The Crimean War and Russia's Relations with European Powers

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Abstract
The article interprets the Crimean War as a momentary breakdown in Russia's otherwise routine participation in the 19th-century Concert of Europe. To reveal the breakdown's causes, the Eastern Question is first examined from the perspective of the long-term evolution of international relations in Europe. This examination supports a more detailed analysis of the circumstances and decisions of the 1830s and 1840s that contributed to Russia's subsequent diplomatic isolation. Specifically, it is argued that Nicholas I missed an opportunity for rapprochement with France that could have helped Russia prevent the creation of a hostile European coalition in 1853–1854. Finally, the article discusses the short-term and the long-term consequences of the Crimean War for European politics in general, and for Russia's relations with various European countries in particular.

Keywords: Crimean War; Eastern Question; Concert of Europe; Franco-Russian relations; Nicholas I; public opinion.

The Crimean War occupies a very special place in the historical memory of Russian society, as well as in public discussions of international relations and foreign policy. This war was far from Russia's first—and certainly not its last—defeat, yet it was in some ways the most painful of all. This defeat was the outcome of a clash with a West European coalition, against which Russia found itself completely without allies. Contemporary Russian observers perceived the Crimean War as they did Napoleon's 1812 campaign, i.e., as Russia's conflict with a 'united' Europe, with the important difference that, this time, Russia lost.[1] Thus, the defeat in Crimea became an important topic for successive generations of both Slavophiles and Westernizers. For the former, the Crimean War confirmed the West's inexorable hostility towards Russia, as well as the cynicism and duplicity of European politicians. For the latter, it served as an illustration of the consequences of Russian backwardness and inertia—those supposedly constant companions of Russian authoritarianism—and the inevitable outcome of any attempts by Russia to bypass the main track of European historical development and find its own "special path."

In light of such polar and equally flawed interpretations of the Crimean War, it is important to emphasize the uniqueness of the situation of 1853–1856. Neither before nor after did Tsarist Russia have to confront a coalition of some great powers without the support of other great powers. The Crimean War thus represents an exceptional moment of crisis in the nearly bicentennial history of Russia's involvement in the European great-power balance, in that all other Russian successes and defeats in Europe, whether military or diplomatic, took place within the framework of coalitions or alliances.[2]

[1] Admittedly, there was some discrepancy between the Russian perception of European 'unity' and its actual reality. Among the smaller powers, only Piedmont-Sardinia joined the anti-Russian coalition. Among the great powers, both Prussia and Austria maintained neutrality throughout the war, although in the Austrian case this neutrality was hardly benevolent towards Russia. Vienna first forced Nicholas I to evacuate the Danubian Principalities in the summer of 1854, and pressured his son and successor Alexander II to accept peace negotiations in Paris, thereby admitting defeat.

[2] This also applies to Russia's decisive confrontation with Napoleon in 1812, when British diplomacy facilitated a quick conclusion of the Russian-Ottoman War of 1806–1812. The Bucharest peace treaty was signed by the Ottoman representatives less than a month before Napoleon's invasion of Russia, which allowed the Russian army on the Danube to hurry north. Meanwhile, Anglo-Portuguese forces under the command of the Duke of Wellington tied down some 135,000 French troops in Spain.

This article reinterprets the Crimean debacle as the product of mistakes by Nicholas I during the 1830s and early 1840s, i.e., at the height of Russia's integration into the Concert of Europe. After the tsar's early victory over the Ottoman Empire in 1829, and his decisive intervention into the conflict between Mahmud II and the rebellious Egyptian vassal Muhammed Ali, Nicholas I wrongly concluded that France rather than Britain was Russia's main adversary in the East. As a result, Nicholas I ignored French interest in a rapprochement with Russia over the Eastern Question, which was expressed by notable French politicians and segments of French public opinion over the first half of the 19th century. This missed historical opportunity had important consequences for both Russia and Europe. It helps explain the tsar's diplomatic isolation and the formation of the anti-Russian coalition in 1853–1854. The subsequent clash in Crimea triggered important structural transformations in European politics, and generated new great-power tensions that would ultimately lead to the outbreak of WWI.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN EUROPE AND THE EASTERN QUESTION

To understand the reasons for the Crimean breakdown in the functioning of the European balance of power and in Russia's participation in the Concert of Europe, it is necessary to examine the Eastern Question from the perspective of the long-term evolution of international relations in Europe. At first glance, the history of international relations appears to be a history of great events *(histoire évènementielle)* that are merely the foam on the waves of economic cycles *(conjonctures)*, beneath which lies a seabed of long-term structures and processes *(longue durée)* (Braudel, 1958). However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that international relations themselves also contain long-term structures that change little over the centuries. These include both the centennial conflicts between European countries, and the alliances that these conflicts generated (Thompson, 1999).

To the first category belongs the long Anglo-French rivalry, the origins of which can be traced to the dowry of Duchess Eleanor of Aquitaine, the spouse of Louis VII of France and Henry II of England

(Devries, 2016; Black, 1999). This dowry formed the core of the Angevin Empire (1154–1224) and was the object of the centuries-long struggle between the English Plantagenets and the French Capetians (and the Valois, who succeeded them) (Aurell, 2003). The famous Hundred Years' War of 1337–1453 was the culmination of the first stage of the Anglo-French rivalry. After a hiatus of two and a half centuries, marked by occasional conflicts, there followed the "Second Hundred Years' War," or a series of almost continuous Anglo-French clashes extending from 1689 to 1815 (Scott, 1992).

