In this expanded new edition of his study of the Crimean War, historian Winfried Baumgart (Johannes Gutenberg University–Mainz) a leading expert on the diplomatic history of nineteenth-century Europe argues that the conflict was fought on six fronts (Crimea, the Caucasus, the lower Danube, the Baltic and White Seas, and the Northwest Pacific). Even though most of these regions lay outside the heart of Europe,

the Crimean War contained all the elements for a world war. If the conflict had continued in 1856, Prussia and Sweden would have declared war on Russia and engulfed all Europe in the fray; the United States would have joined the Russian side because of the tension in their relations with Britain. It was the statesmanship of Tsar Alexander II and his advisers that made Russia stop before crossing the Rubicon. In the subsequent fifty-eight years, Europe witnessed only a few short wars. In the age of imperialism, when nationalism and Darwinism wielded great influence on policy-making, the traditional principle of the balance of power was gradually weakened. It became a dead letter in the July crisis of 1914. (253)

The seventeenth-century nation state system, the so-called Westphalian order (after the Treaty of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years’ War) had limited—but not eliminated—the effect of European conflicts. A common international order safeguarded the territorial integrity of national states and ensured, for instance, proper treatment of POWs, through high diplomacy. Napoleon Bonaparte presented the first real challenge to the Westphalian order during his quest for European supremacy. But ultimately, the rise of extreme nationalism in the Great War destroyed it altogether.

The author maintains that diplomacy and the adherence of Europe’s political leaders to the principle of the balance of power kept the Crimean War from becoming a major conflict and reduced its effects. This marked one of the last victories of an old regime Europe based on the sovereign national states system before the descent into chaos and total war in 1914.

Chapters 1–2 concern the war’s causes and the diplomatic efforts to avert it. Baumgart attributes the origins of the war not to the divisive issue of control over of the Holy Land and Jerusalem, but to the desire of European nation states to address Russian expansionism through an alliance and by shoring up the Ottoman Empire. France already had long-standing ties with the Ottomans. And Austria, whose Eastern territories were most directly threatened, wanted to secure them against the Tsar’s territorial intrusion; they accordingly reinforced their Eastern defenses and dispatched troops to the frontier. At first it seemed that these moves would force the Tsar into an accommodation with Austria. But war broke out when Britain and France intervened. Though France deployed far more troops in Crimea than did Great Britain, the war became intimately associated with British history and national identity. Emblematic of that status were the

charge of the Light Brigade during the Battle of Balaclava (25 Oct. 1854) and the career of Florence Nightingale, two famous examples of contemporary British military and cultural identity. The United States’ inclination to support the autocratic Russian regime strained its relations with Britain to the point of bringing them close to fighting each other. Only the restraint of other European powers, such as Sweden, which held back from entering the war, prevented further escalation.

Chapters 3–16 detail the military events of the Crimean War and the diplomatic efforts to bring it to an end. They convey the ferocity of the fighting and the vast resources, human and material, expended during the conflict. Chapters 17–19 treat the war’s consequences, including its acceleration of the European nationalism that laid the foundations of the First World War. The European powers wanted to use diplomacy to keep the conflict from expanding beyond eastern Europe. Ultimately the Crimean War took over 500,000 lives and had dire political ramifications. It was fought with advanced weaponry such as heavy artillery on a scale similar that of the US Civil War.

Lastly, the Crimean War benefited the cause of Italian unification. The Kingdom of Piedmont dispatched its army in support of France, which later enabled Prime Minister Camillo Benso di Cavour to raise the Italian question during the negotiations to end the war.

In the famous session of 8 April 1856, Walewski as president of the congress placed the Italian question on the agenda. This was of course due to the untiring machinations of Cavour behind the scenes and to the wish of Napoleon to do something for Italy. (220)

Winfried Baumgart’s new book offers an astute analysis of both the diplomatic and military aspects of the Crimean War. He is especially perceptive with regard to the static phases of the fighting, which entailed horrific trench warfare and long artillery duels, omens of far worse to come.