

# Exploring Ideological Warfare in the Age of Empire



# Setting the Stage

- **Geopolitical rivalry over Eastern Europe and the Black Sea:**

Territories in Eastern Europe and access to the Black Sea was crucial for trade routes, military positioning, and political dominance.

For Russia, gaining access to the Black Sea meant having warm-water ports for year-round naval power and commercial trade. For the Ottomans, maintaining control over these areas was key to protecting their borders and preserving their influence over Balkan territories. This rivalry was a major driving force behind the Ottoman-Russian War of 1768–1774.

- **Russia's imperial ambitions and Ottoman decline:**

Under Empress Catherine the Great, Russia was aggressively expanding its territory and influence. Catherine wanted access to warm-water ports on the Black Sea, more control over the Balkans, and a stronger presence as a European power. This expansionist vision was wrapped in Enlightenment rhetoric, presenting Russia as a civilizing and liberating force (especially for Orthodox Christians under Ottoman rule).

At the same time, the Ottoman Empire was weakening. It was struggling with internal corruption, military stagnation, and administrative inefficiency. This decline made the empire vulnerable to external threats and less able to respond effectively to Russian aggression.

# Setting the Stage

- **Rise of Enlightenment in European political thought:**

This is a period in 18th century Europe when philosophers and intellectuals began to emphasize reason, individual rights, religious tolerance, and secular governance.

Russia, under Catherine the Great, used enlightenment language like “Liberty and protection of Christians” to justify their expansionist policies.

These ideas were also used to gain support from educated elites and Christian populations living under Ottoman rule.



BALTIC  
SEA

R U S S I A

St. Petersburg

P O L A N D

B L A C K  
S E A

O T T O M A N  
E M P I R E

M E D I T E R R A N E A N

## Causes of the War: Tensions Ignited.

- **Russian expansion and warm-water port ambitions:**

At the time, Russia was landlocked for much of the year due to its cold northern ports freezing in winter. Gaining access to **warm-water ports**(especially through the **Black Sea**)was vital for Russia's **economic trade, naval power, and geopolitical influence**. This ambition brought Russia into direct conflict with the **Ottoman Empire**, which controlled the territory surrounding much of the Black Sea.

- **Religious conflict: Orthodox vs. Muslim subjects:**

**The Russian Empire** presented itself as the **protector of Orthodox Christians**, especially those living under Ottoman rule in the Balkans. Russia used this role to justify intervention and territorial claims.

**The Ottoman Empire** was an Islamic state that governed a diverse population, including millions of **Orthodox Christians**, especially in regions like Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria.

# Causes of the War: Tensions Ignited.

- **Polish crisis and Russian interference:**

In the **Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth**, there was political instability and division between Catholic and Orthodox populations.

Russia supported the **Confederation of Radom**, which aimed to protect the rights of Orthodox Christians in Poland, just like what it claimed to be doing in Ottoman territories.

Russian troops entered Poland to enforce influence, alarming the Ottoman Empire, especially after Russian troops pursued enemies into **Ottoman Moldavia**, violating its sovereignty.

This was one of the final sparks that led the Ottomans to declare war on the Russians in 1768.



**RUSSIAN  
EMPIRE**

**POLISH-  
LITHUANIAN  
COMMONWEALTH**

**OTTOMAN  
EMPIRE**

*Black Sea*

*Black Sea*

SWEDEN

LITHUANIA

Warsaw

WARSAV

BULGARIA

GREECE

GREECE

CRIMEA

Azo  
Séc

# War of Words: Proclamations as Weapons:

Under Catherine the Great, Russia framed its involvement in the Ottoman-Russian War using the language of the Enlightenment.

Rather than portraying the war as simply imperial aggression, Russia claimed it was:

- Fighting for **freedom**, especially of Orthodox Christians under Ottoman Muslim rule.
- Promoting **justice** by challenging what it framed as the "backward" and oppressive Ottoman system.
- Acting as a **protector of Christians**, positioning itself as a civilizing power aligned with Enlightenment values like religious tolerance and moral governance.

In reality, these ideologies were used to justify expansion and domination. This shows how ideology and imperialism were tightly connected in this period.

# War of Words: Proclamation as weapons

Ottoman Empire justified its actions during the war by appealing to **Islamic legal principles (Sharia)** and the authority of the **Sultan as Caliph** (leader of the Muslim world).

These declarations often:

- Framed the war as a **jihad (holy struggle)** to protect Islam from external (Christian) aggression.
- Emphasized the **divinely sanctioned right** of the Ottomans to rule over Muslim and non-Muslim subjects.
- Reinforced the **Sultan's role as protector of the faith**, which was crucial for maintaining internal unity and authority.

