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Tahned Tantiyavarong was born on December 1, 1992 in Las Vegas, Nevada. At the age of 2, Tahned and his family moved to Thailand and lived there for the next 5 years of his life. After 6 years, in 1997, Tahned and his family moved back to the United States and lived in San Jose, California, where Tahned graduated from Evergreen Valley High School. He then attended University of California, Merced in the fall of 2011 and is currently a Political Science major with an emphasis on International Relations. As such, his paper discusses various international relations theories and their effectiveness in describing the international system. After pursuing his interest in international relations and graduating from UC Merced, Tahned hopes to study law and attend law school.



**Theoretical Factors Contributing to the Onset of War:  
The Crimean War**

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## **Causes of the Crimean War**

*When can their glory fade? O the wild charge they made!"—Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

These words, from the poem “Charge of the Light Brigade”, rung for decades reminding people of the ill-fated initiation of the Crimean War, where participant countries hastily rushed in the fray of battle – perhaps even without reasonable cause. As an interstate conflict that occurred between 1853 and 1856, this war stood as the first modern war of its time. Involving major powers such as the United Kingdom, France, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia, this war documented many firsts: use of the telegraph, use of railroads for military mobilization, and live war coverage. Also notable was the pioneering of modern nursing practices and medical innovations. These milestones marked a new era of warfare where trenches and rifles first entered the battle field, which effectively served as a precursor to a later major war – World War I. As such, the aftermath revealed the inferiority of the Russian military and their need to modernize. Moreover, the outgrowths brought on by the war would later serve as a context that influenced the underlying causes of WWI. Because of these ramifications, it is important to note the significance of the Crimean War and to also observe its causes – both intermediate and underlying. Generally, historians agree that the underlying cause of the Crimean War stemmed from the waning power of the Ottoman Empire and the implications resulting from it. In addition, an intermediate cause that could be noted is the tensions which burgeoned from ambitions for prestige and influence by the major powers. These reasons appear to be the leading causes of the Crimean War and are supported by a number of studies and theories in the field. Hence, when considering all possible causes, it is generally agreed upon that the overall culmination of an unstable international system and also a catalyst of prestige driven disputes is what drove the participant powers to war. It was indeed a wild charge that they made.

### **Underlying Causes:**

#### *Breakdown of Systemic Stability*

Before the Crimean War broke out, the international system was characterized by the Concert of Europe, which was known as a “vague consensus among the European monarchies favoring preservation of the territorial and political status quo” (“Concert of Europe”). In essence, it was a balance of power system that

was structured during the Congress of Vienna which followed the end of Napoleonic Wars in 1815. Among the members were the original powers of the quadruple alliance responsible for the defeat of Napoleon: the United Kingdom, the Russia Empire, Austria, and Prussia. In time, France too would later become included as a fifth member, which then established an initially effective balance of power among the Great powers where each served to curb each other's imperialistic ambitions. Thus, order and stability was effectively maintained in part by "holding periodic congresses in which they deliberated jointly and attempted to strike agreements that would both preserve the balance of power" (Nye). This configuration served as the context preceding the Crimean War, and it is the demise of this balance that contributed to the onset of war.

A major reason for the unraveling of the Concert of Europe was the Ottoman Empire, or rather its decline. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire was in a state of instability and was characterized by political and economic setbacks. As such, this weakened state brought about the first use of the phrase "sick man of Europe", which was used to describe "a European country experiencing a time of economic difficulty and/or impoverishment", or in other words, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire (National Archives). As a result, if the Ottoman Empire were to collapse, it would become easy pickings for nearby powers such as Austria and Russia to gobble up. This weakness caused the Ottoman Empire to be of great interest in Europe as its collapse would give a clear opportunity for the imperialistic ambitions of other major powers – especially the Russian Empire. Particularly, Russia gladly saw the Turk's decline as a chance to gain influence in the Middle East region and also to gain access to the Mediterranean (National Archives). This zealous behavior, however, did not bode well with the United Kingdom and France who, in adherence to the current balance of power, saw this potential expansion as a threat to their own influence in the region.

