Background Guide

EHMUN
The 11th Edition
2026

CRIMEAN CRISIS CABINET

AGENDA:

The Russian Occupation of Ottoman Territories and the Crimean War, 1853

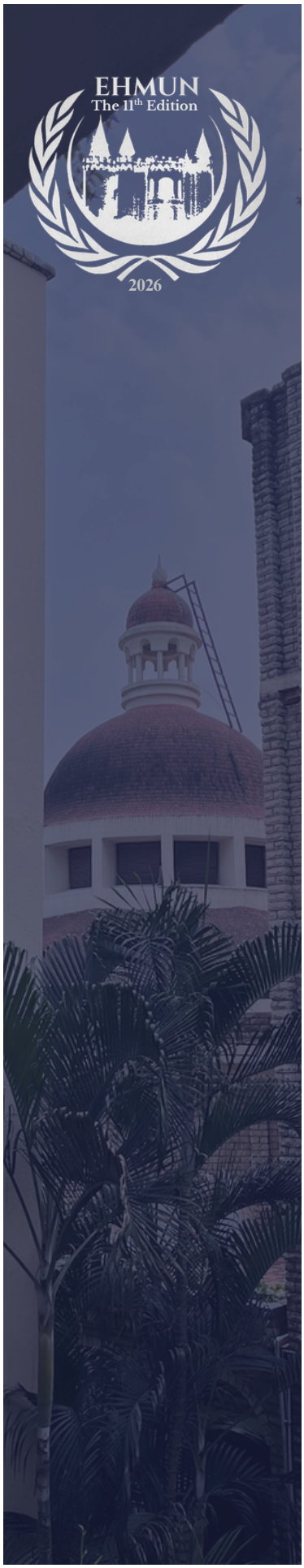
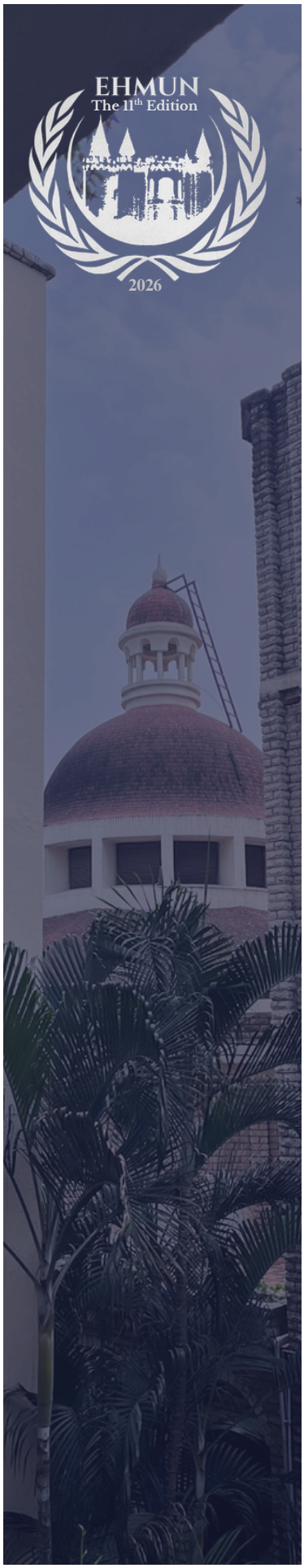


Table of Contents

1.	Letter from the Executive Board	4
2.	About the Committee	5
3.	Committee Matrix	6
4.	Overview	7
5.	Timeline	8
6.	Historical Context	10
7.	Ideologies and Political Alignments	18
8.	Current Situation	23
9.	Tips for further reasearch	30
10.	Bibliography	31



Letter from the Board

Greetings Delegates,

My name is Punya Khemani, and it is my honour and privilege to welcome you all to the Crimean Crisis Cabinet at Emerald Heights Model United Nations 2026. I am thrilled to serve as your Chairperson for what promises to be one of the most dynamic and intellectually stimulating committees of the conference.

This year, our committee will be examining one of the most consequential geopolitical flashpoints of the nineteenth century, the Russian occupation of Ottoman territories and the origins of the Crimean War. By the autumn of 1853, decades of simmering tension between the declining Ottoman Empire and an expansionist Russian Empire had reached a breaking point. Tsar Nicholas I's ambitions over Ottoman lands, and protecting Orthodox Christians was a drive that alarmed the vast Ottoman Empire and the great powers of Europe.

As delegates, you will step into the shoes of emperors, sultans, ministers, and military commanders caught at the precipice of a war that would reshape the balance of power in Europe and the Near East. You will be tasked with navigating alliances and, military pressure, along with managing the changing dynamics of the crisis at hand. Note, the freeze date for this committee is 30th November 1853, meaning all events after this date will not be taken into consideration. We strongly encourage all delegates to familiarise themselves with the broader historical and military context of this period.This study guide serves only as a foundation, the depth of your research will define the quality of your debate.

For any questions or further information, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at ccc.ehmun@emeraldheights.edu.in
We look forward to welcoming you to the floor. Prepare well, debate boldly, and may your negotiations rise to meet the moment.

Best of luck researching!

The Executive Board
Crimean Crisis Cabinet
Emerald Heights Model United Nations 2026

Punya Khemani
Chairperson

Siddhant Chovishya
Rapporteur

Agriti Negi
Vice Chairperson

Arka Mangal
Rapporteur

About the Committee

The Crimean Crisis Cabinet is a specialised historical crisis committee designed to simulate the fragile diplomatic atmosphere of Eastern Europe in 1853. Unlike conventional Model UN committees that deliberate on contemporary issues, this council transports delegates to the heart of a rapidly unfolding crisis: the evening after the Battle of Sinope on November 30, 1853, in the midst of a war that would decide the succession to what may become one of the largest power vacuums in history.

This committee is not a retrospective discussion. Delegates will act as key leaders, ministers, and diplomats of the period, making decisions in real time, with knowledge restricted to the freeze date of November 30, 1853, five months after Russia occupied Moldavia and Wallachia, which led to the Crimean War.

Members of the council, therefore, inhabit a moment when war feels imminent, but not inevitable. The choices you make will determine whether the fragile balance of Europe and the Levant holds or whether the continent descends fully into war.

