The British Empire is the most extensive empire in world history and for a time was the foremost global power. It was a product of the European age of discovery, which began with the global maritime explorations of Portugal and Spain in the late fifteenth century. By 1921, the British Empire ruled a population of between 470 and 570 million people, approximately one-quarter of the world's population. The Légion d'Honneur was awarded to 746 members of the British Armed Forces during the Crimean War (also known as the Russian War) which lasted from 1854 to 1856. Prior to the Crimean War there was no precedent of a mass exchange of awards between allied nations. However, in January 1856 Queen Victoria and the Emperor of France formally agreed to an exchange of awards between France and the British Empire for the first time. These were the first mass awards exchanged between two nations, and the first occasion on which a sovereign was present to receive a Légion d'Honneur from a foreign government. The exchange was the first of its kind, and set a precedent for the future exchange of awards between nations. The British military was in some ways slow to change – bizarrely, mustaches for officers were compulsory until 1916 – but by World War I, British forces were well-equipped and well-trained. The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy, 1853–56. Ashgate Publishing. ISBN 9781409482598. argues that the Baltic was the decisive theatre; Martin, Kingsley. The triumph of Lord Palmerston: a study of public opinion in England before the Crimean War (Hutchinson, 1963). online; Pearce, Robert.