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# The Russian Peace in the Levant

Britain's decision not to supply naval support to the Sublime Porte against Mehmed Ali in January 1833 created a golden opportunity for Russia. Since 1829, St Petersburg had set its Ottoman policy straight. As the 1828–9 Russo-Ottoman war was nearing an end, Russian strategists saw greater benefit in placing the sultan's dominions under their orbit of influence than in dismembering his empire *in toto*. To this end, an offer of alliance had been made to the Porte in June 1829 before the war officially ended, whereby Russian agents had argued that 'for the Sultan's long-term security it was more beneficial to be in a firm and constant alliance with Russia'.<sup>1</sup> But the Porte's plenipotentiary, Serasker Hüsrev Paşa, had rebuffed the offer at the time, considering Russia the cause of the catastrophes the sultan had lately suffered from.<sup>2</sup>

Days before the Treaty of Edirne (Adrianople) was signed on 14 September, Tsar Nicholas I assembled an extraordinary committee to decide upon the Russian strategy. The members of the committee included Kochubei, one of the architects of the 'weak neighbour policy', Count Nesselrode, and D. V. Dashkov, Russia's most prominent expert on 'Turkey'.<sup>3</sup> They agreed to continue the 'Ottoman project' of the 1800s with the belief that the advantages of maintaining the sultan's dominions in Europe were greater than the inconveniences it presented.<sup>4</sup> Their underlying understanding was that a weak neighbour like the Ottoman Empire would never pose an existential threat to Russia and, if Russia could not control the Straits by annexing them, which could prompt a Great Power war, she could ensure her security by ascertaining the closure of the Straits to foreign warships by establishing dominant influence over the sultan.

The tsar signed the 1829 Treaty in part to lay the ground for such influence in the near future.<sup>5</sup> As the Russian historian Alexander Bitis writes, 'through its strategic annexations and extension of Russia's commercial and political rights[,] the treaty . . . served to weaken the Ottoman Empire while preserving its existence'

<sup>1</sup> Krasovskii to Diebitsch, 1 Aug. 1829, RGVIA, f. VUA, d. 4722, ll. 87–8; cf. Bitis, *Russia*, 350.

<sup>2</sup> Nesselrode to I. I. Dibichu, 6 Nov. 1829, *VPR* vol. 2/8, 397–8; General-Lieutenant A. F. Orloff to I. I. Dibichu, 2 Feb. 1830, *VPR* vol. 2/8, 451.

<sup>3</sup> Bitis, *Russia*, 358.

<sup>4</sup> Report of Dashkov, 4 Sept. 1829, *VPR* vol. 2/8 (1995), 292; 'Protocol of the Extraordinary Committee', 4 Sept. 1829, *VPR* vol. 2/8, 278. Also in Bitis, *Russia*, 359–60; Robert J. Kerner, 'Russia's New Policy in the Near East and After the Treaty of Adrianople', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 5(3) (1937): 280–90.

<sup>5</sup> Nesselrode to Butenev, 12 Dec. 1830, *VPR* vol. 17, 175–88.

and making Ottoman authorities believe that it was a generous agreement, as Nicholas I could have actually obtained more territories than he did.<sup>6</sup> The same policy guided the Russian strategists to endorse the French occupation of Algiers in 1830 the following year.<sup>7</sup> By the same token, when the British prime minister, the duke of Wellington, made repeated offers 'for a collective guarantee of the Ottoman Empire' during the 'Greek negotiations' in 1830–32, Russia, despite being committed to her preservation, would not agree with the principle of conserving her territorial integrity entirely.<sup>8</sup>

By 1832, it had become St Petersburg's ultimate goal in the Levant to maintain its privileged hold over the Porte rather than agreeing to the collective European guarantees and to barter away those cherished bits of the 'eastern' empire, such as the Straits and the Caucasus, that served its own interests. This posed a threat to the solidity of the Concert of Europe and the continuation of peace in the continent. But it did not lead to an immediate inter-imperial crisis, since Russian diplomatic rhetoric continued to endorse concerted action while the other Powers were preoccupied with the rising tide of revolutions at home or more immediate diplomatic problems that manifested themselves in Belgium, Portugal, and Algiers, among others.

Only in February 1833, as Ibrahim's armies were marching on Istanbul, when the Porte accepted the Russian offer of military aid and the first Russian squadrons arrived in the Bosphorus, and especially when a defensive alliance treaty was signed between Tsar Nicholas I and Sultan Mahmud II in July, did Russian ambitions in the Levant prompt a major furore in Europe. Distress that the European balance of power could be upset brought the Powers to the brink of war in the summer of 1833 for the first time since the Napoleonic Wars. What follows is a discussion of this new episode of the Eastern Question, when the war between Cairo and Istanbul and the rivalry between Mehmed Ali and Hüsrev turned into a transimperial quandary.

### **The Russian Intervention: 'We Have Been Sick, You the Medicines'**

One month before the Ottoman imperial army was defeated by Ibrahim Paşa in the plains of Konya in December 1832, Russian foreign minister Count Nesselrode announced that Russia would be willing to offer military aid to the Sublime Porte if needed.<sup>9</sup> Russian strategists were concerned that Mehmed Ali's Islamist propaganda campaign in Asia Minor could spark revolts in the Caucasian towns under their control that were predominantly populated by Muslims ready to defy their

<sup>6</sup> Bitis, *Russia*, 361.

