CHAPTER THREE

BATTLES AND DIPLOMACY DURING THE WAR

The Declaration of War

In this chapter I will dwell on the battles of the war to the extent that Ottomans were involved in them, using Ottoman, Russian and European sources in a comparative and critical manner. I will focus on those battles, events and aspects of the war that I see as most important. One of the aims of this chapter is to examine the extent of reforms in the Ottoman army, how it fought, how it was led, organized and supplied. I will also analyse how the Porte carried out its diplomacy in this period, considering the efforts of the great powers and the Porte from the declaration of war in October 1853 until the Treaty of Paris at the end of March 1856.

On 4 October 1853, the Porte’s declaration of war was published in the official newspaper Takvim-i Vekayi. On the same day official notes were sent to the embassies of the four great powers in Istanbul (France, Britain, Austria and Prussia). The next day a leaflet was published in French, bearing the title “Manifeste de la Sublime Porte”.

The declaration was still mild and conciliatory in style. It stated that the Sublime Porte was forced to declare war since Russia had occupied Ottoman territory and had not evacuated it despite various diplomatic efforts. It also announced that, as a last sign of the peaceful intentions of the Porte, the commander of the Rumelian army Ömer Pasha was instructed to allow a period of 15 days for General Mikhail Gorchakov (the Russian commander of the Danubian armies) to evacuate the principalities. Ömer Pasha sent the ultimatum on 8 October 1853, stating that if he received a negative answer or no answer, then hostilities would begin. General Gorchakov replied on 10 October that he was not authorised to remove his armies. Thus from the legal point of view, war was fully declared on the day when General Gorchakov rejected

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1 BOA. HR. SYS. 1189/4. Also see CH, nr. 648, 6 Muharrem 1270 (9 October 1853).
2 BOA. HR. SYS. 907/5, 5 October 1853.
the ultimatum of Ömer Pasha. This point is important because later Nikolai I and some Russian sources claimed that the Porte did not wait until its own ultimatum expired, when Ottoman artillery opened fire on Russian ships on the Danube on 21 October.

Meanwhile Reşid Pasha was afraid that a sudden Russian attack on Istanbul might take place before the end of the ultimatum period. Therefore he requested the French and the British embassies on 8 October to bring some part of their fleets from the Dardanelles to Istanbul. He knew that the ambassadors were instructed and authorised by their governments to bring their fleets to Istanbul in case of necessity to protect the Sultan. Despite this, the ambassadors did not hasten to answer. Their notes came only on 16 October. The French note was positive and clear. It stated that Russia had violated Ottoman territorial integrity and the Porte was now by treaty entitled to freedom of action concerning the Straits. It also indicated that the French fleet was ready to come as a sign of friendship. Further, it stated that due to weather conditions, it was in any case desirable that the fleet enter the Straits. The British response was also positive, though less enthusiastic than that of the French.

On 20 October 1853, the “Emperor and Autocrat of All-Russias” Nikolai I issued his proclamation, finally declaring war on the Porte. Nikolai distorted the facts in this statement to such an extent that it was as though he assumed his subjects had no source of information other than the document itself. He argued that the Porte had declared

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3 Mustafa Budak writes that the Russians rejected the proposal on 17 October, referring to an ATASE document, the contents of which he does not explain. See Budak, op. cit. (1993), p. 41.

4 This date is given by Lane-Poole (op. cit., p. 309). I could not find Reşid Pasha’s note in the BOA; therefore its date is not certain, although I found the replies of the two ambassadors to it.

5 Translation of the French note to the Ottoman foreign ministry. Edmond de la Cour to Reşid Pasha, 16 October 1853. BOA. HR. SYS. 1193/2 enc. 9. I could not find the original of this note.

6 Translation of the British note to the Ottoman foreign ministry. Stratford to Reşid, 16 October 1853. BOA. HR. SYS. 1193/2 enc. 8. I could not find the original of this note.

7 For the Russian original, see Zayonchkovskiy, op. cit., vol. II, part two, p. 531. This proclamation was translated into Bulgarian as well and distributed in Bulgaria. The kocabaşı of Rusçuk (Ruse) sent it to the governor of Silistria, who forwarded it to Ömer Pasha and to the Porte. The proclamation in Bulgarian, its translation into Ottoman Turkish and the letter of the governor of Silistria Mehmed Said Pasha to the grand vizier, dated 18 March 1854 can be found at BOA. A. AMD. 51/1.