Another long-standing element in the structure of European international relations was the conflict between the Valois (and later the Bourbons) and the Habsburgs, which can be seen as an echo of the struggle for the crown of Charlemagne (Simms, 2014, p. 4-5; Rule, 1999). Beginning in the late 15th century and reaching its early climax in the clash between Charles V and Francis I, this struggle continued between their heirs and successors and did not end even with the imperial coronation of Napoleon in 1804 and the subsequent abolition of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in 1806 (Rodriguez-Salgado, 1990; Anderson, 1998; Schroeder, 1999). Rather, Napoleon's victories over Austria and Prussia in 1805–1806 transformed the dynastic dispute into a conflict between the French and German nations, which would remain one of the defining factors of European international relations until World War II, and even, in some more subtle sense, to this day (Hensen, 1999; Wawro, 2016).

The long-term alliances born of these centuries-long conflicts proved to be another important element in the long-term structure of European international relations. This applies primarily to the so-called 'Eastern Barrier,' which the Valois began to build in response to their strategic encirclement by the Habsburgs (Kudelin and Popova, 2022). Francis I's cooperation with Suleiman the Magnificent became the first step in creating long-term counterweights to the hegemonic aspirations of Charles V and his successors (Heath, 1989). Subsequently, Sweden and Poland would become elements of the Eastern Barrier alongside the Ottoman Empire (Norrhem, 2019). As a result, the Austrian Habsburgs had to reckon with the possibility of a two-front war. The

French system of alliances with peripheral and/or regional powers of Northern, Central, and Southeastern Europe, in turn, contributed to a rapprochement between France's adversaries and eventually contributed to the long-term Anglo-Austrian cooperation. From the War of the Grand Alliance (1689–1697) onward, and for nearly two centuries, the Anglo-Austrian partnership became a near-constant in European politics, replacing the preceding two-hundred-year alliance of the Austrian Habsburgs with their Spanish cousins. Both partnerships joined the continental (Austrian Habsburg) empire to an Atlantic maritime power (first Spain, then England).

Despite the nearly permanent war of the early modern period, the fundamental contours of European international relations thus remained quite stable and recognizable until the French Revolution and the Long Nineteenth Century that it ushered in. The European system's stable elements, which existed for three centuries or even longer, can be described as 'long-term structures' that constitute the essence of Braudel's *longue durée*. The subsequent Long Nineteenth Century, despite its name, represents a much briefer moment of these structures' breakdown or radical transformation (Osterhammel, 2014). In a strictly diplomatic and international political sense, this moment of breakdown and transformation is called the Eastern Question (Frary and Kozelsky 2014; Case, 2018; Schumacher, 2023).

The Eastern Question was a consequence of the ostensible weakening of the Ottoman Empire, a key element of the Eastern Barrier, which until the end of the 17th century served France to contain the Austrian Habsburgs and then their important ally, the Russian Empire (Nelipovich, 2010). The weakening of the Ottomans manifested itself during the Ottoman-Habsburg and then Russo-Turkish wars, which provides grounds for considering these wars as a kind of continuum, especially since several overlap chronologically (in 1684–1699, 1737–1739, and 1788–1790) (Whatcroft, 2016; Guskov, et al., 2022; Davies, 2011). In its actions against the Ottomans, Russia not only relied on an alliance with Vienna, but also received some logistical support from London during the crucial war of 1768–1774 (MacDougall, 2022, pp. 102-113; Davies, 2016, pp. 152-154). When the Russian fleet launched its anti-Ottoman

expeditions to the Greek Archipelago, their initial success, from the British point of view, served to weaken the Sultan's French ally—Britain's main trading competitor in the Levant (Tarle, 1959; Rodzinskaia, 1967).

The first moment of breakdown in the long-standing international political structures, and thus the first stage of the Eastern Question, occurred at the very end of the 18th century, when further weakening of the Ottomans forced both London and Paris to temporarily reconsider their respective policies towards the Tsar and the Sultan. Russian victories over the Ottomans in the late 1780s sparked the so-called "Ochakov Debates" in England, which demonstrated how little remained of London's self-serving support for Russian actions against the Turks in the Archipelago some two decades previously. On the contrary, a significant portion of the British political elite, led by William Pitt the Younger, began to view Russia as an increasingly important threat to British trade interests in the East (Cunningham, 1964). Although the initial wave of anti-Russian sentiment did not culminate in direct conflict (partly due to the skillful actions of the Russian ambassador to London, Semyon Vorontsov), this episode foreshadowed the anti-Russian thrust of British foreign policy for much of the 19th century (Worontsoff-Dashkoff, 2014).