Committee Matrix

CRIMEAN CRISIS CABINET

1. Tsar Nicholas I (Emperor of Russia)
2. Prince Alexander Menshikov (Admiral-General of the Imperial Russian Navy)
3. Karl Nesselrode (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia)
4. Mikhail Gorchakov (Commanding General of the Russian Forces)
5. Pavel Nakhimov (Commander of the Imperial Russian Navy)
6. Ivan Paskevich (Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Imperial Army)
7. Sultan Abdülmecid I (Sultan of the Ottoman Empire)
8. Mustafa Reshid Pasha (Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire)
9. Mehmed Fuad Pasha (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Ottoman Empire)
10. Omar Pasha (Marshal of the Ottoman Forces)
11. Ahmed Pasha (Senior Commander to the Ottoman Porte)
12. Archbishop Kyrillos VII (Representative of the Greek Orthodox Millet)
13. Queen Victoria (Queen of Great Britain & Ireland)
14. Earl of Aberdeen (Prime Minister of Great Britain)
15. Viscount Palmerston (Home Secretary of Great Britain)
16. Lord John Russell (Foreign Secretary of Great Britain)
17. Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe (British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte)
18. Lord Reglan (Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Forces)
19. Admiral James Dundas (Admiral of the British Mediterranean Fleet)
20. Emperor Napoleon III (Emperor of the French Empire)
21. Marquis de Turgot (Minister of Foreign Affairs of France)
22. Armand de Saint-Arnaud (Minister of War of France)
23. Ferdinand Hamelin (Admiral of the French Mediterranean Fleet)
24. Père Alphonse Ratisbonne (Envoy of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem)
25. Emperor Franz Joseph I (Emperor of Austria & King of Hungary)
26. Karl von Buol-Schauenstein (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria)
27. Archduke Johann (Imperial Envoy of the Austrian Crown)
28. Anton von Prokesch-Osten (Austrian Internuncio at the Sublime Porte)
29. Patriarch Anthimos VI (Supreme Prelate of Constantinople)
30. Camillo di Cavour (Prime Minister of Piedmont-Sardinia)
31. Mircea Ştirbei (Prince of Wallachia)
32. Grigore Alexandru Ghica (Prince of Moldavia)
33. Prince Alexander Karadjordjevic (Prince of Serbia)
34. Lajos Kossuth (President of the Hungarian National Government)
35. Adam Jerzy Czartoryski (President of the Polish National Council)

Overview

Europe in the mid-nineteenth century was a continent held together by the careful architecture of the Concert of Europe, a system of great power diplomacy forged in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars that sought to preserve stability through negotiation and mutual restraint. It was an order that had, for nearly four decades, managed to contain the ambitions of individual states. By 1853, however, that architecture was beginning to show its cracks.

The immediate origins of the crisis lay in a dispute over the rights of Christian minorities in Jerusalem, specifically, whether Catholic or Orthodox clergy held precedence over the holy sites. This had poisoned relations between France and Russia, and by extension, between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Tsar Nicholas I saw in the dispute an opportunity, pressing the Sublime Porte for sweeping rights to act as the protector of all Orthodox Christian subjects within Ottoman lands. It was a demand that, if granted, would have given Russia extraordinary leverage over Ottoman internal affairs, and one the Ottomans flatly refused. In response, Russian forces crossed into the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in July 1853, framing the occupation as a temporary measure. Britain and France, alarmed by the prospect of Russian expansion toward the Mediterranean, moved their fleets eastward.The Ottoman Empire, its sovereignty directly challenged, faces a choice between humiliation and war.

The Crimean Crisis Cabinet convenes on the 30th of November, 1853, the very day the Russian Black Sea Fleet descended upon the Ottoman squadron at Sinop. Every power in the room carries its own interests and its own calculations about what the collapse, or survival, of Ottoman sovereignty would mean for the order of Europe. This cabinet positions itself at this crucial turning point, where the decisions made in the committee determine whether the order of Europe survives what comes next.

Timeline

The following is a comprehensive timeline of key events that shaped Crimean dynamics covered in the guide and beyond:

1774:
- Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji grants Russia the right to protect Orthodox Christians in Ottoman lands, the legal foundation of Russia's intervention.

1815:
- The Congress of Vienna establishes the Concert of Europe, creating a framework of great power diplomacy designed to maintain continental stability.

1821–1829:
- The Greek War of Independence breaks out against Ottoman rule.
- Russia intervenes on behalf of the Greeks.

1830:
- France intervenes in Algeria, beginning a broader pattern of European powers chipping away at Ottoman influence across North Africa and the Mediterranean.

1833:
- The Treaty of Unkiar-Skelessi grants Russia significant influence over the Ottoman Empire

1839–1841:
- The Oriental Crisis of 1840 - the Egyptian–Ottoman War in the eastern Mediterranean, triggered by the self-declared Khedive of Egypt and Sudan

1841:
- The London Straits Convention closes the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to foreign warships in peacetime.
- Curtails Russian naval access to the Mediterranean.

1844:
- Tsar Nicholas I privately describes the Ottoman Empire as the "sick man of Europe" during a visit to Britain.

1850:
- Dispute erupts between France and Russia over the rights of Catholic and Orthodox clergy over the holy sites of Jerusalem

Early 1853:

- Russia sends Prince Menshikov to Constantinople with sweeping demands. The Sublime Porte refuses.

May 1853:

- Menshikov's mission fails.
- Russia breaks off diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire.

July 1853:

- Russian forces cross into the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia.
- Britain and France move their fleets toward the eastern Mediterranean in response.

August 1853:

- The Vienna Note, proposed by Austria as a diplomatic compromise, is accepted by Russia but rejected by the Ottoman Empire.

September 1855:

- Britain and France move their fleets through the Dardanelles and into the Bosphorus, stationing them at Besika Bay.

October 1853:

- The Ottoman Empire formally declares war on Russia after demanding Russian withdrawal from the Principalities goes unheeded.
- Fighting breaks out along the Danube.

November 1853:

- Ottoman forces under Omar Pasha push Russian troops back across the Danube in several engagements.

30 November 1853:

- The Russian Black Sea Fleet destroys the Ottoman squadron at anchor in the port of Sinop. The Battle of Sinop sends shockwaves through the European capitals, making great power intervention increasingly inevitable. The Crimean Crisis Cabinet convenes here, the first major naval engagement of the war has just taken place, and the question of how far the conflict will spread hangs in the balance.

