

Forum: Historical Committee

Issue: Crimean War

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Introduction

The decades between the Congress of Vienna (1815) and 1840s, Europe were defined by diplomatic manoeuvring, alliances and transformation. Eastern Question, the growing concern among European powers regarding the fate of the Ottoman Empire, was the best instance for it. The Europeans were negotiating how big a piece they would get from the Sick Man of Europe.

Following the fall of Napoleon and the reorganization of Europe at Vienna, the Ottoman empire was excluded from decision-making. This absence was a crucial signal that the Ottomans are not accepted as "Great Power" anymore. Nationalist uprisings on the Balkans gave a great chance to the Russian Empire to reach the Mediterranean and became the protector of Orthodox Christians. This threat means the loss of the Balkans for the Ottoman Empire. Because of this, Ottoman diplomacy and reformist sultan Abdulmejid I started huge efforts for granting minority rights. Furthermore, Ottomans wanted to have good relations with Russians. If you do not fight with them, be friends with them. French colonization of Ottoman North Africa was a trigger for these actions.

Ottomans tried to save their nation against external and internal enemies. Internal enemies like Ali Pasha of Ioannina and Muhammad Ali of Egypt openly rose against central authority. The rebellion From Muhammad Ali exposed the military and political weaknesses of the Ottomans, which gave enough encouragement to Europeans powers to interfere in Ottoman internal affairs bravely.

This escalation reached a high point by the term of "Sick Man of Europe" from Nicholas I who was the Russian Tsar at the time. These terms showed Russian intentions to the Ottoman Balkans and an unofficial partition invitation to the



European Powers. Ottomans were no longer seen as an equal actor and needed to be finished.

Definition of Key Terms

All definitions were retrieved from the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Congress of Vienna (1814–1815)

The assembly that reorganized Europe after the Napoleonic Wars.

Treaties of Paris (1814-1814)

The two treaties that ended the Napoleonic Wars. Signed after the Congress of Vienna between the Allies and France, the treaties dealt with France's mainland borders, overseas territories, and war reparations.

Holy Alliance (1815)

An organization consisting of the monarchs of Russia, Austria, and Prussia, with the aim of promoting Christianity, conservatism, and loyalty to the throne.

Spanish Revolution of 1820

A liberal uprising in Spain that opposed King Ferdinand VII's absolutist monarchy, through which the 1812 constitution and liberal reforms were restored.

Italian Revolutions (1820–1821)

A series of rebellions calling for constitutional changes and national unity in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and Piedmont-Sardinia by the Carbonari.

Greek War of Independence (1821–1829)

The successful uprising of Greeks against Ottoman rule that led to the establishment of an independent Greek state.

Auspicious Incident (1826)

The bloody disbandment of the Janissary corps by Sultan Mahmud II, one of the significant military reforms of the Ottoman Empire.



Treaty of Adrianople (1829)

The treaty that concluded the Russo-Turkish War (1828–29) granted Russia territorial gains and increased its influence in the Balkans.

London Protocols (1830)

Agreements by Great Britain, France, and Russia that recognized Greece as an independent and sovereign state under their protection.

French Conquest of Algeria (1830)

The capture of Algiers and subsequent military campaigns which marked the beginning of French colonial rule in Algeria.

Ali Pasha of Ioannina

An Albanian brigand who was the governor of Janina/Ioannina from 1788. He expanded his rule through a series of murders, intrigue, and disobedience to the Sultan. He acted as if he were an independent ruler until he was assassinated.

Muhammad Ali of Egypt

Pasha and viceroy of Egypt (1805-1848) who ruled Egypt and advocated for the emergence of a modern and independent Egyptian state.

First Egyptian–Ottoman War (1831–1833)

A war between Egyptian and Ottoman forces in which Muhammad Ali Pasha's army took control of Syria.

Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi (1833)

A defensive pact between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, which effectively made the Ottomans a Russian protectorate.

Second Egyptian–Ottoman War (1839–1841)



A second conflict in which Muhammad Ali Pasha's army defeated the Ottomans, causing European intervention and ultimately the withdrawal of Egyptian troops from Syria, which they had previously captured.

Convention of London (1840)

An agreement by European powers compelling Muhammad Ali Pasha to give up control over Syrian territories, reaffirming Ottoman sovereignty.

Danubian Principalities

The semi-autonomous regions / Ottoman territories of Moldavia and Wallachia, which later became focal points in the Crimean War.