Moreover, since "states are concerned with their standing in power and/or prestige" in the international system, Russia's and Austria's gains over a collapsed Ottoman Empire would clearly offset the "ranking scales" of the major powers and increase mutual tensions and conflict (Singer et. al). So then the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would cause a huge shift in power capabilities of the respective nations and also would lead to a breakdown of the balance of power in Europe. As a result, because of fears that the relative power

capabilities would change against their favor, the United Kingdom and France saw a necessity to prop up the declining Ottoman Empire in order to ensure regional stability and to protect their own interests as well as prestige. This commitment later attributed to their abandonment of the norms established during the Congress of Vienna and led to their entrance into the war on the side of the Ottoman Empire (Lambert). In other words, it was this erosion of stability within the system of states that serves as an underlying cause for the Crimean War.

To further elaborate on the connections between this overall systemic instability and the Crimean War, one can note several supporting studies and theories. First to note is the connection between power cycle theory and the decline of the Ottoman Empire. According to power cycle theory, states move through a “generalized, cyclical pattern of capability growth, maturation, and decline” and that there are “critical points” located on specific points near these stages of this cycle (Geller). These critical points characterize a time in a states life where its capabilities do not match its aspiration or vice versa. In turn, power cycle theory states that it is during these critical points that war is more likely for a major power. This theory could effectively be applied to the Ottoman Empire’s situation where it is evident that it is going through a stage of decline; therefore, it should be nearing or at a critical point where the probability of war is especially high.

Also what should be noted are the positions of other 19<sup>th</sup> century major powers, such as France and Russia, on their respective power cycles. For France, what preceded the context of the Crimean War was their defeat in the Napoleonic wars and the European system of power structured around its defeat which, incidentally, “had imposed great humiliations on France” (“Napoleon III”). As a result, France, led by Napoleon III, sought to reestablish French influence in Europe; therefore, relative to its power cycle, France was a rising power and was on the capability growth stage of its power cycle. Accordingly, this status put France near a critical point. As for Russia, its position on its power cycle is unclear because of how its great power status at the time obscured inefficiencies of its government and its economic backwardness, which were not noticed until after its defeat in the war (Lambert). However, this discrepancy between its actual capabilities and its aspirations as a great power also characterizes a critical point in the power cycle. As such, both France and

Russia were at least near critical points on their respective power cycles, and in adherence to power cycle theory, both had high probabilities of going to war. This culmination of war proneness between a number of the major powers thus attributed to the overall war proneness in the region. For the most part, since a number of major powers did indeed go to war while they were at or nearing critical points, power cycle theory proves to be extremely significant in the Crimean War to explain its onset and its relation to the overall system stability – or lack thereof.

Next, a study that could be noted, but that might not necessarily be fully applicable, is the cover law concerning enduring rivalries and conflict. This theory states that “the presence of an enduring rivalry increased the probability of war” (Geller). This relationship appears to be generally true as, according to research, between 1816 and 1976, 47% of all wars take place within enduring rivalries (Geller). However, this consensus erodes when concerning how to define the notion of an enduring rivalry as there are many different criteria for defining it. Among the more widely accepted criteria though is that an enduring rivalry exists between states that have had at least two militarized interstate disputes within a ten year period or three militarized interstate disputes within a 15 year period (Geller). Moreover, there are other sets of criteria that follow along the same lines but none of them can fully prove that there was an enduring rivalry between Russia and the Ottoman Empire as most studies in this subject have only referred to conflicts in 1800s and onward. This data is inadequate when it comes to classifying the Russo-Turkic relationship as most of their conflicts occurred before that time period – there have been 8 Russo Turkic wars before 1800. In all, before the onset of the Crimean war, Russia and the Ottoman Empire have engaged in ten wars and several smaller MIDs. Thus, these data cannot be overlooked when assessing the presence of a rivalry between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and also, how that underlying relationship would increase chances of conflict that would thus destabilize the international system.