At the same time, the sharp decline of France's commercial position in the Levant following the outbreak of the French Revolution (1789) and the Revolutionary Wars (1792/93) produced a fundamental revision of the century-old French policy of alliance with the Sultan, a revision that took the form of Napoleon's Egyptian expedition (1798). And although both these sharp reversals in the Anglo-Russian and Franco-Ottoman relations proved temporary, they made possible several other, albeit equally temporary, changes in the system of rivalries and alliances that had existed since the early modern period. Thus, in 1798–1800, St. Petersburg and Constantinople for the first time put aside their mutual hostility and concluded an alliance against Revolutionary and early Napoleonic France. This was followed in 1800–1801 by the first attempt to create a Russo-French alliance (Feldbæk, 1982).

Over the next decade and a half, Russo-Ottoman, Franco-Russian, and Anglo-Russian relations went from war to truce, peace, or even alliance, and then back to war. Although the acute phase of this

turbulence ended with the final downfall of Napoleon in 1815, a full restoration of the former international political constants did not occur. The continued weakness of the Ottoman Empire, demonstrated by the Greek War of Independence (1821–1830), was a significant factor in the Anglo-Russian and Russian-Austrian tensions that were building up beneath the outward harmony of the Concert of Europe that was established by the Congress of Vienna in 1814–1815. These tensions would eventually make 19th century Anglo-Russian relations akin to the Cold War, and ultimately undermine the long-standing Russian-Austrian alliance (Emerson, 2024).

At the same time, the post-1815 period brought uncertainty in the place of early-modern international political constants such as the Anglo-French struggle and Franco-Ottoman alliance. On the one hand, France's apparent defeat in the Second Hundred Years' War would fuel revanchist sentiments. On the other hand, the political evolution of post-Napoleonic France towards a constitutional monarchy would serve as an argument for a rapprochement with its age-old rival. The same contradictions and uncertainty would also characterize France's post-1815 Eastern policy, where one sees neither the restoration of the traditional alliance with the Sultan, nor the continuation of the 18th century efforts to contain Russia. The memory of Napoleon's catastrophic 1812 defeat and the incompatibility of Russian autocracy with the French Revolution's ideological legacy certainly fueled revanchist and anti-Russian sentiments, yet the impossibility of restoring the Eastern Barrier and reestablishing France's former commercial position in the Levant necessitated a search for alternative solutions, including a rapprochement with Russia for a possible partition of the Ottoman Empire.

Taken together, these developments illustrated the long-term transformation of early modern international political structures, a transformation that began in the late 18th century and continued through the post-Napoleonic period. Despite the apparent stabilization of international relations after 1815, and the absence of wars between European powers over the next four decades, the Eastern Question became a marker of the uncertainty that persisted in the relations

between the great powers and the Ottoman Empire, opening the door to a wide range of scenarios. Moreover, the greatest uncertainty during this period characterized France's foreign policy and its relations with Great Britain, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, to better understand how this uncertainty gave rise to the Crimean War, rather than something radically different, it is necessary to focus further analysis on the French foreign policy debate. Specifically, on the debate between advocates of an alliance with Britain and advocates of rapprochement with Russia in order to realize French goals in the East.

FRANCO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AND THE EASTERN QUESTION

Despite the Russian elite's early Gallomania and Catherine II's well-publicized relations with leading figures of the French Enlightenment, Russia and France remained almost invariably rivals during the century preceding the sudden and short-lived alliance of Paul I and Napoleon. Although the two powers found themselves in the same camp during the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), their relations remained tense due to France's aforementioned Eastern Barrier, which involved alliance with Sweden, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire. Initially conceived as a counterweight to the Habsburgs in Central Europe, the Eastern Barrier eventually became a tool for Paris to contain the ambitions of Peter the Great's successors. The latter responded to this containment by collaborating with Vienna and London—France's traditional adversaries.

The situation changed in the late 18th century, when Britain's influence over the Ottoman Empire began to eclipse France's, while Great Britain itself became increasingly worried by Russian successes in the East. The failure of Napoleon's Egyptian expedition, and Paul I's disappointment with his Austrian and British partners in the Second Coalition, created the preconditions for a Franco-Russian rapprochement on the Eastern Question based on anti-British sentiment (Schimmelpenninck, 2014). However, as is well known, an aristocratic conspiracy against Paul I, formed with the support of the British ambassador to St. Petersburg, Charles Whitworth, put an end to this first attempt at a Russo-French alliance (Kenney, 1977). A decade later, the same fate befell the alliance between Napoleon and

Alexander I, after the commercial interests of the Russian nobility forced the Tsar to end his participation in the Continental Blockade (Lieven, 2010, pp. 102-137). Another chance to create a Franco-Russian condominium in continental Europe was lost in early 1813, following the defeat of the *Grande Armée*. Then, Alexander I, contrary to Mikhail Kutuzov's opinion, decided to continue the war until Napoleon's complete defeat, rather than preserve Napoleon's regime as a long-term counterweight to Great Britain and Austria (Lieven, 2010, pp. 288-289).