Protector of Orthodox Christians

Russia's role as the protector of Orthodox Christian subjects in the Ottoman Empire, claimed to justify their intervention in Ottoman affairs.

Sublime Porte

The name given to the government of the Ottoman Empire, due to its location close to the entrance to the grand vizier's buildings in Istanbul.

Revolutions of 1848

A series of liberal and nationalist revolutions across Europe, including France, Germany, Italy, and the Austrian Empire, which eventually failed to initiate enduring reforms.

Background Information

End of the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815)

On 30 May 1814, the First Treaty of Paris officially ended the War of the Sixth Coalition with the defeat of France. Napoleon Bonaparte, the Emperor of France, was exiled to the island of Elba as a result of the Treaty of Fontainebleau, signed the



month prior. The Treaty of Paris also reduced France's borders back to what they were in 1792, but the details of the final settlement were unclear. Nobody wanted to give one nation too much power, as that could result in another series of wars, similar to the Napoleonic Wars. So, to create a European balance of power, the representatives of the Great Powers of Europe, which excluded the Ottoman Empire, met at Vienna to settle the future boundaries of the continent. This congress, or the series of meetings, was called the Congress of Vienna. Due to a lack of representation for the Ottomans, the territorial integrity of the already decaying Empire was thrown into question.

Internal Struggles in the Ottoman Empire

Simultaneously, the Ottoman Empire was dealing with many problems regarding the authority of the central government: Control over North Africa was nonexistent, Muhammad Ali in Egypt was laying the foundation for independence, the Wahhabis in Arabia ignored Ottoman control, Europeans living under the Empire all sought their independence, etc. All the while, Alexander, the Tsar of Russia, became the monarch of Congress Poland, expanding his control in Europe. A Holy Alliance was created between Austria, Prussia, and Russia, increasing Russia's political role in Europe even more.

Socioeconomic Lag of Russia and the Ottoman Empire

In contrast, both the Russian Empire as well as the Ottoman Empire lagged behind the rest of Europe socioeconomically: Russia retained serfdom, which was outdated in a time when farmers were being transformed into factory workers with the newly-spread Industrial Revolution. Regardless, the Russian Empire was still on the hunt to play the role of a great power, concealing its internal problems. The Ottoman Empire was hardly better: Before the Tanzimat era, it was a theocracy. The Sultan ruled as the Caliph, the leader of all Muslims. State law was also roughly the same as Sharia, the Islamic law. Many people living in the Empire were slaves, similar to those in Russia. However, the slavery in the Ottoman Empire was different: In many cases, a large number of slaves were bought by the Sultan, who were then educated and trained based on a fitting role. Some worked as civil administrators



and even rose to influential and powerful positions. They received housing, food, and clothes, and were able to earn their freedom, which was buying themselves.

Serbian Revolt and the Creation of the Principality of Serbia (1813–1815)

The slight halt in conflict came to an end when the Serbs revolted after their re-annexation to the Ottoman Empire in 1813. Just two years later, on 23 April 1815. The Ottoman Empire, fearing a simultaneous conflict with Russia, decided to negotiate with the Serbs. The two-year conflict resulted in a semi-autonomous Principality of Serbia, governed by the leader of the Second Uprising, Miloš Obrenović, who was declared the Prince of Serbia. The newly formed Principality still paid a yearly tax to the Empire, and had a garrison of Ottoman troops in its capital, but it was still viewed as independent enough by other nationalities for them to revolt too.

The Ali Pasha Crisis and Central Authority Weakening

After the formation of the Principality, Halet Efendi, a minister of the Sublime Porte (a term commonly used to refer to the Ottoman Empire), reported the suspicious activity of Ali Pasha to the Sultan, which included seeking excessive authority, seizing nearby territories, misuse of power, assassination, and intrigue. Halet Efendi tied these accusations into a single goal of Ali Pasha: Establishing an independent rule over modern-day Albania, Greece, and parts of Northern Macedonia. The Sultan then ordered Ali Pasha's dismissal, but Ali Pasha refused to cooperate. He was then declared an enemy of the Sublime Porte and was ordered to present himself in Constantinople within forty days to defend himself from the accusations. After he failed to show up, the Sultan mobilized a large military force to capture him. Ali Pasha refused to surrender and fortified himself in Ioannina, and prepared for a prolonged resistance with the help of Albanian mercenaries and Greeks. These mercenaries helped the Ottoman army when their supplies ran low, so their loyalty was shifting constantly. After a change in commanders, the army forced Ali Pasha to flee Ioannina on 7 February 1821.