<sup>7</sup> See Ch. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Bitis, *Russia*, 466.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *Eastern Question*, 80–81; Bitis, *Russia*, 467–8.

new, 'infidel' Russian overlords. They also looked to avert a potential Egyptian campaign in the Caucasus. In the end, a weaker Ottoman Empire was preferable for the security of Russia than a stronger and better organized empire under Mehmed Ali as their southern neighbours.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, Tsar Nicholas I instructed his agents to inform the Ottoman ministers that Russian naval and military assistance would be supplied only upon the request of Sultan Mahmud II.<sup>11</sup> The Russian ambassador to Istanbul, Apollinari P. Butenev, made an official proposal on the day of the sultan's defeat at Konya (21 December 1832) while a mission was sent to Istanbul to explain the importance the tsar attached to the crisis. Presided over by Lieutenant General Nicolai N. Murav'ev-Karskii (1794–1866), a Russian commander and traveller, who had participated in the Russo-Ottoman war of 1828–9 and who became one of the first chronologists of the crisis, the Russian agents re-articulated their plan: Tsar Nicholas I would demand that Mehmed Ali return his army to Egypt immediately, and send the message that in the case of refusal, the paşa would find in Russia 'an enemy of the revolt' and she would launch military operations against him.<sup>12</sup>

On the receiving end of this proposal were Serasker Hüsrev Paşa and Reisülküttâb Akif Efendi (Hüsrev's protégé). The two men had negotiated with the Russians the peace settlement following the 1828–9 war, and had at the time given the impression to Count Nesselrode that they were 'the bitter enemies of Russia'. Since then, Russian agents had been actively looking to break the anti-Russian sentiment in Istanbul and make personal acquaintance with 'the most influential people' around the sultan, 'in particular, with Serasker Hüsrev [Paşa]'.<sup>13</sup> Without overestimating the significance of the 'confidential relations' with key Ottoman ministers, they strove 'to... control and from time to time direct the actions of [the Ottoman imperial council through them.]'<sup>14</sup>

In November 1832, Serasker Hüsrev Paşa was opposed to accepting the Russian proposal. As an observer reported, at one imperial council meeting he had so insistently pleaded with the sultan that he had thrown himself at the feet of Mahmud II and, 'in the name of the whole *Divan* [imperial council]', striven to show him the perils of welcoming to Istanbul their hereditary enemies.<sup>15</sup> But, according to Murav'ev, by 18 December 1832 the serasker had altered his position

<sup>10</sup> Bitis, *Russia*, 468.      <sup>11</sup> Altundağ, *Kavalah*, 96.

<sup>12</sup> 'Mémorandum confidentiel', 18 Dec. 1832, BOA HR.SYS 1847/1/1; Murav'ev-Karskij, *Turciya*, vol. 3, 390; *Severnaya pchela*, 23 Jan. 1833; cf. Petrunina, *Social'no*, 304; F. S. Rodkey, *The Turco-Egyptian Question in the Relations of England, France and Russia, 1832–41* (Urbana: University of Illinois-Urbana, 1925), 15–16.

<sup>13</sup> Nesselrode to I. I. Dibichu, 6 Nov. 1829, *VPR* vol. 2/8, 398.

<sup>14</sup> K. V. Nesselrode to A. P. Butenev, 12 Dec. 1830, *VPR* vol. 17, 185–8.

<sup>15</sup> George Douin, *La Mission de Baron de Boislecomte. L'Égypte et la Syrie en 1833* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1927), xvi; Pierre Crabitès, *Ibrahim of Egypt* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1935), 164.

diametrically, and became eager to reach a settlement against his old rival Mehmed Ali. 'The [serasker] could not contain his happiness' upon hearing the tsar's official offer of aid, the Russian lieutenant general reported. After the news of defeat at Konya, Hüsrev became more trustful of the 'honest intentions of Russia' and listened to Murav'ev's plans with greater interest, even discussing the number of artillery units needed.<sup>16</sup> He wanted Murav'ev to explain the Russian plans to the sultan as soon as possible.<sup>17</sup> When the sultan dithered about Russian aid, the serasker sought to allay his fears, secretly despising Mahmud II's 'timidness and indecisiveness'. After the sultan decided first to wait for news from Britain in early January, he asked Murav'ev not to 'delay [his] trip to Alexandria' and to pass Mehmed Ali Russia's message.<sup>18</sup>

Murav'ev's mission to Egypt began and ended with hostile remarks and threats. After his arrival on 13 January, the Russian lieutenant general made known to Mehmed Ali that Russia would not permit the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and demanded that the paşa of Egypt 'cease the hostilities and recognise the supreme power of the Sultan'. 'Well,' Mehmed Ali replied,

I will have one thousand very good troops to oppose the [Russians], the entire Muslim population [in Asia Minor] will become my reserve; I have a fleet that is not at all afraid of the Russians, and with the first news of the Russian involvement a terrible uprising in Constantinople will destroy the Sultan and the dynasty.

But when Murav'ev did not hold back, instead responding in kind, Mehmed Ali dithered. At their second meeting on 16 January, the paşa promised that Ibrahim would not march on Istanbul and would refrain from dismembering the sultan's empire.<sup>19</sup>

In the meantime, the sultan was trying obtain a settlement with Mehmed Ali, and sent Halil Rifat Paşa (1795–1856), another protégé of Hüsrev, and the young *amedci* (receiver) Mustafa Reşid Bey (1800–58) to Alexandria at the end of January 1833. These intra-imperial endeavours and negotiations proved to be no less hostile. The Ottoman delegation handed Mehmed Ali the sultan's message that 'he had no grounds to complain about [his] lack of security', that the paşa's provincial governorship of Egypt, Crete, and Jeddah as well as Sidon and Tripoli would be reinstated, but that he would not be granted the whole of Syria nor the timber rich regions on the outskirts of the Taurus mountains.<sup>20</sup> For all these

<sup>16</sup> Murav'ev-Karskij, *Turciya*, vol. 3, 49, 53, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 26

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 26, 192.

<sup>19</sup> BOA TS.MA.e 547/1; Petrunina, *Social'no*, 304–5; T. V. Eremeeva, 'Zaklyuchitel'nyj etap egipetskogo krizisa 1831–1833 gg. i velikie derzhavy', *Uchenye zapiski po novoj i novejshej istorii* 2 (1956): 515.