The Franco-Russian alliance materialized only 80 years later, under completely different conditions created by the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 and the unification of Germany around Prussia, as well as by the transformation of Austria-Hungary into a de facto German satellite after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Congress of Berlin (Kennan, 1984). Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to ignore the moments of Franco-Russian rapprochement that occurred throughout the 19th century, and particularly in the post-Napoleonic decades (1815–1848). Despite the mutual animosity between Alexander I and Louis XVIII, relations between Russia and France were quite good in the early years of the Restoration, largely due to the former Governor-General of Novorossiya, Duke Armand Emmanuel de Richelieu, who became French Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in September 1815. On the Russian side, the de facto Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Ioannis Kapodistrias was the main advocate of cooperation with France (Grimstead, 1969, pp. 226-258).

Russia played a key role in France's remarkably rapid return to the Concert of Europe as a full member. To this end, St. Petersburg persuaded other European powers to reduce the military occupation of French territory and the indemnity imposed on France after Waterloo. Alexander I and Kapodistrias sought France's rapid return to the club of great powers in order to create an alternative to Metternich's legitimism, which in practice meant the restoration of Austrian hegemony in Italy and Germany (Reinerman, 1973). To this end, the Tsar and his Greek minister supported experiments in the spirit of "monarchical constitutionalism" (Prutsch, 2014) in various countries as a way to achieve political compromise between rulers and elites and prevent

further revolutionary crises. This pan-European strategy of the Tsar, an alternative to narrow legitimism, explains Russia's support for the French Constitutional Charter of 1814 and the constitutions of small German states (Bavaria, Baden). It also involved broad autonomy for regional and local elites on the western outskirts of the Russian Empire itself (Finland, Poland, Bessarabia) (Wirtschafter, 2015).

A rapprochement with France also had an impact on Eastern affairs. In particular, it helped contain early Orthodox-Catholic tensions over the Holy Places, tensions that would lead to France's participation some 35 years later in the anti-Russian coalition during the Crimean War (Hopwood, 1969). When reports of these tensions reached Alexander I at the First Congress of the Holy Alliance in Aachen in November 1818, Kapodistrias instructed the Russian envoy to Constantinople, Baron Grigory Stroganov, to communicate to the Greek Orthodox clergy the Tsar's displeasure at their excessive claims. Stroganov was to use all means of persuasion at his disposal "to put an end to any errors into which the spirit of factions might lead the Greeks." The Russian envoy was to work closely with his French counterpart, Rivière, who was expected to exert a similarly pacifying influence on the Catholic clergy. Stroganov and Rivière were to "agree on a method for the coexistence of the two different faiths" (Narochnitskii, 1976, pp. 601-602). At the same time, the Russian ambassador to Paris, Catholic Pozzo di Borgo, conveyed to Richelieu the Tsar's desire "to prevent any incident that might disturb the long-standing brotherhood of the two faiths" (Taki, 2015, pp. 15-18).

The revolutionary wave of 1820–1821, which culminated in the Greek War of Independence, forced Alexander I to abandon his policy of monarchical constitutionalism and ultimately dismiss Kapodistrias, which, in turn, halted the Russo-French rapprochement. To preserve the Holy Alliance, the Tsar refused to declare war on the Sultan in support of the Greek rebels and, after officially breaking relations with the Porte in July 1821, preferred to work together with Austria and Great Britain on the "pacification of Greece." However, the initial post-Napoleonic efforts to improve relations with France ultimately proved fruitful: in the final year of his life, Alexander I became convinced of the futility and ineffectiveness of Austro-British mediation on the

Greek issue, and his younger brother and successor, Nicholas I, heeded the advice of Stroganov, the former ambassador to Constantinople, to pursue a "strictly national and religious policy" in Eastern affairs (Bitis, 2006, pp. 167-176).

By that time, Richelieu had already died, but so had Louis XVIII. His younger brother and successor, Charles X, was much more open to the idea of active French intervention in the Sultan's conflict with his Greek subjects. During this period, Paris was interested in a formal or informal agreement with St. Petersburg that would grant Russia free rein in the Danubian Principalities and on the lower Danube, while France would be able to occupy the Morea and seize some of the Sultan's African possessions (Puryear, 1941, pp. 76-79). Although Nicholas I and Russian Vice-Chancellor Karl Nesselrode did not share Charles X's interest in dividing the Ottoman Empire, the French government's position undoubtedly helped Russia declare war on Turkey in April 1828, without fear of the sort of hostile coalition that Great Britain would assemble a quarter of a century later. Ultimately, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828–1829 played a key role in restoring Russian protectorates over Moldavia and Wallachia, and also contributed, albeit indirectly, to the Porte's recognition of Greek independence (Bitis, 2006, pp. 274-324; Taki, 2024, pp. 42-67).

Soon, however, the Revolution of 1830 and the overthrow of Charles X again interrupted Russo-French cooperation on the Eastern Question. The final fall of the Bourbons and the establishment of the July Monarchy, which imitated English parliamentarism, was followed by the November Uprising in Poland, the suppression of which triggered a powerful wave of Russophobia in both Great Britain and France (Gleason, 1950; Corbet, 1967, pp. 160-169; Adamovsky, 2006; Tanshina, 2017). The long-term consequence of these events was the ideological division of Europe, pitting the liberal 'Europe as the Two' (the English parliamentary and French constitutional monarchies) against the conservative 'Europe as the Three' (the absolute monarchies of Prussia and Austria, and autocratic Russia). According to Martin Malia, this ideological confrontation was in many ways decisive for European politics of the 1830s and 1840s (Malia, 1999, pp. 89-102).