Historical Context

The Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Question

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was one of the most expansive and diverse empires in the world, stretching across three continents. Its capital, Constantinople, sat at the center of Europe and Asia, connecting the Mediterranean to the Black Sea through the straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. This geographic position made it one of the most strategically valuable cities, along with controlling major trade routes between East and West, and being a city of deep religious significance as the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the former capital of the Byzantine Empire.In 1853, under Sultan Abdülmecid I, Ottoman territory spanned modern day Turkey, the Levant, much of the Arabian Peninsula and significant portions of North Africa and Eastern Europe. Its European territories collectively known as Rumelia, included Bosnia, Bulgaria, Albania, North Macedonia, and the autonomous principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. The empire also contained within its borders the holiest sites of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, a fact that gave every major power in Europe a stake in its survival or collapse, and made the question of its future one of the most consequential diplomatic problems of the age.

The empire's scale however, also paved the way to create some structural problems that largely impacts the crisis at hand.

The first is that the empire had expanded rapidly without the administrative consolidation that expansion required. Its provincial system of Eyalets was decentralised by design, local governors were granted significant autonomy over taxation and military affairs in exchange for tribute and troops, an arrangement that had enabled the empire to govern vast territories but had simultaneously made central authority difficult to exercise. Furthermore, the taxation system was riddled with inefficiencies and judicial authority was fragmented across overlapping regions.

The second is in regards to the military pressures the empire went through. The Janissaries, the elite infantry corps that had driven Ottoman expansion for centuries, had by the early nineteenth century become politically volatile and were disbanded in 1826. Their dissolution left the empire reliant on a smaller standing army supplemented by Eyalet troops, with persistent logistical deficiencies in healthcare and supply. However, the widening gap between Ottoman military capacity and that of the industrialising European powers was not unique to the Ottomans, many states struggled to keep pace with the rapid military transformation of the era, but for an empire already navigating significant internal pressures, it carries particular consequences.

The final one deals with the economic situation of the Ottomans. Having not industrialised at the pace of Western Europe, the Ottoman state carried mounting debts to foreign creditors and had entered into trade agreements known as Capitulations that granted European merchants preferential terms, the long-term costs of which were becoming increasingly apparent. The Tanzimat reforms, launched in 1839, though is a genuine effort to modernise the bureaucracy, the legal system, and the military, reflects a serious attempt at institutional renewal It is against this backdrop that the question of what would follow an Ottoman retreat from its territories becomes one of the defining preoccupations of European diplomacy. Russia sees in Ottoman weakness an opportunity to extend its influence southward and protect Orthodox Christian communities within Ottoman lands, a goal it framed in both strategic and humanitarian terms. Britain and France view any significant Russian expansion toward the Mediterranean as a direct threat to their own interests and to the balance of power they had worked to maintain since 1815. The Ottoman Empire, for its part, is navigating these pressures while simultaneously attempting to reform and stabilise itself from within. This was the Eastern Question that defines the Crimean crisis.

Russian Imperial Expansion

By the mid-nineteenth century, Russia had grown from a collection of small principalities around Moscow into the world's largest empire by landmass, stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. Driven primarily by the narrative that Russia was the "Third Rome," the rightful heir to the legacy of Byzantium and the natural protector of Orthodox Christianity worldwide. It was this combined with material ambition that ultimately brought Russia into direct confrontation with the Ottoman Empire in this committee.

Foundations of Empire

The foundations of Russian expansion were laid in the aftermath of Mongol dominance. When Ivan III consolidated power in 1480, he began absorbing rival principalities, most notably Novgorod, and established the territorial narrative that led to defining Russian expansion for centuries. That security required expansion, and expansion required more expansion still. His grandson, Ivan IV, became the first Tsar of Russia and accelerated this process. The campaign of Yermak Timofeyevich against the Siberian Khanate in 1581 opened the vast eastern frontier and by 1640, Russian outposts had reached the Pacific coast via river networks. The Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689 with Qing China further stabilised the far-eastern boundary, allowing Russia to consolidate its gains.

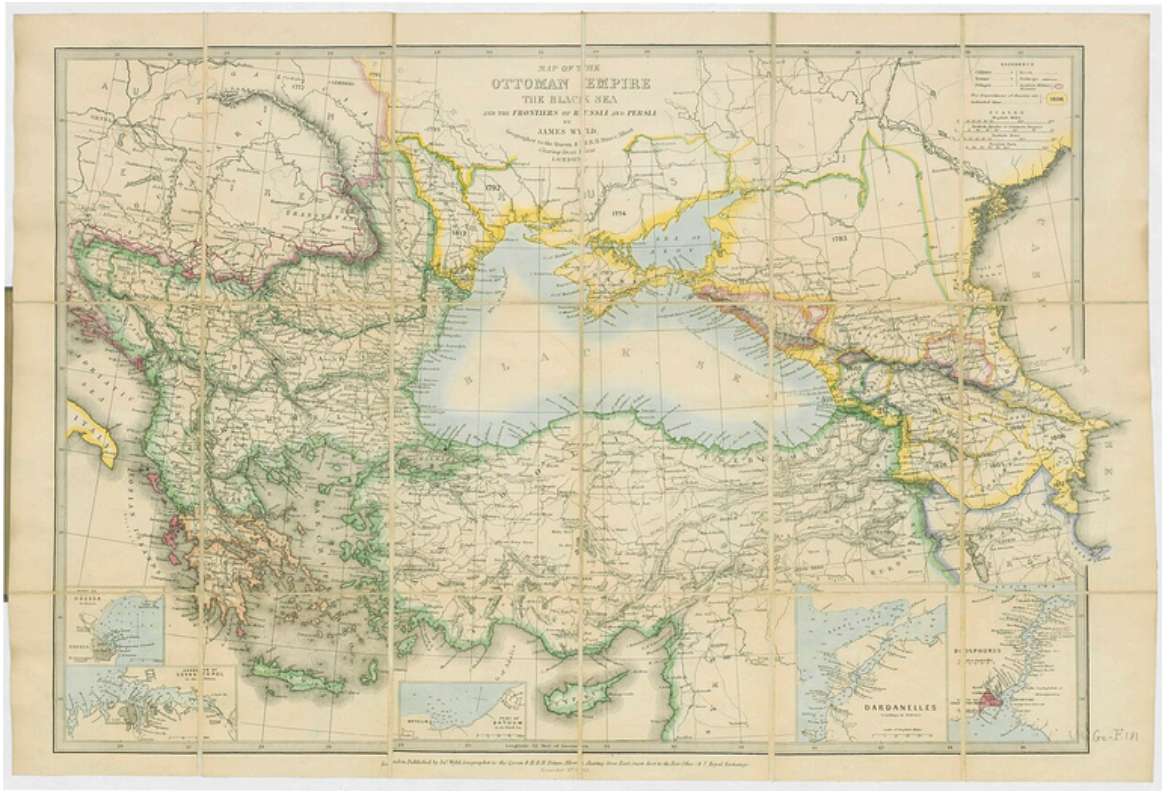
The empire's policy, however, changed significantly under Peter I. Following his victory in the Great Northern War against Sweden, he formally proclaimed the Russian Empire in 1721, having already modernised the military and restructured the administration. What Russia at this point could not secure, however, was reliable warm-water access. A strategic limitation that would preoccupy successors for generations. As a result, control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, the straits connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, became a defining objective of Russian foreign policy, one that brought it into repeated conflict with the Ottoman Empire and into tension with Britain and France, both of whom had compelling reasons to prevent Russia from achieving it.