<sup>20</sup> Kutluoğlu, *Egyptian*, 96–7.

proposals to take effect, the paşa had to release Grand Vizier Reşid Mehmed Paşa from captivity.<sup>21</sup>

Mehmed Ali listened to these demands with unease. Having emerged victorious in three battles against Ottoman imperial armies, he believed that he was entitled to more. He replied that, unless the Porte granted him the whole of Syria and Adana as well as Mersin and the ports of Silifke and Alaiye, his men would march first toward Bursa and then Istanbul, so that he could obtain his goals by force.<sup>22</sup> The sultan's delegates were overwhelmed by this shocking answer, but could do nothing except write back to Istanbul for further instructions. Halil Rifat was asked to stay in Alexandria to continue the negotiations, while Mustafa Reşid was called back to the imperial capital, where, as we will see in the following pages, he would become a key figure in resolving the crisis.<sup>23</sup>

In the meantime, Ibrahim's army was still closing in on Istanbul.<sup>24</sup> On 2 February, he arrived in Kütahya, now only 200 miles away from the imperial capital.<sup>25</sup> He sent to his father asking permission to advance toward Istanbul to acquire further concessions from the sultan:

as long as Sultan Mahmud, that evil genius, remains on the throne no permanent peace or definite arrangement of our conflict is possible... It is imperative that we return to our original intention and dethrone that pernicious man and replace him with the Crown Prince... [W]e should act so promptly that Europe will be unable to forestall our designs...<sup>26</sup>

But on 3 February Ibrahim received orders from his father to halt the army wherever he stationed next.<sup>27</sup> Mehmed Ali kept his word to Murav'ev out of fear of Russian intervention.

In Istanbul, unaware what the paşa's next move might be, the sultan's anxieties had also grown and then turned into panic on 2 February—the very day the news of Ibrahim's arrival in Kütahya overlapped with the news from London that Britain would not come to his aid. Mahmud II was on tenterhooks. Despite his continual hesitation, he listened to Hüsrev's advice, and then expeditiously asked Reisülküttâb Akif Paşa to formally apply to Russia for eight warships and 30,000 men.<sup>28</sup> Russian Ambassador Butenev accepted the Ottoman request instantly.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>21</sup> BOA HAT 369/20364-A; Barker to Mandeville, 17 Jan. 1833, TNA FO 78/221; Kutluoğlu, *Egyptian*, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Ali Fuad, 'Mısır Valisi Mehmed Ali Paşa', *Türk Tarih Encümeni Mecmuası* 19(96) (1928): 85–7.

<sup>23</sup> Kaynar, *Mustafa Reşit Paşa*, 52–3.

<sup>24</sup> Douin, *Boislecote*, xxvii.

<sup>25</sup> BOA 351/19824 A; Fatih Gencer, 'Hünkar İskeleyi Antlaşması'nı Hazırlayan Koşullar', *Tarih Okulu Dergisi* 8(22) (2015): 135–60, at 140.

<sup>26</sup> Ibrahim to Mehmed Ali, 20 Jan. 1833; cf. Crabitès, *Ibrahim*, 152.

<sup>27</sup> BOA TS.MA.e 547/1

<sup>28</sup> Bitis, *Russia*, 470.

<sup>29</sup> Nicolai N. Murav'ev-Karskij, *Russkie na Bosfore v 1833 godu* (Moscow: 1869), 20.

Hence the sultan agreed to the intervention of his age-old Romanov rival in his fight against one of his vassals. This was a huge relief for Serasker Hüsrev Paşa. He had now found the means to protect himself from the threat of Mehmed Ali. By early February 1833, he started to convene hospitable and friendly dinners at his mansion for the Russian mission, giving them valuable gifts to express his gratitude to them.<sup>30</sup> He would even entertain the idea of commanding Russian troops.<sup>31</sup> He was actively involved with the decision of where to camp them, which, Murav'ev writes, was mainly because 'it would stroke his ego, not because of lack of trust'.<sup>32</sup> In the coffee-houses of Istanbul, informants were exchanging 'gossip that Hüsrev Paşa . . . had proposed turning Istanbul over' to Russia so that he and others in the government would be able to 'rest easy'.<sup>33</sup>

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The cause of Hüsrev's relief swiftly became a source of international anxieties. British and French statesmen were uncertain about the tsar's real intentions. Was he trying to capture Istanbul while pretending to aid the sultan, or was he only looking to turn the Ottoman Empire into a Russian vassal? As soon as the news of the Russo-Ottoman agreement broke in Paris, French officialdom looked to capitalize their influence over Egypt, not Istanbul, due to the Franco-Ottoman disputes over Algiers. The French chargé d'affaires in Istanbul, baron de Varennes, sent to Ibrahim demanding he halt his march beyond Kütahya. But Ibrahim refused, writing that he could act only according to the orders of his father.

France then made another move and appointed a new ambassador, Admiral Albin-Rein Roussin (1781–1854), to Istanbul to mediate peace between Istanbul and Cairo. At his arrival in the imperial capital (17 February), the admiral immediately requested a meeting with Reis Efendi Akif, believing that he and Hüsrev would be ready to solicit French help. The two Ottoman ministers secretly conveyed to Roussin that they would agree to renounce Russian assistance on condition that the French agents could guarantee a peace with Mehmed Ali on the sultan's terms.<sup>34</sup>

But, the next morning, Roussin woke up to a dreadful sight. In the Bosphorus, under his window at the Palais de France, were four *vaisseaux de ligne* and four frigates. The first Russian squadron had already arrived. 'Jamais,' the French ambassador wrote that evening, 'jamais sensation plus pénible n'assaillit mon cœur et mon esprit.'<sup>35</sup> He knew that he had to rally support among the representatives of the four Powers in Istanbul to find ways to expel the Russian warships. However, as he wrote later, there was not much hope:

<sup>30</sup> Murav'ev-Karskij, *Turciya*, vol. 3, 177; Campbell to Palmerston, 31 Mar. 1833, TNA FO 78/122.

