

Causes & Prevention of War

THE CRIMEAN WAR, 1853-1856

- I. BACKGROUND TO WAR: MISPERCEPTIONS IN RUSSIA, BRITAIN & FRANCE
 - A. "The Russians Are Coming!" The British and French hold ill-founded fears of Russia.
 - 1. The Illusion of Russian Power: "Russia is the strongest state in Europe!"
 - 2. The Illusion of Russian Expansionism: "Russia plans to carve up Turkey!"
 - B. "The French are coming!" Russia has ill-founded fears of a "revolutionary" France, and false faith that Britain and Austria share these fears.
 - C. "The Turks Are Collapsing." Russia falsely expects Turkey's imminent demise.
 - D. Strategic background: Turkey's role as Russia's southern strategic buffer.
- II. PROXIMATE CAUSES OF WAR: 13 EVENTS
 - A. "The Quarrel of the Monks," 1690-1852: Catholics and Orthodox Christians struggle for control of Palestine's Holy Places. France favors Catholics, Russia backs Orthodox.
 - B. Napoleon III plays demagogue: France intimidates Turkey into favoring the Catholics in the Holy Places dispute, 1850-52. Turkey concedes to France over Russian opposition.
 - C. Russia counter-intimidates, Feb. 1853--Menshikov demands that Turkey grant Russia wide rights to protect Orthodox believers in Turkey. (He demands more than the restoration of the Holy Places status quo.) His demands arise from these facts and concerns:
 - 1. Turkey controls naval access to Russian Black Sea region, hence is a key buffer.
 - 2. Russia infers from French action that France has wide imperial designs on Turkey.
 - 3. Russia fears "revolutionary" France; and also falsely assumes that the rest of Europe also sees "revolutionary" France as the main danger to the European order.
 - 4. Russia thinks Turkey generally bandwagons when threatened.
 - 5. Russia exaggerates its rights under the 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji, hence it falsely believes Menshikov's demands are legitimate under existing treaty rights.
 - D. Britain & Russia bungle their negotiations of Feb. 1853, and Britain misperceives the Russian-Austrian talks of Sept. 1853; hence Britain falsely infers that Russia seeks a wider empire in Turkey; and Russia is oblivious of this British misperception.
 - E. Britain and France send fleets to Besika Bay, June 1853, to scare Russia into withdrawing Menshikov demands (a result they confidently expect).
 - F. Russia doesn't fold--isn't even scared--and instead invades Moldavia & Wallachia (now Rumania), July 1853, in false belief that the Besika Bay deployment reflects British bureaucratic politics, not a firm British attitude; and because Russian diplomats won't tell the Czar that his moves are provoking Europe.
 - G. The Anglo-French "blank check" to Turkey. An offensive Franco-British-Turkish alliance develops, fall 1853. Symbolizing this blank check, the Anglo-French fleet is sent forward from Besika Bay to Constantinople, Sept./Oct. 1853 (in violation of existing treaties); it arrives in Constantinople Oct. 22, 1853. Why the deployment? Partly because the Turkish Sultan (dishonestly) tells GB & Fr: "my government might fall unless you back me with a show of force!"
 - H. The Turks, blank check in hand, attack both Moldavia & Wallachia and the Caucasus, Oct. 23, 1853.
 - I. The "Sinope massacre," Nov. 1853 ---> anti-Russian uproar in GB, France; they commit more deeply to Turkey (why?); they declare war on Russia, March 1854.
 - J. Russia withdraws from Moldavia & Wallachia, August 1854, under Austrian pressure. This satisfies the British & French war aims, but:

- K. Britain and France nevertheless open a ground war against Russia in the Crimea, Sept. 1854 (!!)
- L. The rise of the hawks (Palmerston) in Britain; the growth of hawkish public opinion; and the growth of British war aims--"We must destroy Russian power in the Black Sea region" ("and we'll win in a jiffy!")
- M. The harsh peace: Russian power in the Crimea is destroyed. But not for long...

III. PERSISTING MYSTERIES ABOUT THESE EVENTS

- A. Why didn't Russia assure Britain and France that only limited aims underlay the Menshikov demands?
- B. Why did France and Britain decide to:
 - 1. Resort to war to free Moldavia and Wallachia from Russian control? Why was their defense so important?
 - 2. Back later Turkish aggression against Russia in the Caucasus?
 - 3. Launch the ground war against Russia in 1854, even after Russia withdrew from Moldavia/Wallachia?
- C. Why did the Sinope massacre, which apparently helped move Britain and France to launch the ground war, cause such outrage in Britain?