Under Catherine II

It was Catherine II who most dramatically advanced expansion. Ruling from 1762 to 1796, Russia in those years annexed the Crimean Khanate, absorbed parts of the Caucasus, and, in coordination with Austria and Prussia participated in the partitions of Poland. Wars against the Ottoman Empire, in this period were particularly consequential. The Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji in 1774 granted Russia territorial gains and the right to act as protector of Orthodox Christians within Ottoman lands, a doctrine whose ambiguity dictates the current crisis. In 1783, she annexed eastern Georgia, extending Russian reach deeper into the Caucasus.

Under Tsar Nicholas I

Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 was repelled at enormous cost, but the patriotic defence it required strengthened Russian national consciousness and elevated Russia's standing in Europe. Tsar Alexander I emerged from the conflict as one of the architects of the post-war settlement, playing a central role at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, where Russia secured the bulk of Poland. The Congress also produced the Concert of Europe, the system of great power cooperation that Russia would simultaneously uphold and strain in the decades that followed. Under Tsar Nicholas I, who ascended the throne in 1825, Russian foreign policy took on a more assertive character. Russia continued expansion in the Caucasus and deepened Russian involvement in Ottoman affairs, framing both in terms of the protection of Orthodox Christian populations. The Treaty of Adrianople in 1829 concluding another Russo-Turkish war, granted the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia significant autonomy under Russian oversight, extending Russian influence deep into Ottoman Europe. By 1853, Nicholas had come to regard the Ottoman Empire as a state in terminal decline and one whose succession Russia intended to shape, an ambition that was in significant divergence with other European powers that makes this crisis so important.



The Holy Sites Disputes in Jerusalem

The mid-19th-century political spectrum was characterised by its religious rivalries and strategic alliances, and held a few key players. In this section, we shall examine the ideological and geopolitical context of the Holy Sites dispute leading into 1853.

France

France remained a critical global player under the newly established Second Empire of Napoleon III. It possessed significant political ambition and sought to restore the nation's prestige following the Napoleonic era. A defining characteristic of French strategy was its claim to be the official "Protector" of Catholic interests in the Ottoman Empire. France argued that a 1740 treaty gave it the exclusive right to act as the legal guardian of Catholic people and holy sites. Politically, France's primary objective was to ensure that the Roman Catholic Church regained the keys to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem from the Orthodox Monks. To attain this objective, France turned to aggressive diplomacy, and in May 1852, the French sent an 80-gun ship, Charlemagne, up the Bosphorus. Under pressure from France, the Ottoman government granted key concessions to the Roman Catholics, which further strained relations between Turkey and Russia.

Russia

While Russia remained the traditional guardian of the Eastern Orthodox faith, the French naval provocation and the subsequent handover of the keys exhausted a portion of Russia's diplomatic patience. The state felt its historic rights, protected since the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, were being sidelined by French "gunboat diplomacy." The main pillar of its foreign policy was the policy of Pan-Orthodoxy, where it built its identity as the saviour of the 12 million Orthodox subjects within the Ottoman Empire. After the Sultan granted the concessions to the Catholics in late 1852, Russia under Tsar Nicholas I constantly worked to reassert its dominance.

In early 1853, Russia escalated the conflict by sending Prince Alexander Menshikov on a special mission to Constantinople. Politically, Russia's primary objective was to regain the keys and force the Sultan to sign a formal treaty (Sened) that would recognise the Tsar's right to protect all Orthodox Christians in Ottoman lands. Demanding this treaty was a way in which Russia ensured the prevention of getting diplomatically isolated or religiously threatened in the Holy Land. However, the Sultan, encouraged by British diplomats who feared Russian expansion, viewed this demand as a direct threat to Ottoman sovereignty. The failure of the Menshikov Mission in May 1853 became the point of no return, leading Russia to occupy the Danubian Principalities and setting the stage for a continental war.

Ottoman Empire

In the southern part of Europe, the Ottoman Empire was characterised by its role as the sovereign over Jerusalem, navigating the Eastern Question. Ottoman officials and the Sultan envisioned maintaining a delicate balance between competing Christian denominations to prevent territorial and political expansion by foreign powers into their region. At the crux of the geopolitical scene emerged the Vienna Note, a failed diplomatic attempt by Austria, Britain, and France to prevent war through ambiguous language. Internally, the Ottoman administration was under intense pressure to choose between French demands and Russian threats. Armed with the promise of British naval support and growing nationalist sentiments, the Ottomans set their targets on maintaining sovereignty. Under this, the primary mechanism they employed was a firm refusal to grant Russia a formal Sened (treaty) over its citizens, which led the Sultan to declare war on Russia in October 1853.

30 November 1853:

The destruction of the Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Sinop on November 30, 1853, transforms the geopolitical landscape and power hierarchy of the continent. This escalation, marking the first major use of explosive shells in naval history, threatens the existing power balance of Europe. European powers marked by decades of peace since 1815 formed alliances and consolidated their naval powers to combat the Russian threat, fueled by a public outcry in London and Paris. Russia's expansionist policies and quest for religious dominance triggers a restructuring of European power dynamics and politics.
Therefore, as this cabinet convenes the Holy Land sees the emergence of a continental war, and a persistent fear of changing power dynamics among its countries.