Another set of studies that could be used to further explain the onset of the Crimean War and how an unstable system was formed is the type of polarity configuration of the international system. According to leading studies, there are three types of polarity hierarchies: unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar. Moreover, each

hierarchy has their own explanations on how they could be potentially stable. For a unipolar system, it is argued that there is a “stable order” formed through the dominating power of a hegemon; for a bipolar system, there is the notion of a “balanced power” between the two opposing blocs of states (as seen during the Cold War); for a multipolar system, stability is preserved through a “flexibility of alliances” (Geller). This alliance flexibility is defined as the increase in complexity and variety of interaction patterns in between states thereupon creating “cross-cutting cleavages and cross-pressures” that “decrease the likelihood that implacable hostilities will develop” (Wayman). In essence, 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe was structured in a loose multipolar system; therefore, stability was maintained through this alliance flexibility and can be seen by the shifting of alliances between the five powers of the Concert of Europe in order to prevent any one of them from dominating the continent. This set of behaviors and interactions between the major powers came to be effective as the Concert was active in maintaining equilibrium among the powers. However, this only held true for a few years after the Concert of Europe’s formation and soon after, this constant movement of alliances started to become rigid (Lambert). By the time the Crimean War started, the major powers were already set into two opposing blocks: France, the United Kingdom, and a number of smaller powers such as the Sardinians on the side of the Ottomans against the Russian Empire. Subsequently, this rigidity effectively undermined the balance of powers previously established.

This system, however, did not represent a new bipolar hierarchy similar to that of the Cold War, which evidently would have created a stable and relatively peaceful environment. Rather, it still represented a power multipolar system. To clarify, as this may cause some confusion, power multipolarity is defined as when “capabilities are evenly distributed” among the states in a system (Wayman). Conversely, power bipolarity is when capabilities are distributed in a way that two hostile states carry a disproportionate amount of power. In addition, there is a cluster multipolar system, which is defined as when “states are more evenly distributed throughout the [system] with many opportunities for intermediaries and many-cross-cutting loyalties to moderate hostility”, and a cluster bipolar system where “states in the system are tightly packed into two political clusters, with high hostility, and very few or no states play intermediate or cross-cutting roles” (Wayman). In short, power bipolar and power multipolar describe the capability and power distribution among the states of a

system while as cluster bipolar and cluster multipolar describe the distribution of states within a system. Accordingly, the environment present before the onset of the Crimean War is described as power multipolar, as capabilities were evenly distributed among the powers, and cluster bipolar where the states were clustered into two opposing blocs. To assess the war proneness of this hierarchy, the research by Rapkin, Thompson, and Christopherson is of great value. Their research, which draws upon data from the Correlates of War, is based on the reasoning that the hostility bred by certain hierarchy systems “leads to mutual fear and a high probability of warfare” and asserts the relationship between hierarchy and war (Wayman). What they found was that power bipolarity minimizes the magnitude of war as compared to power multipolarity. In addition, they found that cluster multipolarity is less likely to lead to war as compared to cluster bipolarity.

These findings reveals several implications, one of which is that a “combination of power bipolarity and alignment multipolarity” is the best formula for a stable and peaceful system (Wayman). Another implication is how this describes the systemic hierarchy present before the onset of the Crimean War which happens to be the complete opposite – power multipolar and cluster bipolar. Accordingly, this combination is the worst formula possible for stability and peace. With this understanding in mind, one can conclude that the years leading up to the Crimean War should be characterized by a hostile environment with a high probability of conflict. This deduction hits the mark. The environment preceding the war was characterized as both, and thus, is fairly consistent with the research done by Rapkin, Thompson, and Christopherson, especially with the onset of the Crimean War serving as the biggest piece of evidence in support of their research. As such, the instability of the international system at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has shown to be fairly significant underlying cause of the Crimean War.