Liberal Revolutions in Europe



In the meantime, "the Great Powers", which had agreed in Vienna to suppress revolutionary movements, were occupied with the liberal revolutions in Spain, Italy, and Portugal. King Ferdinand VII of Spain had previously refused to sign the Spanish Constitution of 1812, which, at its core, was liberal. The successful revolutions in South America were enough of a reason for him to deny the nation a more just constitution, and instead assembled an army at the coastal city of Cádiz on an expedition to reclaim the Spanish colonies in the Americas, which were a huge source of revenue for the Spanish Empire. However, the soldiers, who were infuriated by the recent decisions of Ferdinand VII, seized their commander, and under the leadership of Rafael del Riego, relocated to a nearby city to better prepare for the capture of Madrid, the capital.

On 9 March 1820, Ferdinand reluctantly accepted the 1812 Constitution, which granted more power to liberal ministers and allowed for the existence of a liberal government in the early 19th century. This revolution influenced another liberal revolution in Porto, a city in Portugal, and spread like wildfire until it reached Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, but this revolution had its differences: It demanded for the royal court and the king, which were located in Brazil at that time, to return to continental Portugal. This revolution ended rather quickly, however, due to King John VI's swift return to Lisbon.

Another kingdom directly affected by the Spanish Revolution was the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. This young kingdom, established in 1816, lacked a written constitution, which was a deliberate act of the aforementioned Holy Alliance of Austria, Russia, and Prussia. Austria was granted the right to station troops in the kingdom in Vienna, which could have been under threat if a written constitution were to be granted to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Due to this, the kingdom lacked political activity, as the king didn't need to have any political competition, which forced liberals to organize themselves in secret societies. Influenced by the Spanish Revolution, rebels demanded a written constitution, which sparked civil unrest.



The Greek War of Independence

Taking advantage of these distractions, the Greeks decided to declare independence from the Empire in 1821. This event was triggered by the Filiki Eteria, a secret society, with the name translating to "Friendly Society". It was founded in 1814 by a group of young Greek merchants to revive the Byzantine Empire, with Constantinople as their capital city. They were supported and monetarily funded by wealthy Greek exile communities living in the United Kingdom or the United States, as well as other sympathizers. To spark Russian interest in their cause, the members of Filiki Eteria approached the joint foreign minister of Alexander I, Ioannis Kapodistrias, to be their leader, but he declined. They then gave the same offer to Alexander Ypsilantis, a general in the Russian army, who accepted it. On 6 March 1821, he and his followers crossed the river Prut and entered the Danubian Principalities, located in modern-day Romania. He called all Christians, especially Greeks, to revolt against the Ottomans. A weakened Ottoman Empire was confronted by a distraction in the southwest, which tempted the Russians to invade.

However, British and Austrian representatives advised the Russian Emperor to maintain the spirit of collaboration in Europe, so, rather than putting an end to Ottoman control in Europe, Alexander I decided not to enter the war. The Ottomans and Greeks fought each other until 1825, when Nicholas I took the throne after the death of Alexander. Nicholas refused to tolerate Greece's isolation and intervened. Britain, worried that Greece would succumb to total Russian control, gave its helping hand too. Enraged by the intervention, Mahmud II, the Ottoman Sultan, declared Russia an enemy of the religion, which elicited Nicholas to declare war on the Ottomans in April of 1828. The Ottoman army was already weakened by the Auspicious Incident, the disbandment of the Janissary corps, depriving the Empire of major manpower in the time of need. After a year-long series of battles and losing almost half of the active army along the way, the Sultan sued for peace. The Treaty of Adrianople was signed on 14 September 1829, which gave the Danube Delta and most of the eastern shore of the Black Sea to the Russians. The year prior, the Russians defeated the Persians, and these two events reassured their place as a



major European power. The Russians pressured the Sublime Porte to sign the Treaty of London, which declared that an independent Greece would be created with the Sultan being its supreme ruler. However, after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29 ended, the treaty was amended to create an internally autonomous, but tributary Greek state under Ottoman suzerainty with the London Protocol of 3 February 1828.

