisings in Crete. The insurrections were failures that were easily crushed by the Ottoman army. Greece was not invited to the peace conference and made no gains out of the war. The frustrated Greek leadership blamed the King for failing to take advantage of the situation; his popularity plunged, and he was later forced to abdicate.

### **Kiev Cossack revolt and national awakening in Ukraine**

A Kiev cossack revolt that initially started in the Vasylykiv county of Kiev Governorate (province) in February 1855 spread across the whole Kiev and Chernigov governorates. Led by peasants, the revolt found great support among the Ukrainian landowners who opposed the war.

The events were contemporary with the popular movement of Chłopomania that laid the foundations of the Ukrainian national awakening and the creation of the Kiev Hromada (Kiev Community).

### **British position**

Dissatisfaction with the conduct of the war was growing with the public in the UK and in other countries, aggravated by reports of fiascos, especially the humiliating defeat of the Charge of the Light Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava.

On Sunday, 21 January 1855, a "snowball riot" occurred in Trafalgar Square near St. Martin-in-the-Field in which 1,500 people gathered to protest against the war by pelting buses, cabs, and pedestrians with snow balls. When the police intervened, the snowballs were directed at them. The riot was finally put down by troops and police acting with truncheons.

In Parliament, Tories demanded an accounting of all soldiers, cavalry and sailors sent to the Crimea and accurate figures as to the number of casualties that had been sustained by all British armed forces in the Crimea; they were especially concerned with the Battle of Balaclava. When Parliament passed a bill to investigate by the vote of 305 to 148, Aberdeen said he had lost a vote of no confidence and resigned as prime minister on 30 January 1855. The veteran former Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston became prime minister.

Palmerston took a hard line; he wanted to expand the war, foment unrest inside the Russian Empire, and permanently reduce the Russian threat to Europe. Sweden and Prussia were willing to join the UK and France, and Russia was isolated.

### **Peace negotiations**

France, which had sent far more soldiers to the war than the United Kingdom had, and suffered far more casualties, wanted the war to end, as did Austria.

Peace negotiations at the Congress of Paris resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Paris on 30 March 1856. In compliance with article III, Russia restored to the Ottoman Empire the city and citadel of Kars in common with "all other parts of the Ottoman territory of which the Russian troops were in possession". Russia ceded some land in Bessarabia at the mouth of the Danube to Moldavia.

By article IV The United Kingdom, France, Sardinia and Turkey restored to Russia "the towns and ports of Sevastopol, Balaklava, Kamish, Eupatoria, Kerch, Jenikale, Kinburn, as well as all other territories occupied by the allied troops". In conformity with article XI and XIII, the Tsar and the Sultan agreed not to establish any naval or military arsenal on the Black Sea coast.

The Black Sea clauses weakened Russia, and it no longer posed a naval threat to the Ottomans. The principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia were nominally returned to the Ottoman Empire; in practice they became independent. The Great Powers pledged to respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.

### **Historical analysis**

The Treaty of Paris stood until 1871, when France was defeated by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871. While Prussia and several other German states united to form a powerful German Empire, the Emperor of the French, Napoleon III, was deposed to permit the formation of a Third French Republic. During his reign, Napoleon III, eager for the support of the United Kingdom, had opposed Russia over the Eastern Question.

Russian interference in the Ottoman Empire, however, did not in any significant manner threaten the interests of France. Thus, France abandoned its opposition to Russia after the establishment of a republic. Encouraged by the decision of the French, and supported by the German minister Otto von Bismarck, Russia renounced the Black Sea clauses of the treaty agreed to in 1856. As the United Kingdom alone could not enforce the clauses, Russia once again established a fleet in the Black Sea.

Although it was Russia that was punished by the Paris Treaty, in the long run it was Austria that lost the most from the Crimean War despite having barely taken part in it. Having abandoned its alliance with Russia, Austria was diplomatically isolated following the war, which contributed to its disastrous defeats in the 1859 Franco-Austrian War that resulted in the cession of Lombardy to the Kingdom of Sardinia, and later in the loss of the Habsburg rule of Tuscany and Modena, which meant the end of Austrian influence in Italy. Furthermore, Russia did not do anything to assist its former ally, Austria, in the 1866 Austro-Prussian War with its loss of Venetia and more important than that, its influence in most German-speaking lands.