<sup>31</sup> Murav'ev-Karskij, *Turciya*, vol. 3, 181. Hüsrev to Murav'ev, 3 May 1833, in Appendix, Murav'ev-Karskij, *Turciya*, vol. 3, 272.

<sup>32</sup> Murav'ev-Karskij, *Turciya*, vol. 3, 184.

<sup>33</sup> BOA C.Dh. 12037; cf. Philliou, *Biography*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Douin, *Boislecote*, xxii; Crabitès, *Ibrahim*, 169.

<sup>35</sup> Douin, *Boislecote*, xxiii.

I cast my eyes around me. I saw in the envoy of Britain a feeling similar to stupor, but nonetheless the will to associate himself with all that could prevent the Russian intervention. In all the other legations, absolute reserve, and in some, particularly the Austrian and Prussian, obvious malevolence towards us.<sup>36</sup>

As I will explain below, ideological and strategic differences had by this point divided the Powers into camps, making concerted action among them hardly possible. Roussin then acted on his own, requesting Reis Efendi to contact the Russian ambassador Butenev so that Russian naval and military assistance would be withdrawn. Reis Efendi duly approached Butenev and received a tentatively positive response from the Russian agent. At once, the French diplomat threatened Mehmed Ali (22 February) that this situation gravely compromised the general peace, Europe's principal need, that Ibrahim must retire from Kütahya, and that Mehmed Ali must accept the conditions of the sultan. Otherwise France would withdraw all her officers in Egypt.<sup>37</sup> But Mehmed Ali rebuffed him, stating that he 'preferred a glorious death to ignominy'.<sup>38</sup>

For his part, after finding out that Roussin was behind the Porte's demand for the withdrawal of Russian troops, Butenev, despite initial approval, changed the Russian response to Reis Efendi, arguing that until Mehmed Ali retreated beyond the Taurus mountains, the tsar's squadrons would not leave Istanbul.<sup>39</sup> In order to allay Anglo-French fears, the Russian agents communicated to 'the principal courts of Europe' an explanation that they had adopted determinations in the interests of the sultan 'at the request of the Sublime Porte', and then inserted in the newspapers of St Petersburg an official article in which they gave 'the Powers of Europe a pledge of the loyalty of [the tsar's] policy by frankly manifesting [their] resolution as a contribution to the preservation of the Ottoman Empire'. The tsar reassured the other powers that Russian troops would turn back as soon as the threat to the sultan disappeared. This, the tsar considered, was a testimony of 'his sincere solicitude' and a response to those who questioned 'the disinterestedness of [the Russian] cabinet'.<sup>40</sup>

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All these developments only pushed the Porte further into the arms of Russia, and filled Mehmed Ali's sails with wind. The paşa of Egypt tried to influence the course of inter-imperial diplomacy by manipulating the presence of the Russian squadrons in Istanbul to his advantage. He told the representatives of Britain and France in Alexandria how he was aware—through his agents in the Ottoman imperial council who daily reported him the developments from Istanbul—that Hüseyin

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. xxiv–xxv; Crabitès, *Ibrahim*, 170.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 172.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew Rendall, 'Restraint or Self-Restraint of Russia: Nicholas I, The Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, and the Vienna System, 1832–41', *International History Review* 24(1) (Mar. 2002): 40.

<sup>40</sup> 'Extrait d'une dépêche confidentielle de M. le comte Nesselrode à M. de Boutenief en date du 21 février 1833', BOA HR.SYS 1847/1/6.

and his entourage had been bought off by the Russians. By inviting their fleet into the Bosphorus, he claimed, Hüsrev, his 'great enemy', had 'shamefully deceived him', and gained time through Halil Rifat, who was keeping him busy with a peace proposal in Egypt.

Mehmed Ali suggested that London and Paris should support him against the alliance between Hüsrev and the Russians, for in so doing they would be giving 'the best support to the Ottoman Empire [against Russia] which no person could be more anxious to uphold than himself'. The paşa further stated that he had never had the idea of throwing off the sultan, and independence had 'never entered into his mind'. His only aim was 'to give the sultan support ... to realize the desire of the whole [Muslim community] who call on him to free the government and the nation from the shameful servitude imposed on them by their natural enemies, the Russians'.<sup>41</sup> He was bluffing. But the cabinets in Paris and London, as well as Vienna, all refused an alliance with Mehmed Ali against Russia and Hüsrev, seeing no reason to jeopardize European peace over Egypt.

Thereupon Mehmed Ali sent an ultimatum to Istanbul to accept his demands within ten days, while granting his son Ibrahim full authority to sign the peace under his terms.<sup>42</sup> And he told the European agents in Egypt that a forward movement by Ibrahim could cause the Turkish fleet and what was left of the army, as well as the populace of the capital, to depose the sultan and to place his son on the throne, and 'above all [achieve] the exclusion of his enemy [Hüsrev]'.<sup>43</sup>

On 11 March, Hüsrev retaliated by asking Murav'ev whether Russia could send 25,000–30,000 troops to the capital to counter the armies of Ibrahim, before Ibrahim arrived in Istanbul.<sup>44</sup> Although the Russians were willing to send their troops and preparations had long begun, it was impossible for all the Russian forces to arrive before Ibrahim could do so. The Porte was conscious of the risk of panic that the news of Ibrahim's march could generate in the imperial capital. Since it did not want the negotiations to be coloured by an Egyptian advance, *amedci* Mustafa Reşid Bey was sent to Kütahya to start and complete negotiations with Ibrahim immediately. He was ordered to make a settlement, giving up Damascus and Aleppo if necessary, but saving Adana at the least.<sup>45</sup>

On 4 April, the day a small Russian regiment set foot in Istanbul, Reşid Bey arrived in Kütahya to start talks with Ibrahim. When he realized that Ibrahim insisted on keeping the whole of Syria as well as Adana and Mersin, and fearing that the commander could, on a whim, decide to march on Istanbul in the event of an obstinate disagreement, he agreed on 17 April to give up Adana to Egypt in

<sup>41</sup> Campbell to Palmerston, 31 Mar. 1833, TNA FO 78/122.