French Invasion of Algeria

Simultaneously, Hussein Dey, Algeria's Dey, disrespected the French consul Pierre Deval on many occasions, which climaxed when the Dey touched his face with his fly-whisk. This was enough of an excuse for Charles X to create a naval blockade against the port of Algiers. After a three-year blockade, the French decided to negotiate with the Dey, but he fired a cannon directly at a blockading ship. This was the last straw that broke the camel's back, and Charles decided to retaliate. On 16 May 1830, a French fleet consisting of more than one hundred warships carrying an almost 40,000-man army approached the coast, but it took until 14 June 1830 for the entire fleet to arrive. On that same day, the army was divided into three smaller divisions and landed in Algiers, where they fought the heavily underarmed guerrilla-style fighters. The capitulation took only two weeks, as the already-weakened Ottoman forces couldn't afford to cross the Mediterranean and leave the mainland undefended. The French looted the city's treasury, which had a total of 43 million Francs worth of gold and silver.

First Egyptian-Ottoman War (1831-1833)

Muhammad Ali of Egypt demanded to have Syria in exchange for assisting the Ottoman Empire in the Greek Civil War. The Sublime Porte refused, so he sent his son Ibrahim Pasha to invade Syria. He was successful in his conquest, and they advanced to Kütahya. The Sublime Porte had suffered an embarrassing defeat and was searching for a point of compromise with Muhammad Ali. Finally, the British and the French pressured him to agree to the Convention of Kütahya, through which Syria was given to his rule, and he was made the governor-general of the region.



The Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi (1833)

However, the Sultan didn't feel safe. He had succeeded in keeping the peace, but two of the world's greatest powers had been involved in the country's business. So he signed a mutual help and non-aggression agreement with Russia, at the Hünkâr Pier of Beykoz in İstanbul. The agreement contained a classified agreement, which stated that in the event of a war, the Dardanelles Strait — normally closed off due to war — would be open to Russian naval ships.

France and Britain protested the agreement as soon as they found out. They disliked it so much so that they believed the agreement was a direct threat to British interests, and that it should be revoked immediately. The main issue with the agreement was that the Ottoman Empire was now de facto under Russian rule, and that it provided Russia with great access to the Balkans, the Persian Gulf and maybe even India.

Second Egyptian-Ottoman War

The Sultan had taken Syria, Palestine, and Egypt back from Muhammad Ali in his mind. For him, the Convention of Kütahta was only temporary — an agreement that could come to an end at any moment. The British were aware of this, so they took it upon themselves to protect the Ottoman Empire, especially after the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi. The Ottomans also had the support of the French, after a trilateral trade agreement between the three governments.

In 1839, Muhammad Ali Pasha noticed that the Sublime Porte were in the process of military preparation and diplomatic initiatives. They felt especially threatened, seeing the support the Sublime Porte were receiving. They sent out a list of demands to İstanbul. Following the rejection of their demands, Muhammad Ali Pasha declared Egypt's independence, which in turn started the Second Egyptian-Ottoman War.



The war ended in 1840 with the Convention of London, signed with Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia on one hand, and the Ottoman Empire, along with Muhammad Ali Pasha, on the other. This granted Muhammad Ali Pasha hereditary governance of Egypt and the surrounding provinces, in the condition of him returning the Ottoman naval forces in the Ottoman Empire. This proved that the Ottoman Empire could only survive with foreign intervention.

Tanzimat Reforms

During this time, the Ottomans observed that the only way to protect the country's unity was Westernization. In November 1839, the Tanzimat Edict was announced in the Gülhane Park. Officially known as the *Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerifi* (Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber), it was drafted and announced by Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Pasha, who advocated for modernization in the Ottoman Empire and diplomacy with the West. The two main aims of the edict were to reform the military, civil, and legal systems in the Empire, as well as to prevent the negative effects of nationalist ideas that came into the country with the French Revolution. The edict promised equal legal rights to all those living in the Ottoman Empire, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, abolished tax farming, standardized conscription, and codified laws to ensure fair trials. These reforms were an attempt to address internal decay, but they highlighted how late Ottoman modernization was.

Beyond internal restructuring, the Tanzimat was also a foreign policy tool. It was designed to impress the European powers and portray the Empire as a "civilized" and reforming state that is worth preserving. Britain and France, concerned with maintaining the balance of power, were more likely to support a modernizing Ottoman Empire against Russian aggression. However, these reforms were not welcomed by all: conservative Muslim elites feared that the edict would erase Islamic tradition, while Christian and Jewish minorities were cautious about the promised legal equality, due to implementation being slow and inconsistent. Still, the Tanzimat laid the ideological and political groundwork that shaped Ottoman



diplomacy in the years leading up to the Crimean War, reinforcing the idea that the Empire was evolving and should be defended.

