**Long-Term Causes of the Crimean War by Marjie Bloy, PhD**

For Britain, the Crimean War was part of the basic Eastern Question that had been going on since the 1780s and the time of [Pitt the Younger](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/pms/pitt.html)'s ministry. To maintain the integrity of the Turkish empire had become one of the [principles](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/forpol/principle.html) of Britain's foreign policy. By the Convention of Balta Liman (1838) Britain had won widespread concessions from the Porte that included (a) special rates on most of the raw materials sold to Britain and (b) a host of benefits, grants and acknowledgements that gave Britain a very privileged position in the Ottoman Empire

Consequently, Britain felt that it was essential to keep control over the Mediterranean sea routes and to preserve the [Ottoman Empire](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/crimea/ottomap.html) as a barrier against Russian expansionist tendencies. These considerations led to hostility against Russia. Britain also had the idea, advocated by [Richard Cobden](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/cobden.html), that free trade would lead to world peace. The repeal of the [Corn Laws](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/cornlaws1.html) in 1846 had begun to turn Britain into a [free trade](http://www.victorianweb.org/economics/laissez.html) nation; by encouraging other nations to turn to free trade, Britain was attempting to increase her own wealth. It has also been said that the British thought that they had the 'secret of civilisation' and wanted to export her political system to the remainder of the world.

However, over this period of time, the Sultans who ruled the Ottoman Empire had learned to make strengths out of their weaknesses. The Turkish Empire was much weaker following the loss of territory to the Russians and from the creation of independent nations such as Greece. Sultan Abd al-Majid was relying heavily on foreign aid to help him to hold the remainder of his empire together. He had allowed the empire to weaken because history had shown that he could always get help. Europe reaped the rewards of supporting the Sultan.

Russia found the Ottoman Empire attractive and vulnerable especially as a means of acquiring access to the [Straits](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/crimea/straits.html) — the [Bosphorus](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/crimea/forts.html), Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles — to allow an easy passage into the Mediterranean. Britain had every intention of ensuring that Russia was kept out of the Mediterranean, and the Sultan knew it: he continued to play off one Power against another. Russia had shown that she was always going to take any opportunity to probe into Turkish territory; Britain's policy was that the Russians needed firm handling because they could be prevented from invading Turkey and it was thought that the Russians were not prepared to go to war over Turkish territory. It was an intractable problem.

The 1848 Revolutions had changed Europe. The standards of diplomacy which had held firm since 1815 had gone and new approaches in foreign matters were coming into use. Metternich and [Palmerston](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/pms/palmerst.html) had both ceased to be powerful forces in foreign affairs; Metternich had been forced to flee from Vienna and Palmerston had left office when [Russell](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/pms/russell.html)'s ministry fell. Napoleon III was Emperor of France and was seeking personal prestige. New men had assumed office in most European nations and they were not dealing with old problems in the same way as their predecessors.

By 1850, Britain's sensitivity to the Eastern Question had increased because [India](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/empire/indiaov.html) was the most important part of the Empire — a real asset and the 'jewel in the Crown' — as a result of free trade and overseas expansion. India was a source of raw materials and Britain feared the threat to the overland route to India. [Railways](http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/railways/railway4.html) had expanded the British economy. To some extent, a century of British foreign policy was now coming to fruition. Britain was becoming a victim of her own policy of maintaining the integrity of the Turkish Empire.

The position of Napoleon III as Emperor of the French was crucial. He had great ambitions as well as the misfortune and liability of his name - Bonaparte. The French wanted prestige and expansionism to uphold the name "Second Empire", and expected to get it from a Bonaparte. Also, Napoleon III wanted to keep Papal support and therefore needed to uphold the Catholic Church wherever he could. Napoleon III was arrogant and ambitious; he was looking for sources of pride and achievement.

The state of British politics did not help. In 1852 Palmerston was appointed as Home Secretary in Aberdeen's government; [Aberdeen](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/pms/aberdeen.html) hated war, and disliked Palmerston. It was a coalition government riven with instability and indecision. In the 1840s Aberdeen gave [Czar Nicholas I](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/crimea/gowing/tsar.html) the strong impression that Britain would not go to war over Turkey, which made it likely that Russia would probe harder and further. Radicals like John Arthur Roebuck, the MP for Sheffield, supported the war because it proved their point that further reform of parliament and other outmoded institutions — such as the War Office and the Army — were needed desperately.

Russian ambitions to expand into the Mediterranean increased in ratio to the decline of Turkey. The Czar still wanted to make territorial gains in the Ottoman Empire, despite being thwarted several times already. To add to the problems, relations between Czar Nicholas I and Napoleon III were poor because:

* Napoleon I had invaded Russia in 1812 and caused untold hardship there. The mere name 'Napoleon' was unpopular in Russia
* Napoleon III had come to power through a coup d'état: he was a usurper and a product of revolution, not a legitimate ruler. The Czar saw him as being no better than the Liberal Nationalists who had caused such troubles in Europe in 1848
* on Napoleon III's accession, Czar Nicholas I sent a him a telegramme that began, "Monsieur mon ami", instead of the traditional and customary "Monsieur mon frère". It was an insult to Napoleon III and also was a diplomatic snub; Napoleon wanted revenge.

The situation in Europe in 1850 was different from any previous situation after the end of the French Wars, since the capacity for co-operation between Britain, France and Russia did not exist in 1850: it was unlikely that the three countries could negotiate because

* British relations with Austria-Hungary were strained after the Kossuth and Haynau incidents following the 1848 Revolutions
* British relations with Russia and France were strained after the [Don Pacifico](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/pms/palmerst.html#pacifico) incident of 1850
* Russo-French relations were strained for many reasons, including the attitude of the Czar towards Napoleon III

Consequently, prospects did not look good. The change of personnel involved was important in the build-up to war:

* Napoleon III in France was looking for glory
* Lord John Russell, who was weak, was British Foreign Secretary
* This was a time when strained international relations being dealt with by new men
* Many of the British Cabinet tended towards pacifism — but even [Gladstone](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/pms/gladston.html) — who in no way was a war-monger, because wars cost money — deemed the Crimean War to be 'justifiable'.