<sup>42</sup> Bitis, *Russia*, 472; Douin, *Boislecomte*, xxxvi.

<sup>43</sup> Campbell to Palmerston, 1 Apr. 1833, TNA FO 78/122, f. 33.

<sup>44</sup> N. N. Murav'ev to Chernyshev, 12 Mar. 1833, RGVIA, fond VUA, d. 5304, f. 31–5; cf. Bitis, *Russia*, 473.

<sup>45</sup> BOA HH 20345, n.d.; cf. Kutluoğlu, *Egyptian*, 98.



return for keeping Mersin and Silifke. But the sultan was outraged by Reşid's unauthorized action. He adamantly opposed conferring the timber-rich town of Adana upon Mehmed Ali, for he knew that the paşa wanted this in order to build battleships. The deal collapsed.<sup>46</sup>

Thence began a new round of Anglo-French pressure on the Porte and the paşa to make an agreement each on the terms of the other. The two powers hoped to get this done immediately, for they wanted to countermand the landing of Russian soldiers in the Ottoman capital, the second group (4,500 soldiers) of which was scheduled to arrive on 23 April.<sup>47</sup> Colonel Campbell and Charles-Joseph-Edmond Baron de Boisilecomte, the British and French agents in Egypt, received identical instructions from their ambassadors in Istanbul to convince the paşa.

Mehmed Ali did not waver, determined to protect his reign, his family, and thus his burgeoning imperium. He argued that the security of all he had was dependent upon obtaining that natural defence line of Egypt, the Taurus mountains, and the timber-rich province of Adana.<sup>48</sup> He told Boisilecomte on 12 May that he would desist from his demand for Adana only under one condition: the European powers 'should confirm by their guarantee a peace' in his terms and ensure the security of his reign.<sup>49</sup>

The French agent replied that it was impossible to suggest an explicit guarantee to a subject against his sovereign.<sup>50</sup> When the paşa reminded him of the guarantees granted to the Greeks and the Belgians, Boisilecomte responded that the case was different: '[T]he peace that these two peoples concluded with their former rulers declare them independent.' Their negotiations took place between two equal parties. The paşa then asked, 'Why am I not independent?' and replied himself,

You know, it is out of deference to the Powers. Do you believe that without the due respect I had for the intentions of the Powers, I would still be in the condition of a subject? Well, that respect I had for your advice the Greeks did not have, neither did the Belgians, and you rewarded them by guaranteeing their independence and you punish me by refusing to guarantee my security.<sup>51</sup>

Mehmed Ali considered his position no different from that of the Greeks and the Belgians. But in the eyes of the powers, his was a revolutionary movement that was upsetting European stability by threatening the existence of the Ottoman Empire as a whole, and, unlike the case of Greece of the 1820s, there were neither humanitarian, nor religious, nor strategic or commercial security issues at stake

<sup>46</sup> Boisilecomte to MAE, 11, 12, 14 May 1833; Douin, *Boisilecomte*, 32–4.

<sup>47</sup> Petrunina, *Social'no*, 309–10.

<sup>48</sup> Boisilecomte to MAE, 5 May 1833, in Douin, *Boisilecomte*, 8–9.

<sup>49</sup> Boisilecomte to MAE, 12 May 1833, in Douin, *Boisilecomte*, 40; see also Campbell to Palmerston, 13 May 1833, TNA FO 78/227; cf. Kutluoğlu, *Egyptian*, 104.

<sup>50</sup> Boisilecomte to MAE, 12 May 1833, in Douin, *Boisilecomte*, 40.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

for the Powers to intervene on his behalf. By contrast, Britain's transportation and communication routes to India were now at risk of falling under the indirect domination of Russia and France.

The paşa was accordingly strong-armed. The British foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, ordered the British navy to blockade Alexandria and cut Ibrahim's communication with Egypt. France buttressed this move by sending her own ships to the Levant. Upon hearing these orders, the paşa gave in. He agreed to abandon Adana and sent his orders to Ibrahim to withdraw his men on 8 May.<sup>52</sup> But he was fortunate to avoid a formal commitment, because Mahmud II had also caved and agreed further concessions just before the paşa's orders arrived in Kütahya. The sultan could no longer have tolerated the risk of an Egyptian attack on Istanbul. Having observed that he had to make a choice between abandoning Adana or starting military preparations against the Egyptian army, Mahmud II decided that the former was the lesser of two dangers. Russia, he thought, was hardly to be trusted and France often changed her position.<sup>53</sup> He therefore accepted the abandonment of Adana and declared with a *firman* an amnesty for Ibrahim only two days before Mehmed Ali made his decision.

Sultan Mahmud II never found out about the paşa's almost simultaneous surrender. As Palmerston wrote to his agents, the question was finally settled, and no one would want to disturb it.<sup>54</sup> On 6 May, Ibrahim was appointed as the *muhassil* of Adana and restored as the paşa of Jeddah and Habesh, while the provinces of Egypt, Crete, Damascus, Tripoli, Sayda, and Aleppo as well as the *sancaks* of Jerusalem and Nablus were conferred upon Mehmed Ali.<sup>55</sup> The civil war in the Ottoman world was thus halted with the naval and diplomatic interference of the Powers.