The status of Austria as a great power, with the unifications of Germany and Italy was now severely questioned. It had to compromise with Hungary, the two countries shared the Danubian Empire and Austria slowly became a little more than a German satellite. With France now hostile to Germany, allied with Russia, and Russia competing with the newly renamed Austro-Hungarian Empire for an increased role in the Balkans at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, the foundations were in place for creating the diplomatic alliances that would lead to World War I.

Notwithstanding the guarantees to preserve Ottoman territories specified in the Treaty of Paris, Russia, exploiting nationalist unrest in the Ottoman states in the Balkans and seeking to regain lost prestige, once again declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 24 April 1877. In this later Russo-Turkish War the states of Romania, Serbia, Montenegro gained international recognition of their independence and Bulgaria achieved its autonomy from direct Ottoman rule.

The Crimean War marked the ascendancy of France to the position of pre-eminent power on the Continent, the continued decline of the Ottoman Empire, and the beginning of a decline for Tsarist Russia. As Fuller notes, "Russia had been beaten on the Crimean peninsula, and the military feared that it would inevitably be beaten again unless steps were taken to surmount its military weakness." The Crimean War marks the demise of the Concert of Europe, the balance of power that had dominated Europe since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and which had included France, Russia, Austria and the United Kingdom.

**According to historian Shepard Clough, the war:**

was not the result of a calculated plan, nor even of hasty last-minute decisions made under stress. It was the consequence of more than two years of fatal blundering in slow-motion by inept statesmen who had months to reflect upon the actions they took. It arose from Napoleon's search for prestige; Nicholas's quest for control over the Straits; his naive miscalculation of the probable reactions of the European powers; the failure of those powers to make their positions clear; and the pressure of public opinion in Britain and Constantinople at crucial moments.

This view of 'diplomatic drift' as the cause of the war was first popularised by A. W. Kinglake, who portrayed the British as victims of newspaper sensationalism and duplicitous French and Ottoman diplomacy. More recently, the historians Andrew Lambert and Winfried Baumgart have argued that, first, Britain was following a geopolitical strategy in aiming to destroy a fledgling Russian Navy which might challenge the Royal Navy for control of the seas, and second that the war was a joint European response to a century of Russian expansion not just southwards but also into western Europe.

Russia feared losing Russian America without compensation in some future conflict, especially to the British. While Alaska attracted little interest at the time, the population of nearby British Columbia started to increase rapidly a few years after hostilities ended. Therefore, the Russian emperor, Alexander II, decided to sell Alaska. In 1859 the Russians offered to sell the territory to the United States, hoping that its presence in the region would offset the plans of Russia's greatest regional rival, the United Kingdom.

**Documentation**

Notable documentation of the war was provided by William Howard Russell (writing for *The Times* newspaper) and the photographs of Roger Fenton. News from war correspondents reached all nations involved in the war and kept the public citizenry of those nations better informed of the day-to-day events of the war than had been the case in any other war to that date. The British public was very well informed regarding the day-to-day realities of the war in the Crimea. After the French extended the telegraph to the coast of the Black Sea during the winter of 1854, the news reached London in two days. When the British laid an underwater cable to the Crimean peninsula in April 1855, news reached London in a few hours. The daily news reports energised public opinion, which brought down the Aberdeen government and carried Lord Palmerston into office as prime minister.

### **Criticisms and reform**

As the memory of the "Charge of the Light Brigade" demonstrates, the war became an iconic symbol of logistical, medical and tactical failures and mismanagement. Public opinion in the UK was outraged at the logistical and command failures of the war; the newspapers demanded drastic reforms, and parliamentary investigations demonstrated the multiple failures of the Army. However, the reform campaign was not well organized, and the traditional aristocratic leadership of the Army pulled itself together, and blocked all serious reforms. No one was punished. The outbreak of the Indian Revolution in 1857 shifted attention to the heroic defence of British interest by the army, and further talk of reform went nowhere. The demand for professionalism was, however, achieved by Florence Nightingale, who gained worldwide attention for pioneering and publicizing modern nursing while treating the wounded.