The Tanzimat reforms influenced European opinion toward the Ottoman Empire during the pre-Crimean War years. By being depicted as a reforming state, the Empire gained the sympathy of Britain and France, who would later justify their 1853 military intervention against Russia as a defense of a reforming ally, rather than a dying empire. And so the Tanzimat helped to shift the Eastern Question from one of certain collapse to one of strategic preservation.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
1815	Congress of Vienna: Reorganized Europe after the Napoleonic Wars; the Ottoman Empire was excluded, which weakened its diplomatic position.
1820	Spanish Revolution: Liberal uprising restored the 1812 constitution, which inspired other revolutions in Italy and Portugal.
1821-1829	Greek War of Independence: Greek uprising against Ottoman rule, supported by Russia, Britain, and France. Led to the establishment of an independent Greek state.
1826	Vaka-i Hayriye: Sultan Mahmud II



	disbanded the Janissary corps and started military modernization efforts.
1828-1829	Russo-Turkish War & Treaty of Adrianople: Russia defeated the Ottomans, gained Danube Delta and Black Sea territory. Increased its influence on the Balkans.
1830	London Protocols & French Conquest of Algeria: Greece recognized as independent; France begins colonizing Ottoman North Africa with the capture of Algiers.
1833	Treaty of H�nkar �skelesi: Secret defense pact between Ottomans and Russia. Dardanelles closed to foreign warships except Russian in wartime.
1839	Tanzimat Edict: Ottoman reforms announced to modernize the state.
1841	Straits Conventions: Nullifies Treaty of H�nk�r �skelesi. The Dardanelles were closed to all warships in peacetime, restoring European control over the straits issue.
1844	"Sick Man of Europe" Remark by Nicholas I: Russian Tsar Nicholas I labels the Ottoman Empire as the "Sick Man of



	Europe" and proposes informal partition plans to Britain.
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Key Policies and Issues

Ottoman Empire	Russian Empire
1. The territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire was threatened by Russian incursions into its territories, particularly in the Crimea and the Balkans. The Ottomans sought to establish alliances with Sardinia, Britain, and France to stop further losses to their empire	1. To gain strategic access to the warm water ports, Russia sought to expand its authority over the Crimea and the Black Sea. The defense of Orthodox Christians served as a cover for Tsar Nicholas I's territorial aspirations.
2. The Ottoman military struggled to repel the Russian assaults because it was antiquated. Ottoman leaders made an effort to enact reforms, but they mostly depended on their European friends for military assistance.	2. By employing strong diplomatic and military pressure to impose its expansionist objectives, Russia could threaten the Ottoman Empire thanks to its military development.
3. Tensions rose when Russia asserted that it was defending Orthodox Christians in Ottoman lands. For fear of internal strife and losing their independence, the Ottomans rejected these proposals.	3. In order to acquire domestic support and subvert Ottoman authority, Russia pretended to be the protector of Orthodox Christians in order to excuse its meddling in Ottoman affairs.



<p>4. The Ottomans were required to control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles in order to preserve their military and commercial routes. In order to avoid Russian activity on their land, they placed a strong emphasis on maintaining the status quo on a diplomatic level.</p>	<p>4. In order to prevent Russian naval progress, Britain and France rejected Russia's attempt to take control over the straits and get access to the Mediterranean, which heightened tensions on a global scale.</p>
<p>5. The Ottoman Empire was susceptible to foreign influence and reliant on European loans due to its economic inferiority. Ottoman authorities attempted, but were not very successful, to maintain their political independence by taking advantage of disputes in Europe.</p>	<p>5. Concerned about Russia's geopolitical aspirations, Britain and France created an alliance against Russia because they believed that Russian expansion threatened the balance of power in the world</p>
<p>6. Ottoman authority over its heterogeneous populace was in jeopardy due to the emergence of nationalist movements in the Ottoman provinces, which were subtly aided by Russian assistance. In response to outside pressure, Ottoman strategy concentrated on quelling uprisings.</p>	<p>6. As part of its larger policy, Russia supported Slavic and Orthodox factions in Ottoman lands, taking advantage of the nationalist upheaval to undermine the empire and defend its intervention.</p>



7. Corruption and internal unrest hindered the Ottoman government's capacity to effectively counter external threats. The goal of diplomacy was to secure assurances from Western nations.	7. By defending the military action as a defense of Russian honor and Orthodoxy, Russia's dictatorial administration exploited the conflict to garner domestic support from nationalists.
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Further Reading

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