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The 'convention' of Kütahya was only a verbal truce, with no written assurances, signatures, or ratifications on the part of either party.<sup>56</sup> An ephemeral solution for the sultan's distress, it left the Powers and the Porte with a question still unresolved. What would now happen to the Russian warships and soldiers that had been stationed in Istanbul? The answer Palmerston came up with was to curb the self-centred actions of Russia, and invigorate the Concert of Europe against this perilous episode of the Eastern Question.

In fact, this was precisely when the term 'Eastern Question' became prevalent in both European and Ottoman parlance. Following the pattern laid out by the Vienna Order, at the end of May 1833 the British foreign secretary proposed a

<sup>52</sup> Campbell to Palmerston, 9 May 1833, TNA FO 78/227; cf. Kutluoğlu, *Egyptian*, 103.

<sup>53</sup> BOA HH 20346, n.d.; cf. Kutluoğlu, *Egyptian*, 102–3.

<sup>54</sup> Palmerston to Campbell, 1 June 1833, TNA FO 78/226/27.

<sup>55</sup> BOA HAT 362/20211B; BOA TS.MA.e 712/19.

<sup>56</sup> Muhammed H. Kutluoğlu, '1833 Kütahya Antlaşmasının Yeni Bir Değerlendirmesi', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 17 (1997): 265–87, at 285.

convention among the powers where they would pledge themselves to the support of the sultan. However, the Austrian and Russian agents in London, Philip von Neumann (1781–1851) and Christopher Lieven (1774–1839), were not given authorization by their governments to enter into such an arrangement.<sup>57</sup>

The Concert was in dissonance. Russian policy had undermined the commitment to multilateral action—even though the Russian agents would have phrased it differently. The diplomacy pursued by the Ottoman elites—Hüsrev and his men—in the spring of 1833 was one of the chief causes of Russian unilateralism. Before the verbal truce at Kütahya, Hüsrev had become more and more eager to make concessions in return for Russian guarantees, and had approached Butenev for the signing of an offensive and defensive alliance.<sup>58</sup> St Petersburg instantly seized the opportunity once again.

Count Aleksey F. Orlov (1786–1861), whom Nesselrode had dispatched to Istanbul in late April as an extraordinary envoy to discuss with the Porte the future of Russian troops, received the news of the Ottoman proposal of alliance on his way. His mission gained a new quality then. Orlov was ordered to begin and conclude the negotiations immediately after his arrival (6 May).<sup>59</sup>

Russia was disinclined to give away her dominant position in Istanbul, the centrepiece of her ‘weak neighbour’ policy. This was why Orlov was instructed to oppose any suggestion for collective intervention.<sup>60</sup> Tsar Nicholas I and Nesselrode saw in the Ottoman offer of alliance an invaluable opportunity to secure the Black Sea and the south of Russia, especially in view of the fact that British and French squadrons were cruising the Mediterranean, alarmed by the Russo-Ottoman rapprochement.

During the negotiations, Orlov made sure that the Ottoman representatives, Hüsrev and Akif, kept the contents and existence of negotiations secret from foreign ambassadors, and promised that Tsar Nicholas I would forgo half of his pecuniary claims from the sultan arising from the 1829 war, and would evacuate Silistria. Moreover, learning from Hüsrev that Mahmud II was reluctant concerning an alliance with Russia, the tsar himself wrote a private letter to the sultan, stating that ‘it was reserved for his genius to see in Russia a true friend and a serviceable and faithful ally’.

In return, during the talks in early May, the Porte’s plenipotentiaries, Akif Paşa and *Hekimbaşı* (chief of medicine) Mustafa Behçet Efendi (1774–1834), would express the Porte’s willingness to enter into an alliance, stating that:

We feel some relief when we see that our disasters have served to expose, to the face of the world, the high benevolence of the [Russian Emperor] . . . We have been the

<sup>57</sup> Sir F. Lamb (Vienna) to Ponsonby, 30 May 1833, BLM MS 60474, f. 14.

<sup>58</sup> Altundağ, *Kavalalı*, 150–51.

<sup>59</sup> BOA TS.MA.e 547/2–3; C. de Freycinet, *La Question d’Égypte* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1905), 27.

<sup>60</sup> Rendall, ‘Restraint’, 41.

sick, you the medicines... [S]o that the cure becomes complete, we [ensure that] justice and good order reign at our home... [We] tell you with great frankness [that] the Representatives of His Imperial Majesty can henceforth be considered as the ministers, the sincere advisers of the S[ublime] Porte herself...<sup>61</sup>

This was probably the first time the impression of the Ottoman Empire as 'a sick man' was uttered, not by Russian but Ottoman agents themselves, possibly by Behçet Efendi. It also attested how Ottoman officialdom called in Russia in the management of a threat (Egypt) within their empire, though it is true that in demanding an alliance treaty they also had in view the immediate evacuation of Russian troops from Istanbul.