Nicholas I's hostility towards the July Monarchy and his dislike of Louis Philippe are well known (Gonneau, 2018; Vyskochkov, 2003, pp. 361-366). This hostility became fully evident during the Ottoman-Egyptian War of 1832–1833, when the Tsar dispatched the Black Sea Fleet and 10,000 soldiers to the shores of the Bosphorus to support Sultan Mahmud II, whose capital was threatened by the army of his rebellious Egyptian vassal, Muhammad Ali (Karsh and Karsh, 1999). The latter, on the contrary, enjoyed the sympathy and support of France, being something of a successor to Napoleon's Egyptian project. The crisis of 1832–1833 and Russia's intervention led to the Treaty of Unkiayar Iskellesi, which for the next eight years guaranteed the Tsar's assistance to the Sultan in the event of renewed conflict with Muhammad Ali, and also mandated the Sultan's closure of the Straits in the event of war between Russia and a third power (Noradoughian, 1897, pp. 229-231). Following the events of 1832–1833, Russia's position in Constantinople reached its apogee, while the Tsar emerged from the crisis convinced that France, not Great Britain, was Russia's main adversary in the East (Puryear, 1941, p. 85).

However, even a cursory glance at the political and intellectual life of France in the 1830s and early 1840s reveals the fallacy of this assumption. Alongside the supporters of a British alliance, the most significant of whom was Talleyrand, there were also many advocates of a rapprochement with Russia (Keir, 2017). One finds among them some French royalists, such as Richelieu's former colleague in Novorossiya, Vicomte de Saint-Priest, who returned to France in 1821 and became a member of the Chamber of Peers. But it would be a mistake to look for French 'Russophiles' of the post-Napoleonic period only among the most conservative segments of the French elite. Along with legitimists like Dominique Dufour de Pradt and Louis de Carné, supporters of a rapprochement with Russia also included the former Napoleonic Marshal Auguste Marmont, as well as some leftist publicists, notably Émile Barraultand Louis Blanc (Corbet, 1967, pp. 175-192).

It is thus incorrect to see the Russophobia of many representatives of French and Western European society in the mid-19th century as a natural consequence of liberal or socialist ideas. Not all Western

European liberals and progressives were automatically hostile to Russia, just as not all of them became sympathetic to the Ottoman Empire after the sultans embarked on a path of Westernizing reforms and imitation of Western European legal and constitutional principles (Caquet, 2000). Even in England, such key liberal figures as Richard Cobden and John Bright, champions of free trade, took exception to the Turkophilia and Russophobia predominant in foreign policy and public opinion (Gleason, 1950, pp. 183-185; Taylor, 1995). The situation was even more complex in France, where traditional anti-British sentiments and the specific legacy of Napoleon's Eastern policy prevented French progressives from quickly following London's pro-Ottoman and anti-Russian line on the Eastern Question.

The French liberals during the July Monarchy were no less burdened by the treaties of 1815 than the French royalists had been during the Restoration. Seeking to erase this national disgrace, the liberal leaders (and in particular renowned journalist and politician Adolphe Thiers, who served as prime minister in 1836 and 1840) pursued a bold, if not risky, foreign policy. Along with continuing the conquest of Algeria, begun under Charles X, this policy included intervention in the Spanish Civil War and the aforementioned support for Muhammad Ali in his conflict with the Sultan. Thiers's Egyptian policy ultimately led to France's diplomatic isolation after Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia signed the First Treaty of London in July 1840, collectively supporting the Sultan. Soon thereafter, the British bombardment of Acre forced Muhammad Ali to relinquish control of Syria and agree to a reduction of Egyptian forces in exchange for the Sultan's recognition of his hereditary rule in Egypt (Sedivy, 2017).

This foreign policy defeat for France led to the replacement of bellicose Thiers by the Anglophile Guizot, whose policy of rapprochement with Great Britain ultimately led to the first "Entente Cordiale" of 1843–1846 (Schroeder, 1994, pp. 765-775). However, not all French liberals immediately embraced Guizot's Anglophile line. In a number of cases, anti-British sentiments triumphed over Russophobia, converting the revolutionaries of 1830 into supporters of an alliance with Russia. This was the case, in particular, with François Mauguin,

one of the most radical opponents of Charles X, who took an active part in the July events of 1830 and soon afterward advocated France's military aid to the Polish insurgents (Corbet, 1967, pp. 163, 169-170). One of the French 'demagogues' whom Alexander Pushkin famously rebuked in *To the Slanderers of Russia*, Mauguin gradually lost his anti-Russian animus over the 1830s. In late 1840, he returned from a trip to St. Petersburg as a supporter of alliance with Russia to counter British hegemony in the East (Grangeville, 1841).