The Crimean War also saw the first tactical use of railways and other modern inventions, such as the electric telegraph, with the first "live" war reporting to *The Times* by William Howard Russell. Some credit Russell with prompting the resignation of the sitting British government through his reporting of the lacklustre condition of British forces deployed in Crimea. Additionally, the telegraph reduced the independence of British overseas possessions from their commanders in London due to such rapid communications. Newspaper readership informed public opinion in the United Kingdom and France as never before. It was the first European war to be photographed.

The war also employed modern military tactics, such as trenches and blind artillery fire. The use of the Minié ball for shot, coupled with the rifling of barrels, greatly increased range and damage of the allied forces. The British Army system of sale of commissions came under great scrutiny during the war, especially in connection with the Battle of Balaclava, which saw the ill-fated Charge of the Light Brigade. This scrutiny eventually led to the abolition of the sale of commissions.

The Crimean War was a contributing factor in the Russian abolition of serfdom in 1861: Tsar Alexander II (Nicholas I's son and successor) saw the military defeat of the Russian serf-army by free troops from Britain and France as proof of the need for emancipation. The Crimean War also led to the eventual realisation by the Russian government of its technological inferiority, in military practices as well as weapons. Meanwhile, Russian military medicine saw dramatic progress: N. I. Pirogov, known as the father of Russian field surgery, developed the use of anaesthetics, plaster casts, enhanced amputation methods, and five-stage triage in Crimea, among other things. The war also led to the establishment of the Victoria Cross in 1856 (backdated to 1854), the British Army's first universal award for valour. 111 medals were awarded.

The British issued the Crimea Medal with 5 clasps, and the Baltic Medal, as well as Valour medals, including the newly created Distinguished Conduct Medal, the Turkish the Turkish Crimea Medal, the French did not issue a campaign medal, issuing Médaille militaire and Legion of Honour for bravery, Sardinia also issued a medal. Russia issued a Defence of Sevastopol, and a Crimean War medal.

### **Prominent military commanders**

- **Russian commanders**
  - Prince Mikhail Dmitriyevich Gorchakov
  - Count and Namestnik Ivan Feodorovich Paskevich
  - Admiral Pavel Stepanovich Nakhimov
  - General Eduard Ivanovich Totleben
  - Prince Aleksandr Sergeyevich Menshikov
- **French commanders**
  - Marshal Jacques Leroy de Saint Arnaud

- Marshal François Certain Canrobert
- Marshal Aimable Pélissier
- Marshal Pierre Bosquet
- Marshal Patrice de MacMahon
- General Émile Herbillon
- **Ottoman commanders**
  - General Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha
  - General Omar Pasha
  - General Iskender Pasha
  - General Ismail Pasha
- **British commanders**
  - James Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan
  - FitzRoy Somerset, 1st Baron Raglan
  - Sir Thomas James Harper
  - Sir Edmund Lyons (later 1st Baron Lyons)
  - George Charles Bingham, 3rd Earl of Lucan
  - Colin Campbell, 1st Baron Clyde
- Kingdom of Sardinia commander
  - General Alfonso Ferrero La Marmora

A British naval mascot, Timothy (1839–2004) was the last "veteran" of the Crimean War

- Yves Prigent (1833–1938). French sailor.
- Charles Nathan (1834–1934). Last French soldier, also saw action in Italy, Syria, Mexico and the Franco-Prussian War.
- Edwin Hughes (1830–1927). Last survivor of the Charge of the Light Brigade.
- Colonel Rookes Evelyn Bell Crompton (1845–1940). Repeatedly claimed that he was a cadet on HMS *Dragon* during the siege of Sevastopol, earning two campaign medals before his twelfth birthday. There is no record of his having enrolled in the Navy; at the time of his visits to the Crimea (mid-May to mid-July 1856), nobody was entitled to the award of the British Crimea Medal.
- Luigi Palma di Cesnola (1832–1904). An Italian soldier who served with the British Army in the Crimean War as the aide-de-camp to General Enrico Fardella. Also served in the American Civil War, on the Union Side
- Timothy the Tortoise (1839–2004). The naval mascot of HMS *Queen*.



**Marcus Sparling seated on Fenton's photographic van, Crimea, 1855.  
Basildon Borough Heritage Society – December 2024**