### **Immediate Causes:**

#### *Prestige and Influence*

Even though the underlying cause, and its supporting research, of the war were noteworthy, it would not have occurred without a catalyst to spark it. One factor contributing to the onset of the Crimean War was the aggressive foreign policies carried out by major powers in order to gain influence in the region – a conse-

quence of a weakening Ottoman Empire. Particularly, in France, the newly proclaimed emperor, Napoleon III, sought to reestablish French prestige which became badly damaged as a result of their defeat in the Napoleonic Wars (“Napoleon III”). This aspiration led France to pursue an increased influence in the region by claiming authority to the Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire and its surrounding area. Moreover, France desired access and control to religious sites in the Holy Land, which led to tensions with the Russian Empire who, seeing itself as the protector of Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire, also sought influence in the Holy lands (National Archives). Later on, Russia, seeing a weakened Ottoman Empire, planned to carve up the European part of Turkey and went a step further by marching troops to occupy the Danubian Principalities, which were controlled by the Ottomans. Subsequently, Russia expected support from other powers such as the United Kingdom and Austria; however, because of the culmination of factors leading to an already hostile international environment – as mentioned before – “neither Britain nor Austria wanted to see Russia controlling the Dardanelles”, which encompassed the Danubian Principalities (Lambert).

As a result, this heightened aggression pressured the Ottoman Empire to retaliate and declare war on the Russian Empire. This hostility subsequently caused the United Kingdom to declare war on the Russia in support of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, France, who also “was desperate for military glory and revenge for its defeat at the hands of Russia in 1812”, followed suit (Lambert). To France, the Crimean War offered a chance of realizing an alliance with the United Kingdom “that would succeed in checking Russian expansion toward the Mediterranean” (“Napoleon III”). This desire came as an outgrowth of past French humiliations during its defeat in the Napoleonic Wars. Hence, Napoleon III sought to glorify France, and in addition, he sought to “exploit the domestic prestige” from the war in order to “stir a national feeling that would enhance the state’s ability to govern”, thereby consolidating his rule (Betts). What resulted were from these pursuits for glory and prestige were the eventual mobilization of forces and the start of the Crimean War. As such, these ambitions for influence and prestige at the wake of the declining Ottoman Empire served as the immediate caused that sparked the war’s onset. It is important to note, however, that without the underlying causes that characterized the environment precluding the war, these immediate causes most likely would not have been enough to start such a large war.

Because of an increasing bipolar environment defining the years leading up to the war, it is beneficial to state the presence of alliances and the consequences that they entail. Drawing from Jack S. Levy's analysis on the relationship between alliance formation and war behavior, it is concluded that alliances characterized by a lack of cross-cutting ties "may lead to war because of the rigidities which prevent the formation of counterbalancing coalitions" (Levy). As previously noted, the context preceding the Crimean War was defined as cluster bipolar where very few or no states play intermediate or cross-cutting roles – Russia for the most part stood alone and isolated from the British and French alliance because of failed diplomatic ventures. Therefore, according to Levy's research, the alliances, which burgeoned due to the immediate causes of the major powers' thirst for influence and prestige, led to an increased likelihood of an ongoing and major conflict. Subsequently, outgrowths of the antagonisms formed as a result of these alliances have carried on for years after the war, as can be seen by the alienation between Russian and Western European powers.

### **Aftermath**

All in all, because of the tensions generated by ambitions of prestige and a deteriorating balance of power system brought on by the declining Ottoman Empire and an increasingly unstable polar hierarchy, the Crimean War rested on a bomb on the verge of exploding. The overall accumulation of events that fostered this environment during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century attributed to both the underlying and immediate effects causing the Crimean War. These individual effects of the underlying or immediate causes acting independently would not have been enough to trigger the war; therefore, it is important to consider their combination and the product it yielded. In other words, the underlying causes acted as the fuel, while as the immediate causes acted as the initial spark that started the fire; each one needs the other to create a sufficient enough flame. In time this flame would generate a lingering heat that would carry on years after the war.

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