Around 1840, there were many French critics of the rapprochement with England, which required the abandonment of Napoleon's designs in the East for the sake of preserving the Ottoman Empire and containing Russia (Marmont, 1836; Le Francoois, 1841; Chaussenot, 1843; Quesnet and Santeuil, 1843). Along with Frenchmen, these critics also included some Eastern Europeans, such as Greek poet Alexandros Soutsos and Wallachian publicist Mikhail Anagnosti (Anagnosti, 1841; Soutsos, 1841). With varying degrees of literary talent and theoretical sophistication, these authors insisted that an alliance with Russia was more in line with France's interests than a rapprochement with London, whose defence of the status quo in the East was little more than a means of maintaining its hegemonic position in Oriental commerce. Although such authors were in the minority, their role in the public debate around French foreign policy was significant, at least as long as the French retained independent geopolitical ambitions and were able to perceive Russia as an enlightened—rather than Asiatic—despotism.

This ability was severely undermined by Astolphe de Custine's scathing critique of Nicholas I's Russia published in 1843 (Cadot, 1967). However, even before the publication of Custine's *Russia in 1839*, French supporters of an alliance with Russia had no concrete evidence that Nicholas I himself wanted one. With the outbreak of the Second Ottoman-Egyptian War in 1839, the Tsar preferred to adhere to the status quo in the East as he had done six years earlier. Through his envoys in Constantinople and Alexandria, Nicholas I supported young Sultan Abdülmecid I (r. 1839–1861) and restrained Muhammad Ali (Ingles, 1976, pp. 102-106).

Once again, French support for the Egyptian pasha confirmed the Tsar's view of France as the primary source of subversive influences,

whether in the East or elsewhere. Nicholas I apparently overlooked certain French political circles' interest in rapprochement with Russia, preferring to seek a gentleman's agreement with London on Eastern affairs (Puryear, 1965, pp. 32-36; Ingles, 1976, pp. 124-147). The illusory nature of this approach became evident ten years later, when Great Britain not only failed to diffuse the Franco-Russian dispute over the Holy Places that flared up in the early 1850s, but in fact used it to create an anti-Russian coalition (Figes, 2010, pp. 61-70).

THE CHARACTER OF THE CRIMEAN WAR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Among the immediate preconditions of the Crimean War was another revolution and regime change in France, as a result of which the July Monarchy gave way to the Second Republic and the presidency of Louis Bonaparte. Neither the republican regime, nor the election of Napoleon's nephew in December 1848 automatically turned France and Russia into enemies, yet they made possible a peculiar conjuncture of international and domestic French developments that complicated a possible rapprochement between Paris and St. Petersburg while increasing the number of potential flashpoints between them. Although Nicholas I delayed official recognition of the new French government until May 1849, the Tsar and his diplomats repeatedly assured their French counterparts of Russia's non-interference in the internal affairs of France, as long as it did not support revolutionary movements in Germany, Austria, or Italy (Martens, 1909, pp. 228-229). For his part, the Second Republic's first foreign minister, Alphonse de Lamartine, declared himself convinced that "the most natural alliance for France was the one with Russia," regretted that the Polish Question had prevented its conclusion in the past, and expressed hope that it would happen sooner or later under more propitious circumstances (Martens, 1909, p. 230).

Those circumstances would in fact come later rather than sooner. While Russia's post-1848 policy towards France was no longer constrained by Nicholas I's prejudices against Louis-Philippe and the liberal constitutionalism of 1830, French foreign policy of this period proved to be even more shaped by anti-Russian public opinion than had been the case under the July Monarchy. Russia's role in the suppression

of the Wallachian and Hungarian revolutions in September 1848 and August 1849, respectively, generated a Russophobic wave even greater than that which swept France and broader Europe during the Polish November Uprising of 1830–1831 (Malia, 1999, pp. 146-159). As a result, France and Russia fell on the opposite sides of the diplomatic crisis around the Hungarian and Polish revolutionary emigres in the Ottoman Empire, whose extradition was demanded by St. Petersburg and Vienna in the fall of 1849 (Goldfrank, 1994, pp. 68-71). Some eighteen months later, Louis Bonaparte's desire to secure the votes of French Catholics—to become Prince-President and ultimately Emperor of France—led him to support the Catholic monks in their clashes with the Greek Orthodox clergy (supported by Russia) over control of the Holy Places (Mange, 1940, pp. 18-23). The Porte decided in favor of the Catholics at the end of 1852 (Goldfrank, 1994, pp. 75-100).

Nicholas I responded to this decision by sending his Minister of the Navy and personal friend, Alexander Menshikov, on an extraordinary mission to Constantinople with the task of restoring the rights of Orthodox co-religionists and demanding from the Porte a definitive guarantee of these rights in the form of a convention (Goldfrank, 1993). Menshikov accomplished the first but not the second. Supported by the British ambassador, Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, the Porte refused to sign the convention, which would have meant official recognition of a Russian protectorate over the entire Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire. Menshikov's subsequent departure from Constantinople marked the official break of Russian-Ottoman relations and made a new Russian-Ottoman war imminent.

On 3 July 1853, Nicholas I ordered his troops to occupy Moldavia and Wallachia in an attempt to force the Porte to accept the demands he had previously voiced through Menshikov (Palmer, 1992, p. 21; Figes, 2011, pp. 116-117). However, by this time, the Ottoman government had become accustomed to temporary Russian occupations of the Danubian Principalities and hoped to regain them after the conflict, as had happened after every previous Russian-Ottoman war. Therefore, the entry of Russian troops into Moldavia and Wallachia was insufficient to force the Porte to make such a sweeping concession as recognition

of a Russian protectorate over the entire Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire. Instead, the occupation of the principalities served as a pretext first for the Ottomans, and then for the British and French governments, to declare war on Russia (Badem, 2010, pp. 99–100; 180).