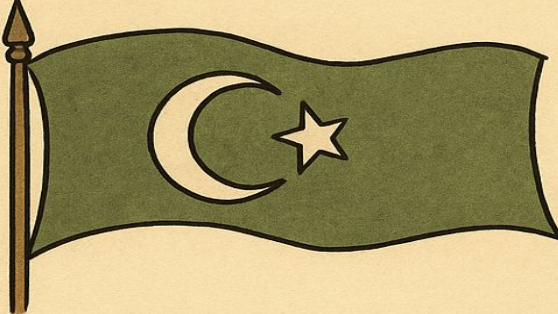
While Russia leaned on Enlightenment ideals, the Ottomans grounded their proclamations in religion and tradition to assert both legal and moral legitimacy.

In this war, both sides weren't just fighting over land, they were also competing over which *idea* of empire should dominate Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region.

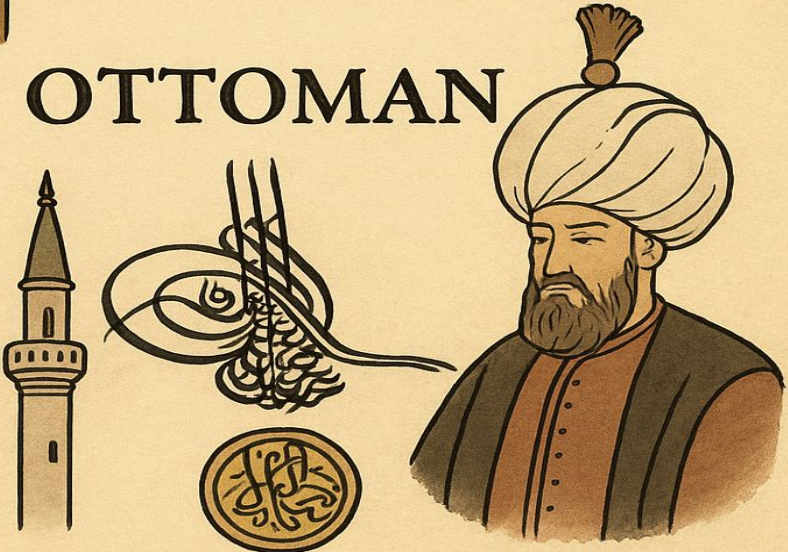
# COMPETING VISIONS OF EMPIRE



**RUSSIAN**



**OTTOMAN**



# The War Unfolds:

- **Battle of Chesme (1770):**

The Russian fleet destroyed the Ottoman navy in the Aegean Sea in this decisive naval battle. This showcased Russia's growing naval power and humiliated the Ottoman forces.

- **Battle of Kagul (1770):**

A significant **land battle** took place in Moldavia where Russian troops, led by General Pyotr Rumyantsev, defeated a much larger Ottoman army. It marked a turning point in the land campaign and solidified Russia's upper hand.

Both battles were crucial in shifting the war's momentum in favor of Russia and were followed by proclamations meant to legitimize and celebrate these victories.



# Civilian reactions to Russian occupation:

**They were varied reactions and could include:**

- **Fear and displacement** due to military presence and violence.
- **Support or cooperation**, especially among Orthodox Christians who welcomed Russian forces as liberators.
- **Resistance or unrest**, particularly in Muslim-majority regions under new Russian control.

This point emphasizes that war impacts not just armies and leaders, but also everyday people, whose responses can shape propaganda, morale, and legitimacy claims on both sides.

# Legitimacy:

After achieving key military victories (like Chesme and Kagul), Russia released formal statements or manifestos to:

- **Publicly justify** their actions and territorial acquisitions.
- **Reassure or persuade** the local populations (especially Orthodox Christians) that Russian rule was beneficial.
- Present their expansion as lawful, enlightened, and even protective, rather than as sheer conquest.

These proclamations were part of Russia's strategy to frame their imperial growth in terms of moral or ideological legitimacy, using Enlightenment language like **freedom**, **civilization**, and **justice**.

## Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774): A Shifting Balance.

The **Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774)** was the peace agreement that ended the Ottoman-Russian War (1768–1774). The two major outcomes of this treaty:

- **Annexation of Crimea:** Although initially declared independent, Crimea came under Russian influence and was formally annexed in 1783. This gave Russia strategic control over the northern Black Sea, fulfilling its long-standing ambition for warm-water access also opening up new trade routes in Russian waters.
- **Religious protectorate role:** The treaty gave Russia the right to represent and protect **Orthodox Christians** living under Ottoman rule. This was a major diplomatic shift, it allowed Russia to interfere in Ottoman internal affairs under the guise of religious protection, setting a precedent for future interventions.

Together, these gains significantly boosted Russia's regional power and weakened Ottoman sovereignty

POLOGNE

EMPIRE  
DE RUSSIE

ODOLIE

*ulovlie*

MOLDAVIE

OTTOMAN

MARE D'AZOF

MALDAVIA

EMMER  
MARIE

MATDAVIA



# Some things to think of:

**Did Enlightenment ideals genuinely shape Russian policy? Did the Ottoman proclamation about religion and tradition truly grant legitimacy? Or is history on the side of the winners after all?...**

**THANK YOU!!!**