At the end of June, the plenipotentiaries of the two empires reached agreement over the details of the alliance. Russia promised to evacuate Istanbul once the treaty was signed, and only the wording of the document remained to be completed. Orlov and Hüsrev added the final touches, and on 8 July 1833 the two put their signatures on the Hünkâr İskeleyi Treaty at Hüsrev's mansion. This was a *defensive* mutual assistance treaty for eight years, with a renewal option. Its object was the security of the two empires 'against every species of attack'. Russia and the Ottoman Empire would engage to arrange all matters, without exception, which could affect their tranquillity and security, and for that purpose afford each other effective succour and assistance. Most importantly, a secret clause stipulated the closure of the Dardanelles to all foreign battleships in times of war in return for relieving the sultan of the obligation to supply military aid.<sup>62</sup>

Although historians have previously suggested otherwise, the Porte did not resist the treaty with Russia, and was not in fact coerced into signing it.<sup>63</sup> It is true that Orlov used the presence of Russian troops in Istanbul to his advantage, having only to point his finger at the squadrons in the Bosphorus to obtain leverage.<sup>64</sup> But, despite the sultan's reluctance, it was through Hüsrev's initiative, eagerness, and desire for revenge, that the Porte *wished* to enter into an alliance, both offensive and defensive, with the tsar. The Ottoman *serasker* had to contend with a defensive agreement alone, since Nicholas I considered it more advantageous and useful for Russia, 'given France's and England's present alliance'. It would help him 'tie Austria more tightly than ever to [his] interests', by guaranteeing the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>65</sup> And it would procure Russia a unique advantage for intervention in the Levant in the future,

<sup>61</sup> 'Résumé d'une conférence de M. l'envoyé Bouténeff avec le Reis Effendi et l'Hekim Bachi, médecin en chef et ministre des conférences, Bestchef Effendi, tenue dans la maison de ce dernier à Bebeck le 13/23 mai 1833', AVPRI f. 181/2, l. 5.

<sup>62</sup> 'Traduction de l'acte de ratification du Traite patent', BOA HR.SYS 1847/1/18; 'Traduction de l'acte de ratification de l'article séparé et secret', BOA HR.SYS 1847/1/18; *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. 10 (London: James Ridgway & Sons, 1836), 1176; Bitis, *Russia*, 475.

<sup>63</sup> Rendall, 'Restraint', 43.

<sup>64</sup> Orlov to Kiselev, 27 June/9 July 1833; cf. Rendall, 'Restraint', 43.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 46.

‘the first and strongest . . . whether considering the preservation of the Ottoman Empire possible, or at last recognizing its dissolution inevitable’.<sup>66</sup>

Hence the fears, ambitions, and policies of the sultan, Hüsrev Paşa, and the tsar coalesced, and guaranteed a Russian peace in the Levant. Ibrahim’s troops had already begun evacuating Asia Minor in early May, and retreated back to Urfa. Russian troops left Istanbul days after the signing of the Hünkâr İskelesi Treaty in July. But the Russian peace in the Levant immediately jeopardized order and security in Europe, prompting a diplomatic crisis and the threat of war. It also emphasized the cracks within the Concert of Europe, testing both its functionality and durability.

### **Preaching to the Winds: The Disconcert of Europe and the Diplomatic Impasse**

Only days after the signing of the Hünkâr İskelesi Treaty, its secret clause was leaked to the British and French agents by anti-Russian Ottoman ministers (possibly by the Anglophile Pertev Efendi). In London and Paris, the secret clause was considered sensational and controversial.<sup>67</sup> British and French statesmen believed that Russia had trapped the Porte into signing the treaty, and thus placed the sultan’s empire under her protectorate. The secret clause had given the tsar a strategic advantage with a geographical and natural defence system, as he now had control over the Dardanelles, which were very difficult for naval ships to sail through from the Aegean Sea thanks to the strong northerly winds.<sup>68</sup> As a result, preventing the ratification of the treaty became a matter of preserving the balance of power in Europe. Seeing that their attempts could lead to aggression, Tsar Nicholas I started drawing up plans for war.<sup>69</sup>

The risk of war was now indeed very high. Palmerston looked to avert it first by persuading the Porte. To this end, he instructed Lord John Ponsonby (1770–1855), his new ambassador to Istanbul, to remind the Ottoman ministers that, when ‘a sovereign trusted for his security to the military support of a neighbouring Power stronger than himself’, it would be obvious that he acquired such protection ‘at the price of his independence’ Furthermore, ‘[s]uch a state of things’ would destroy the respect of the foreign powers for the sovereign, ‘weakens the affection of his subjects, exposing him thereby to danger from their insurrection and tends to the loss of his crown as the consequence of the sacrifice of his

<sup>66</sup> Nesselrode to Orlov, 8/20 May 1833, cf. Rendall, ‘Restraint’, 46.

<sup>67</sup> Lamb to Ponsonby, 15 Aug. 1833, BLM Beauvale Papers, Add. MS 60474/20.

<sup>68</sup> William R. Polk, *The Opening of South Lebanon, 1788–1840: A Study of the Impact of the West on the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 194.

<sup>69</sup> Palmerston to Bligh, 9 Aug. 1833, BLM Add. MS 41285, f. 79; *ibid.* f. 60, Palmerston to Bligh, 19 July 1833; see also Bitis, *Russia*, 475, 478

independence'. Hence, in forming alliances and developing policies, any sovereign had to follow a careful and well-calculated triple policy of preserving its independence while acknowledging the sentiments of its citizens and the reactions of other major global actors. This was why, Palmerston concluded, the Porte had to pay attention to the fact that the Hünkâr İskelesi Treaty was produced for Russian and not for Ottoman goals. The Porte was advised not to ratify it. If it ratified the treaty, Russia would become 'the umpire between the sultan and his subjects, would exercise a species of Protectorate over Turkey, and the [s]ultan would be bound to adopt the quarrels of Russia'.<sup>70</sup>

Palmerston was not aware that this was what the Ottoman ministers, Hüsrev and Akif Paşas, wanted, at least in part, in the spring of 1833. Before the foreign secretary's instructions reached Lord Ponsonby, Ottoman Reis Efendi Akif, now known as a Russophile, announced the ratification of the treaty on 26 August. The Porte's decision was met with immediate protests. Ponsonby even threatened that 'if the stipulations of that treaty should hereafter lead to the armed interference of Russia in the internal affairs of Turkey, the British government [would] hold itself at liberty to act upon such an occasion'.<sup>71</sup> But Reis Efendi sent a negative and detailed response, declaring that the Porte would not enter into any discussion with respect to such protests because it would be 'without object, and must be without result'. The Ottoman court sought only the tranquillity of the sultan's dominions, and as an independent power, it had the right to enter into alliance with any other state, especially when such an alliance was not directed against any power—the alliance was made through the mutual desire of both parties.<sup>72</sup>