The Crimean War was one of the first global military conflicts (Curtiss, 1979; Palmer, 1992; Figes, 2010; Kozelsky, 2019). Although the Crimean Peninsula was undoubtedly its main theater, military operations were also conducted in the Baltic, Arctic, and Pacific Ocean, not to mention the well-known Transcaucasian front, where the Russian army was most successful overall. The Crimean War was the first modern war: it marked the end of the age of sail, demonstrated the superiority of French and British rifled weapons over Russian smoothbore muskets, and was the first conflict to be photographed and telegraphed.

British diplomacy played a major role in creating the anti-Russian coalition, and the British navy provided logistics for the Allied landings in Crimea, but the French army formed the core of the coalition forces. At the battles of Alma and Inkerman, French troops outnumbered their British allies (though not by much), and they were the sole authors of the allied victory in the decisive Battle of Chernaya in August 1855. At the siege of Sevastopol, French troops outnumbered the British two to one. The quantity of France's contribution to the coalition was matched by its quality: the joint action of the French and British armies revealed the superiority of the former over the latter in most respects (Figes, 2010, pp. 178-181, 278-290). It is therefore entirely justifiable to call Napoleon III the "soldier on the continent," without whom the coalition's victory—and the war itself—would have been impossible.

The role of Austria also confirms this thesis. The entire first half of the 19th century saw growing contradictions behind the screen of the continuing Russo-Austrian alliance. Joint action against the Porte during the previous century gave way to Austrian concerns about the consolidation of Russian hegemony in Moldavia and Wallachia. In the context of the dispute over the Holy Places and the Menshikov mission of 1853, this hegemony threatened to turn into a formal Russian protectorate over the entire Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire, which would further have strengthened Russia's influence over

the Southern Slavs (Sedivy, 2013). These concerns dictated Metternich's close cooperation with his British counterpart, Viscount Castlereagh, in 1821–1822 to prevent unilateral Russian intervention in the conflict between the Sultan and his Greek subjects (Kissinger, 1957, pp. 298-299; Sedivy, 2013, pp. 71-80). During the Crimean War, the desire to prevent another Russian victory over the Ottoman Empire led Vienna to issue an ultimatum that forced Nicholas I to withdraw Russian troops from the Danubian Principalities in the summer of 1854.

However, while Austria displayed an "ingratitude" for Russian assistance against the 1849 Hungarian Revolution that "astonished Europe," Vienna did not directly enter into military conflict with Russia, even when London succeeded in drawing Paris into the war. Austria was unwilling to replace France as Britain's main "soldier on the continent." Around 1830, when Paris's interest in partitioning the Ottoman Empire hindered the formation of an Anglo-French coalition against Russia, Metternich limited himself to purely diplomatic means of containing Russian pressure on the Porte. As a result, Francis I and Nicholas I revived the Holy Alliance during a meeting in Münchengratz in 1833 and agreed to jointly safeguard the status quo in the Ottoman Empire's European territory (Kiniapina, 2001). Four decades later, after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 had temporarily sidelined Paris as a serious player, Metternich's successor, Gyula Andrássy, proved equally unwilling to confront Russia militarily during another escalation of the Eastern Question. Instead, Vienna and St. Petersburg concluded a secret convention that guaranteed Austria's benevolent neutrality in the upcoming war for the "liberation of Bulgaria," on the condition of Austria's post-war occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The convention also excluded the possibility of a large Slavic state in the Balkans after the war (Sumner, 1962, pp. 273-289).

The Crimean War, born of a unique international political configuration, was also exceptional in its consequences. In the context of Russia's historical development, it represents a rare example of a 'useful' defeat that unleashed internal reforms beneficial for the Russian autocracy's political survival and military successes. In this sense, the Crimean War again stands in contrast to the Patriotic War of 1812.

Being a victory of the post-Petrine military-political system over the French Revolution's new mass army, the war of 1812 contributed to preserving the military and social organization of Russia's *Ancien Régime* precisely when the other European great powers were beginning the transition to short-term universal military service and a system of national reserves (Fuller, 1992, pp. 217-218). Serfdom's incompatibility with this method of raising an army became the main factor in its 1861 abolition, followed by judicial, provincial, and municipal reforms, and finally the military reform of 1874 (Rieber, 1966, pp. 15-58; Zaionchkovskii, 1952; Menning, 2000, pp. 6-50; Fuller, 1992, pp. 275-285; Baumann, 2004).

The Crimean War was even more exceptional in its international consequences: it reactivated the aforementioned long-term transformation of international political structures that began in the late 18th century. The post-1856 period witnessed a disruption of the internal German balance of power, which had constituted one of the constants of early modern European politics, alongside the Anglo-French and Franco-Austrian conflicts and their associated alliances. The balance between the Protestant rulers of northern Germany (the dukes, later kings, of Saxony and Brandenburg-Prussia), versus Catholic Austria and its southern German satellites, constituted the core of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, and had its roots in the early Reformation and the even earlier 12th–13th century struggle between the Holy Roman Emperors and the German princes.