The Danubian Principalities

The Danubian Principalities refer to historical regions of Moldavia and Wallachia, which were Ottoman vassal states along the Danube River.
Moldavia and Wallachia emerged as independent principalities in the 14th century but fell under Ottoman suzerainty through military defeats, and agreements in the early 15th century and 16th century. Even after being under the Ottoman Empire, the Danubian principalities retained internal autonomy. The principalities controlled trade routes that linked northern Europe to the Black Sea. They were vulnerable invasion routes in southeastern Europe.

Wallachia

Wallachia, north of the Lower Danube River, was found around 1330 . It was important in trade as it controlled the Danube River, and the Danube River gave it access to the Black Sea routes using ports like Brăila. This geographical position made Wallachia a trade intermediary, enabling it to generate its revenue through customs, exports, and transit. Trade, therefore, was the backbone of Wallachia's urban economy. It exported goods that consisted of salt, cereals, livestock, animal products, and skin. Wallachia came under Ottoman suzerainty around 1417, becoming a tributary state obliged to pay an annual tribute to the Sultan. It however, retained internal autonomy governed by a Hospodar and a council of boyars, though the Sublime Porte retained the right to influence its political affairs. Several rulers attempted to break free of this arrangement, most notably Vlad III in the late fifteenth century, but none succeeded. Unlike Moldavia, Wallachia never became a fully absorbed Ottoman province, a distinction owed largely to its mountainous terrain and the resilience of its ruling class.

Under the Ottomans, Wallachia's trade was not fully monopolized, as non-monopoly products circulated freely within the markets of the Ottoman Empire. Ports such as Brăila and Giurgiu were returned to the principality due to treaties and agreements that helped them build trading hubs using the Danube River. By the eighteenth century, however, the Ottoman Empire had restricted Wallachian access to certain Black Sea ports, limiting its economic reach. The Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, concluded following Russian victory in the Russo-Turkish War, granted Wallachia freedom of trade and restored several key Danube ports, though the principality remained nominally under Ottoman suzerainty, now with a conspicuous degree of Russian oversight.

Moldavia

The principality of Moldavia was founded around 1359, breaking away from Hungarian influence. Early rulers strengthened their power by using the trade routes to their advantage and importing goods like spices, silks, and jewels. Moldavia itself exports livestock, grain, fish, honey, wax, etc., as their primary goods.

Trade privileges allowed foreign merchants from places like Transylvanian Saxons or Poles to make customs revenue that later funded state institutions, fortifications, and military campaigns.

Under Stephen the Great, Moldavia reached its peak and defeated Ottoman incursions. This victory allowed them to control the vital Black Sea ports temporarily and enhance their direct access to Mediterranean shipping.
However, Moldavia accepted the Ottoman suzerainty in 1456 to avoid the destruction of the principality. They got their vassal status later in 1538 when Sultan Süleyman, suppressed a rebellion by Prince Petru Rareș. This rebellion resulted in the annexation of the southern coastal strip and deprived Moldavia of the full control of its most important Black Sea outlets and shifted its dependency on land routes.

Moldavia also had internal autonomy similar to Wallachia. Towns had a mixed economy that depended on agriculture, craftsmanship, and commerce. They were resilient despite Ottoman oversight. During the 18th Century, Russian influence grew stronger in the regions because of continued annexation. The Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, following Russian victory, put an end to the Ottoman trade policy in Moldavia and returned it the key access to the Danube River and the Black Sea. This also helped them expand their agriculture and allowed them to do free commerce with any nation, although it was still under the Ottoman Empire.

Ideologies and Political Alignments

Pan-Slavism and Orthodox Solidarity

To understand Russia's justification for intervention in Ottoman territories, and the anxieties that intervention provoked among the other great powers, it is necessary to understand two ideological forces that shaped Russian foreign policy in this period: Pan-Slavism and Orthodox Solidarity. Both reflect genuine currents of thought within Russian society and politics, and it is precisely this ambiguity that made them so difficult for the other powers to dismiss or accommodate.

Pan-Slavism

Pan-Slavism was the belief that the Slavic peoples, among them Russians, Ukrainians, Serbs, Croats, Bulgarians, Poles, and others, shared a common heritage and ought to be united under a single political identity. Historically, Slavic populations had been among the most vulnerable to external domination, subject to centuries of conquest and, in the case of the Ottoman Empire, the target of some of the largest slave raids in history. By the nineteenth century, however, Slavic political consciousness had grown considerably. The Russian Empire, as the largest and most powerful Slavic state, positioned itself as the natural leader of this movement, the champion of Slavic peoples wherever they remained under foreign rule.This ambition had direct implications for the Balkans. The largely autonomous Eyalets of the region contained significant Slavic populations living under Ottoman suzerainty, and Russia had already established considerable influence over their governance, particularly following the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829. When Russian forces occupied Wallachia and Moldavia in July 1853, Pan-Slavism provided part of the ideological justification.

Furthermore, the Austrian Empire, composed of many ethnicities and largely Catholic in character, therefore, Austria-Hungary had strong reasons to resist the spread of Pan-Slavic sentiment. A successful Russian expansion under Pan-Slavic rhetoric risks inspiring nationalist movements among the empire's own Slavic subjects, threatening the internal cohesion of a state already strained by ethnic diversity.

Orthodox Solidarity

The more explicit justification Russia offered for its intervention was Orthodox Solidarity, the claim that the Ottoman Empire mistreated its Orthodox Christian subjects and that Russia, as their protector, had both the right and the obligation to intervene on their behalf. The Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji in 1774 had granted Russia a degree of formal standing in this regard, and Russian Tsars had invoked it periodically ever since.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate, the seat of Eastern Orthodoxy, sat within Ottoman Constantinople, a fact that lends Russian claims of Orthodox protection a symbolic weight.