IV. CAUSES OF THE WAR

- A. Ten (10) Misperceptions & Diplomatic Blunders:
 - 1. French leaders were unaware that by humiliating Turkey over the Holy Places issue they would injure an interest that Russia held dear--i.e., Turkey's attitude of fearing Russia more than other states.
 - 2. France failed to tell Russia: "our objectives in Turkey are limited"; hence Russia feared that France had wide ambitions.
 - 3. Russia failed to tell Britain, France, and Turkey: "our objectives in Turkey are limited"; hence Britain and France feared that Russia had wide ambitions.
 - 4. Britain and Russia differed on the odds that the Ottoman empire would soon collapse, but didn't realize that they differed, hence they talked past each other; hence British wrongly inferred that Russia sought Turkey's partition.
 - 5. The Russian Czar exaggerated Russian rights under the Treaty of Kutchuk Kainardji.
 - 6. Britain and France expected their Besika Bay deployment would induce Russia to back down; instead Russia got tougher, occupying Moldavia & Wallachia.
 - 7. Russian leaders wrongly assumed the Franco-British Besika Bay deployment arose from British bureaucratic politics, and did not reflect real British opposition to Russian demands on Turkey.
 - 8. Russia occupied Moldavia and Wallachia without realizing that Austria would threaten to counter-intervene.
 - 9. Russia failed to realize that the Menshikov demands and the occupation of Moldavia and Wallachia appeared aggressive to others, because Russian leaders focused on false analogies--similar moves in the past by Russia (in M&W) and Austria (in Montenegro) that had evoked no alarmed reaction.
 - 10. Britain and France failed to bound their commitment to Turkey, instead giving Turkey a blank check to attack Russia.
- B. Spiral Dynamics?
 - 1. Spiral ingredients:
 - a. Russia:
 - i. misperceives the status quo, by exaggerating Russian rights under 1774 Kutchuk Kainardji Treaty.
 - ii. underestimates British & French interests, hence inadvertently damages them. Specifically, Russia was unaware of British & French security-related fears of Russian power & intentions, hence Russia was slow to see the need to assuage their fears by curbing its demands on Turkey.
 - b. France: underestimates Russia's interests, hence inadvertently damages them. Specifically, France was unaware of the injury

Russia thought it would suffer if it allowed France to intimidate Turkey successfully.

- c. Britain: exaggerates Russian aggressiveness, because Britain misconstrues Feb. 1853 Anglo-Russian discussions & later Austro-Russian talks; and Russia is unaware of this British misperception.
 - d. GB, France, Russia all exaggerate the shared character of information, & underestimate the others' misperceptions: hence they do too little to explain their actions & intentions; hence misperceptions persist that otherwise might be detected & cured.
2. Later stages of the Spiral:
- a. As a result of #1a and #1b, France and Russia injure each others' interests without knowing they did so.
 - b. France therefore overestimates Russian hostility, since it misconstrues the Russian hostility that it provokes to be unprovoked.
 - c. Russia, at first unaware of the hostility its behavior has provoked, underestimates British and French hostility (re: ignoring the warning conveyed by the Besika Bay deployment); hence it fails to heed their warnings, and continues to do them injury, unaware that they mean business.
 - d. As a result Britain and France exaggerate Russian hostility, leading them to adopt more aggressive aims themselves.
 - e. Russia, finally aware of Franco-British hostility, is now unaware that it provoked this hostility, and hence overestimates it.

Note: the 7 Years War spiral arose largely from misperceptions about others' actions. The Crimean spiral arose largely from misperceptions of others' ideas, intentions, and interests.

- C. Unsettled Disputes (but did Russia try to settle something too early?)
- D. Preventive War (by Turkey).
- E. False Optimism: Britain and France expect easy victory at Sebastopol.
- F. Offense/defense & Security Aspects.
 - 1. Security is a goal of all major parties: Britain, France, Russia, & Turkey.
 - 2. Offensive opportunity tempts Turkey.
- G. Crisis Mismanagement:
 - 1. The Sinope Massacre--a loss of command control by the Czar.
 - 2. The Besika Bay deployment--a move whose self-entrapping effects were not foreseen, hence an instance of crisis mismanagement.
- H. War ---> War. See British war aims grow like topsy!

V. OUTCOME

- A. Russia, seeking to secure Black Sea region, loses control of Black sea until 1871.
- B. Britain and France prevent a Russian expansion into Turkey that Russia never planned anyway.
- C. Russian power, which Britain fought to destroy, is restored in only 14 years.