Throughout their struggle with the Habsburgs, the French kings sought to exploit the internal German conflict. After 1648, they even acted as arbiters of the internal German balance. One finds a concrete example of this role in the 'Diplomatic Revolution' of the mid-18th century, in which Louis XV sought rapprochement with the weakened Austrian monarchy (and Russia) to contain the growing strength of Prussia (resulting in the Seven Years' War of 1756–1763) (Black, 1990; Bély, 2013). From the end of the 18th century, Russia also became an arbiter in the Austro-Prussian competition for influence in Germany. In 1779, St. Petersburg (along with Paris) sponsored the Peace of Teschen, which ended the Austro-Prussian War of the Bavarian Succession

(Grebenshchikova, 2018). After 1815, Russia's role in the internal German balance of power was realized through the Holy Alliance.

However, the Crimean War (or, more precisely, the need to repeal the provisions of the 1856 Treaty of Paris, which were unacceptable to Russia) became a significant factor in upsetting the internal German balance of power in Prussia's favor. Bismarck's success in uniting Germany "by iron and blood" was facilitated by Russia's "concentrating" on domestic reforms and its desire to reverse the humiliating 1856 Treaty of Paris, something that could be achieved only in tandem with Prussia. The memory of Austrian "ingratitude" in 1854–1855, as well as Vienna's attempt (along with Paris and London) to intervene in the Tsar's latest conflict with his Polish subjects in 1863 (Revunenkov, 1957), secured Russia's benevolent neutrality towards Prussia in the Second Schleswig-Holstein War of 1864 and in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, which led to the formation of the North German Confederation. The same benevolent neutrality allowed Bismarck to decisively challenge France on the southern German issue in 1870, without fear of a two-front war (Vinogradov, 2005).

France's stunning defeat in 1870 allowed Russia to officially declare null and void the Black Sea demilitarization clause of the 1856 Treaty of Paris.[3] Seven years later, a new war with Turkey secured the return of southern Bessarabia—the only territorial concession that Alexander II had been forced to accept at the very beginning of his reign. Thus, Chancellor Alexander Gorchakov's old school diplomacy and Dmitry Milyutin's military reform enabled Russia to completely overcome the consequences of its painful defeat in Crimea within some 15–20 years—but at the price of fundamental changes to the European balance of power.

The disruption of Germany's internal balance, and the unification of small German states around Prussia, produced the strongest and yet most vulnerable European great power, right in the center of the Old Continent. The military and industrial might of unified Germany was

[3] That Russia was able to declare the embarrassing clauses of the 1856 Treaty of Paris null and void ***specifically after France's catastrophic defeat at Sedan in 1870*** is *a contrario* evidence that the Crimean War would have been impossible without Napoleon III as Britain's "soldier on the continent."

counterbalanced by its food insecurity and relative scarcity of natural resources, which made the country dependent on external, primarily Eastern European, sources of minerals and agricultural products. The Second Reich's combination of strength and vulnerability explains the aggressiveness of its foreign policy, which the Concert of Europe ultimately failed to neutralize.

This epochal change in the structure of European international politics finally led to the conclusion of a Franco-Russian alliance in the early 1890s. However, this alliance proved insufficient to counterbalance unified Germany and its Austro-Hungarian satellite. In July 1914, the Franco-Russian alliance even contributed to the transformation of another Balkan crisis into a pan-European conflict, in which Russia suffered defeat while France achieved only a pyrrhic victory. The fatal character of the Russo-French alliance, when concluded on an anti-German basis, only highlights what the Franco-Russian alliance ***could have been*** if concluded in the first half of the 19th century, i.e., before the structural changes brought about by the Crimean War (Vinogradov, 2005).

In that case, a Franco-Russian alliance would not only have prevented the formation of an anti-Russian coalition in the context of the Eastern Question, but it would also have helped maintain the internal German balance of power, with France and Russia continuing to act as arbiters in the Austro-Prussian standoff. This, in turn, would have created the objective preconditions for the gradual displacement of British influence in continental Europe and the establishment of a long-term Franco-Russian condominium. It was precisely this historical opportunity that Nicholas I missed at the turn of the 1830s and 1840s, when he preferred the illusion of a gentleman's agreement with Great Britain to a rapprochement with France. The cost of this missed opportunity was the Tsar's personal defeat in Crimea in 1854–1855, and the global "Thirty Years' War," (1914–1945) that Russia was able to win only at the cost of a radical (and bloody) transformation.

Although the Crimean War was a consequence of the Eastern Question, this does not justify viewing the Question—like Nikolay Danilevsky and other Russian Pan-Slavists did—as a confrontation between Russia and Europe. Throughout the entire history of the

Eastern Question, fundamental antagonism existed only between Russia and Great Britain, whose rivalry for predominant influence in the Ottoman Empire and other parts of Asia is sometimes called the 'Cold War of the 19th century.' In 1854–1855, this Cold War went hot, but all previous and subsequent Eastern crises (including in the 1820s and late 1870s) passed without the formation of a hostile West European coalition, let alone a military conflict between it and Russia.

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