This places Russia in direct tension with France, which has long styled itself the protector of Catholic communities within Ottoman lands. The dispute over the rights of Christian clergy in Jerusalem is in part a collision between these two competing claims of religious guardianship

Ottoman Tanzimat Reformism

The Ottoman Tanzimat Reform refers to the reorganisation era of the Ottoman Empire under Sultan Mahmud II. It was a movement to modernise the army of the Ottoman Empire. The project was under Mustafa Reşid Pasha, who was the foreign minister and the edict's chief architect. The reforms were made based on the past actions of the sultan to modernise(mainly after the 1826 abolition of the Janissaries). But the 1839 edict marked the formal, empire-wide launch of the sustained program of administrative, legal and societal reorganisation.

By the early 1800s, the empire started showing defects in its army by continuous defeats in battles like the Napoleonic wars, Greek revolts and various other crises. Sultan Mahmud II began this unofficially by abolishing the Janissary in 1826, who were an elite infantry force but had become corrupt. This dismantling allowed the emergence of a stronger central bureaucracy. Still, the Ottomans were weak, and we could see this by their losing parts in regions like the Balkans to Greece and Russia, which highlighted their need to reform. When Mahmud's son Abdülmecid I ascended the throne in 1839, the era officially began. The Edict of Gülhane declared the Sultan's commitment to perfect security of life, honour and fortune in the empire.

The Modernisation Ideology was adopted mainly to keep up with the powers of Europe and mainly their neighbours. The Edict aimed to strengthen the central government's control over the provinces, reduce local autonomy and strengthen itself against threats. The Edict was also important for equality in the Ottoman Empire as it promised security of life, honour, and property to everyone regardless of religion or ethnicity. Though the edict was made by the Ottoman Empire, it was heavily influenced by the West for modernisation.

The Reformist Bloc/Tanzimat Faction

It was led by Mustafa Reşid Pasha. Its major supporters were the Western-educated or western orientated people or diplomats. It was backed by Sultan Abdülmecid I, as Reşid would receive a lot of backlash from the conservatives of the Empire. It was strongly pro-British and pro-French. Reşid has made close ties with British and French statesmen, and he relied on them during the Egyptian Crisis. This alignment was strategic as Britain and France were seen as safe countermeasures against Russian expansion.

Conservative / Anti-Reformist Bloc

It comprised traditional ulema, high-ranking officials who used to benefit from the old system. They opposed rapid Westernisation, the principle of religious equality and wanted to stay privileged. They used tactics like rumours or direct challenges to stop the Reformist Bloc. After the death of Mahmud II, they blamed Reşid for his death. After the Egyptian crisis eased, they openly attacked Reşid's reforms; however, the Sultan's protection did not let them demolish this.
The Sultan supported this because he wanted reforms to act as protection from external threats like Egypt and Russia and he also required western support to do so.

Ideologies:

Liberalism: It was an ideology that supported modernization as it was important for the protection of the Empire. It was heavily influenced by the British and the French. They supported westernisation and wanted equality. They drafted new codes and rules.

Conservatism: They were mostly people who belonged to Islam and wanted no one else to get privileges except them. They openly hated these reforms and said that it was against Islam to give all religions equal rights.

Centralism: It was mostly run by western style bureaucrats. Post 1826, reforms already started. Tazimat statesmen believed modern warfare depended on a hierarchical, rational legal state. They aimed to abolish tax farming and wanted to replace it with salaried officials.

Nationalism: In the background of it all, Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians and others had already aimed for a separate nation from the Ottoman Empire. In the Ottoman empire, nationalism to the people was supporting their own religion over the Ottoman Empire. The Tanzimat aimed to combat these people and avoid separation from the Ottoman Empire.

Nationalism

By definition, nationalism is the ideological belief that a people sharing a common language, culture, and history should possess the sovereign right to govern themselves within a defined state. For mid-19th-century Europe, it was one of the most defining pillars of the geopolitical landscape. All major players saw the mobilisation of national identity as a means to achieve their political objectives. This era saw the concentration of power in the hands of leaders who used "prestige politics" to stay popular. For instance, French political capital under Napoleon III primarily lay in the hands of the Catholic electorate, who demanded that France assert its national greatness in the Holy Land. Nationalism also became a stakeholder in shaping the day-to-day context of citizens; the defence of "holy sites" was seen as a symbol of pride and unity. Therefore, the public and the leaders were on the same page about wanting to increase their power in foreign lands, creating a climate in which religious disputes became defining parts of Europe's national honour.

The Clashing National Identities

The mid-19th century witnessed a dramatic build-up of nationalistic fervour. Russia was determined to assert itself as the "Third Rome" and the leader of the Slavic world, and expanded its influence through the policy of Pan-Orthodoxy. This meant Russia claimed the right to protect 12 million Orthodox subjects within the Ottoman Empire, viewing them as part of a broader Russian spiritual nation. France, already a traditional power, responded to Russian ambitions with a renewed commitment to its role as the "Protector of Catholics," seeking to restore the national prestige lost after the Napoleonic era.

This rivalry escalated with the dispute over the keys to the Church of the Nativity in 1852. France and Russia quickly engaged in a race for diplomatic dominance; by 1853, the Tsar's demand for a formal treaty (Senatus-Consultus) shattered the balance of power in the East and deepened mistrust. While Russia maintained its claim to religious leadership, the French challenge through "gunboat diplomacy" proved that the status quo in Jerusalem was obsolete.

On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire also experienced a rise in defensive nationalism. Threatened by internal ethnic rebellions in the Balkans and external pressure from the Tsar, the Sultan embarked on ambitious modernisation programs (the *Tanzimat*) to create a unified Ottoman identity. Between 1850 and 1853, the Ottoman refusal to yield to Russian demands reflected the widespread belief that national survival required total sovereignty over its own citizens.

The Paradox of Protection and Sovereignty

European nationalism was defined by its rigid claims of "protection" rather than simple land-grabbing. The most famous of these was Russia's claim to be the sole guardian of the Orthodox faith, a response to the perceived danger of French Catholic expansion. It relied on a specific mechanism: the belief that the Tsar's authority crossed international borders. The plan left no room for flexibility; once the Russian public was stirred into a religious frenzy, the Tsar was locked into a path of confrontation.

