

## CRIMEAN WAR – EXTRACT

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.

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 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.

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 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".

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

End.