Other powers followed similar patterns. The British "National Interest" envisioned the containment of Russia to protect the route to India, emphasising the "Balance of Power." The Ottoman Sultan stated a firm refusal of the Menshikov Mission, viewing Russian "protection" as a direct threat to their national existence. These nationalistic goals, often fueled by public outcry in London, Paris, and St. Petersburg, placed enormous pressure on governments. The moment one nation claimed a "holy right," its rivals felt compelled to follow suit, with the fear that hesitation could mean national humiliation.

Thus, nationalism in Europe before 1853 meant that nations claimed to protect religious "brothers" in the name of peace, but the very existence of these exclusive national identities and rigid claims of protection made conflict almost unavoidable. This fostered rivalry and fear, transforming a local church dispute into a continental war that could not be stopped.

Current Situation

The Eastern Question, long the defining anxiety of European diplomacy, has ceased to be a question. Events over the course of 1853 have moved with a speed that has outpaced the capacity of the great powers to manage them, and the Ottoman Empire now finds itself at war with Russia, a war that has already drawn first blood on both land and sea.

Menshikov Mission

The crisis has its immediate origins in the Menshikov Mission of early 1853. Tsar Nicholas I, long convinced that the Ottoman Empire was approaching collapse and that Russia's interests in its succession needed to be secured, dispatched Prince Alexander Menshikov to Constantinople with a set of demands that went considerably further than anything the Sublime Porte could reasonably accept. Menshikov pressed for Russian rights over the holy sites of Jerusalem and a sweeping treaty that would grant Russia the formal right to act as protector of all Orthodox Christian subjects within Ottoman lands. The implications were significant. Such an arrangement would have effectively given Russia a permanent basis for interference in Ottoman internal affairs, a degree of leverage that the Sublime Porte, encouraged by signals of support from Britain and France, was unwilling to concede. After weeks, Menshikov withdrew from Constantinople in May 1853. Russia severed diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire shortly thereafter.

Occupation

In July 1853, Russian forces crossed into the Danubian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, territories nominally under Ottoman suzerainty that Russia had occupied before and over which it had exercised considerable political influence since the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829. Russia frames the move as a temporary measure. The occupation of sovereign Ottoman territory was an act of considerable aggression by any conventional measure, and the Sublime Porte was not alone in recognising it as such. Britain and France have moved their fleets into the eastern Mediterranean. On 23 October 1853, the Ottoman Empire formally declared war on Russia, issuing an ultimatum demanding the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Principalities. Fighting has broken out along the Danube with Ottoman forces under Omar Pasha engaging Russian troops in a series of engagements that demonstrating great Ottoman resistance.

Battle of Sinop

The situation has escalated decisively on the morning of 30 November 1853. Vice Admiral Pavel Nakhimov, commanding the Russian Black Sea Fleet, descended upon the Ottoman naval squadron anchored in the port of Sinop on the northern Anatolian coast.

The Russian fleet, equipped with shell-firing guns, devastated the squadron almost entirely. Seven frigates, three corvettes, and several smaller vessels are destroyed. It is the most significant naval engagement in the Black Sea in a generation, and its consequences extend far beyond the military. The Battle of Sinop has sent shockwaves through the European capitals, particularly in London and Paris.

The Crimean Crisis Cabinet convenes today, the 30th of November 1853, in the immediate aftermath of Sinop. Russian forces remain in occupation of Wallachia and Moldavia. Ottoman and Russian armies are engaged along the Danube. Britain and France are positioned and their patience is running short. Every power in this cabinet faces choices whose consequences will extend far beyond the present moment, and the decisions made here today may determine whether this remains a war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

Response from the powers

Russia

Tsar Nicholas I has long regarded the Ottoman Empire as a state in terminal decline, and the question of what follows its collapse as one that Russia must shape before its rivals do. Decades of southward expansion, the establishment of influence over the Danubian Principalities, and the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji's provisions for the protection of Orthodox Christians have all pointed toward a moment of reckoning with Constantinople, and Russia believes that moment has arrived.

Response: Russia's confidence in its position has been shaped by both ideology and military calculation. It believes that Orthodox Solidarity and the legal precedents of prior treaties give Russia a defensible basis for its actions. The Battle of Sinop on 30 November, in which the Russian Black Sea Fleet destroyed the Ottoman naval squadron at anchor, has demonstrated decisive military superiority in the region and has, in Russia’s view, strengthened its hand at any future negotiating table. As of the freeze date, Russia remains in occupation of Wallachia and Moldavia and in active conflict with the Ottoman Empire along the Danube. It has achieved its immediate military objectives but finds itself in a position of deepening diplomatic isolation.

The Ottoman Empire

The crisis of 1853 for the ottomans is an immediate military emergency. The Russian occupation of Wallachia and Moldavia and the refusal of Russia's proposal under the guidance of Britain and France, signals an imminent alliance that the empire wishes to utilise.

Response:

The Ottoman declaration of war on Russia in October 1853 followed the failure of successive diplomatic efforts, including the Vienna Note, to produce terms that Constantinople found acceptable. The empire's leadership concluded that further negotiation from a position of occupation offered diminishing returns, and that a military response, however risky, was preferable to continued concession. Fighting along the Danube has been more sustained than many anticipated, with Omar Pasha's forces offering creditable resistance. The Battle of Sinop, however, has exposed significant vulnerabilities.

The destruction of the Ottoman Black Sea squadron has weakened the empire's naval position considerably and demonstrated the gap between Ottoman and Russian military capacity at sea.As of the freeze date, the Ottoman Empire is at war, its navy has suffered a devastating blow at Sinop, but is showing remarkable strength on the banks of Danube. Its territorial integrity is directly compromised by the Russian occupation of the Principalities, however, it awaits British and French reinforcements .

Great Britain

Britain's underlying concern is straightforward. A Russia that succeeds in extracting sweeping concessions from the Ottoman Empire, or that presides over its partition, would emerge as the dominant power in a region through which Britain's commercial and imperial connections to India and the East run. The Black Sea, the Bosphorus, and the Dardanelles are centers of a global trading system in which Britain has more at stake than any other power. Russian dominance over them or decisive influence upon them, is a prospect that successive British governments have treated as incompatible with British security. The crisis of 1853 is the most serious test of that position in a generation, and the manner in which Britain responds will define the credibility of its foreign policy for years to come.

Response:
Britain's response has thus far been measured, a fleet deployment in the Mediterranean equipped to aid and diplomatic support for the Vienna Note. The 30th of November and the destruction of the Ottoman Black Sea squadron at Sinop, however, has made continued restraint a position that is becoming harder to defend in Parliament and in the capitals of allied powers.As of the freeze date, Britain stands at the edge of a decision it has spent months attempting, sinop has made deferral expensive. The costs of intervention are real, but the costs of inaction, strategic, and reputational are becoming harder to dismiss.

France

For France, the crisis of 1853 arrives at a moment of particular sensitivity. The Second French Republic has recently given way to the Second Empire under Napoleon III, a leader acutely conscious of France's need to reassert its standing as a great power after decades of revolutionary upheaval and post-Napoleonic diplomatic containment. The Eastern Question, which might in other circumstances have been a peripheral concern, has become for Paris both a genuine strategic interest, a chance to demonstrate that France is once again a power whose voice carries weight in the affairs of Europe.

On the practical side, French commercial interests in the eastern Mediterranean are considerable, and the prospect of Russian dominance over the straits and the Black Sea trade routes is one that Paris regards with the same unease as London. On the symbolic side, France has long styled itself the protector of Catholic communities within Ottoman lands, a role that the dispute over the holy sites of Jerusalem brought into sharp relief. It was French pressure on behalf of Catholic clergy that first provoked Russia's counter-demands, making France in some sense the original party to the diplomatic quarrel that has since spiralled into occupation and war. Having helped set the crisis in motion, Paris has a particular interest in shaping how it resolves.

Response: France has moved in close alignment with Britain throughout the crisis, deploying its fleet to the eastern Mediterranean and lending diplomatic support to the Ottoman position. The Entente between Paris and London is a departure from a century of rivalry, and demonstrating its durability in a moment of genuine pressure is as important to France as any specific outcome in the Black Sea.

The two powers have coordinated their signals to Russia, their support for the Vienna Note, and their posture in the face of continued Russian intransigence.The French Mediterranean fleet was shifted to Besika Bay, where the military presence served to reinforce the Ottoman government.

As of 30 November 1853, France remained in a state of strategic readiness. While a formal declaration of war has not yet been issued, French warships are set to enter the Black Sea if and when required. Within the halls of power in Paris, there is a prevailing belief that a short and victorious war will fix the balance of power and force a Russian retreat.

Austria

The Danubian Principalities, currently under Russian occupation, share a border with Habsburg territory. The spread of Pan-Slavic sentiment, which Russia has invoked to justify its intervention, poses a direct ideological threat to an empire that governs more ethnic groups than perhaps any other state in Europe.

On one hand, the Danube is Austria's commercial lifeline to the east, and Russian control over its lower reaches would give Russia leverage over Habsburg trade that Austria is unwilling to concede. On the other hand, Austria is equally reluctant to see the Ottoman Empire collapse entirely. A sudden Ottoman retreat from the Balkans would create a vacuum that Slavic nationalist movements, many of them hostile to Habsburg rule, would rush to fill.

Response: Austria's response has been to pursue diplomacy, the Vienna Note of August 1853, Austria's most significant contribution to the crisis thus far, was a serious attempt to construct a compromise acceptable to all parties.

Its failure, accepted by Russia, rejected in its amended form by the Ottoman Empire, and ultimately abandoned, has raised the stakes for choosing an alliance. As of the freeze date, Austria has neither entered the war nor aligned itself formally with either side. It has mobilised troops along its border with the Principalities, but has stopped well short of intervention. However, most in Austria believe that neutrality cannot be maintained indefinitely.

The Principalities and Minor Powers

The Russian occupation of Wallachia and Moldavia in July 1853 produces an immediate and disruptive political reality for the populations and rulers caught within it. When General Gorchakov's forces moved into the Principalities, in Wallachia, Prince Barbu Ştirbei, faced with the full weight of Russian military presence and pressure to submit to the Tsar, chose exile departing for Vienna in October 1853. In Moldavia, Prince Grigore Ghica refused to acknowledge Russian authority and was forced to resign under pressure shortly thereafter. Tsar Nicholas I has responded by placing both principalities under direct Russian administration. The tributary payments that had historically flowed to Constantinople were redirected to Russia.

Within the Principalities themselves, opinions are divided. Those who had looked to Russia as a protector of Orthodox Christian communities and a counterweight to Ottoman suzerainty are broadly accepting of the occupation. Those with stronger ties to the Ottomans, however, still pose a strong resistance. For now, most minor powers remain on the margins of the crisis.

Present day: It is 30 November 1853. The smoke has not yet cleared from the port of Sinop, where the Russian Black Sea Fleet bombed the Ottoman squadron and the reverberations of this engagement are being felt in every European capital. The crisis that began as a dispute over religious rights in Jerusalem has drawn the great powers of Europe to the edge of a wider war. The occupation continues, and the window in which statecraft can still determine the outcome is closing. The power to shape what comes next now rests in the hands of this Cabinet.

Tips for Further Research

1. For the Crimean Crisis Cabinet, note that the freeze date of the committee is 30th November 1853, any events after the given date will not be taken into account.

2. Make sure to review the study guide well as it contains the basic outline of the topics to be covered in the committee. Note that the study guide also contains the issues that need to be resolved and the basic questions the directive must answer. You may use the study guide as a starting point and make notes based on it for your understanding.

3. Make sure that you know your portfolio well, what its stance on the occupation and the crisis is, the foreign policy and basic information about the portfolio assigned.

4. The study guide must not be the only research done by a delegate on the agenda. Find things not mentioned in the study guide, the bibliography might not have all the information you need on the agenda. Note that researching on relevant topics is essential as well and must be done.

5. Make sure to research all relevant affairs mentioned in and beyond the study guide intensively, successful solutions, solutions that have failed and the complications that have emerged in the topic.

Additional notes:

1. Make sure to come up with new solutions that haven't been thought of before and are actually implementable in the real world of 1853. Plagiarism (copying solutions or matters from any website) of any kind is strictly prohibited. If any directive is found with plagiarized material, the directive will be scrapped off and the bloc members will be marked down. The upper limit for sealing plagiarism is 15 percent for the Crimean Crisis Cabinet.

2. Note that adherence to the foreign policy is a must for all delegates. Anything said that goes against the policy of the country or portfolio will not be accepted. However, the EB is open to minor alterations if such a situation arises. Note that the EB must be informed about such changes beforehand.

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