When the tsar ratified the treaty on 29 October, similar protests, denouncing the action, were delivered to his court.<sup>73</sup> Russian foreign minister Count Nesselrode responded that the treaty did not impair the interests of any powers whatever, and asked: 'How can the other Powers declare they do not recognize its validity unless they aim at the destruction of [the Ottoman Empire] the preservation of which is the aim of the treaty?' The treaty was concluded in a 'peaceful and conservative spirit', and 'has indeed introduced a change in the relations of union and confidence in which the Porte will find a guarantee for her stability and if need be means of defence'.<sup>74</sup>

The Russian disavowal of the Anglo-French protests engendered deep antagonism among the powers. Palmerston ordered his ambassador in St Petersburg,

<sup>70</sup> Palmerston to Ponsonby, 7 Aug. 1833, TNA FO 78/472/42.

<sup>71</sup> Ponsonby to [the Porte], 26 Aug. 1833, BOA HAT 1166/4123; also in BOA TS.MA.e 578/34.

<sup>72</sup> Dispatches by Ponsonby (Istanbul), 15 and 24 Sept. 1833, in 'Proceedings in Turco-Egyptian Question', TNA FO 78/472, f. 46, 48.

<sup>73</sup> Dispatch by Bligh (St Petersburg), 2 Nov. 1833, in 'Proceedings in Turco-Egyptian Question', TNA FO 78/472, f. 49.

<sup>74</sup> Dispatch by Bligh (St Petersburg), 4 Nov. 1833, in 'Proceedings in Turco-Egyptian Question', TNA FO 78/472, f. 50.

John Duncan Bligh (1798–1872), to stress to tsarist authorities that the ‘real independence’ of the Ottoman Empire had to be regarded as ‘an indispensable condition’.<sup>75</sup> And, from that point on, it became his object and a centrepiece of his eastern policy to prevent Russia from ‘pushing her advantages farther’, and depriving her ‘of what she has gained’ in the Levant.<sup>76</sup> Under the ministries of Maréchal Étienne Maurice Gérard (1773–1852) and Jean-de-Dieu Soult (1769–1851), France consistently supported the British policy, though they also hoped to accommodate Sultan Mahmud II in a new understanding, which would procure for the paşa of Egypt hereditary rights in the provinces he ruled.<sup>77</sup>

Britain and France thus positioned themselves sternly against the 1833 treaty and Russia. But, against the two, St Petersburg made new diplomatic moves that bolstered her position. One of these was to assure Austria of her peaceful intentions. Its success is affirmed by Metternich’s note to his agents in the summer of 1833 that where Ottoman affairs were concerned, the courts of Vienna and St Petersburg ‘want the same thing, and they want it in the same way’.<sup>78</sup> The Austrian chancellor was of the belief that the 1833 treaty’s real object was the protection of Odessa, and to that end, not to open the Bosphorus to Russian ships of war, but to close the Dardanelles against British warships.<sup>79</sup>

On 18 September, Metternich agreed to adopt a ‘principle of union’ with Russia in his eastern policy. This resulted in the famous 1833 pact in Munchengrätz in the presence of King Francis I and Tsar Nicholas I. A month later Prussia joined the conservative Holy Alliance, which positioned her against the revolutionary aspirations of Mehmed Ali as the three powers agreed to support the sultan against the paşa, and to act together should the sultan’s empire disintegrate.<sup>80</sup>

With the support of the conservative Austria and Prussia, the liberal camp of Britain and France would not be able to diplomatically twist the arm of the tsar into annulling the treaty and giving up his advantages in the Levant. A diplomatic impasse ensued. The powers were grouped into camps, each seeking to weaken the other, and toying with the idea of war. A Great Power intervention in the Levant—this time a unilateral one—thus generated division in Europe and prompted fears of war. As Lord Beauvale, the British ambassador to Vienna,

<sup>75</sup> Dispatch to Bligh, 6 Dec. 1833, in ‘Proceedings in Turco-Egyptian Question’, TNA FO 78/472, f. 52.

<sup>76</sup> Palmerston to Ponsonby, 6 Dec. 1833, in ‘Proceedings in Turco-Egyptian Question’, TNA FO 78/472, f. 58.

<sup>77</sup> Charles-Roux, *Thiers*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Metternich to Ficquelmont, 10 July 1833; cf. Šedivý, *Metternich*, 538.

<sup>79</sup> Lamb to Ponsonby, 2 Sept. 1833, Beauvale Papers, BL, Add. MS 60474, f. 22; also in Šedivý, *Metternich*, 537–8.

<sup>80</sup> For the details of this union, see esp. Miroslav Šedivý, ‘From Adrianople to Munchengrätz: Metternich, Russia, and the Eastern Question 1829–33’, *International History Review* 33(2) (2011): 205–33.

poignantly wrote, the circumstances could 'set... Europe on fire' again at any minute.<sup>81</sup>

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None of the individual Great Powers, or their liberal and conservative camps for that matter, could dare to make any other one-sided move now. They dreaded the destabilizing effect of aggression on the sensitive 'Eastern Question'. They knew well that neither Sultan Mahmud II himself nor Mehmed Ali was entirely satisfied with the terms of the Kütahya truce to which the two had reluctantly agreed. True, Egyptian armies had withdrawn and the imminent danger of the fall of the sultan's empire had passed for the time being. But what was obtained in Kütahya was merely a verbal agreement and the status of Mehmed Ali could be revoked by the sultan whenever he pleased.<sup>82</sup>

As a result, the paşa of Egypt kept making military preparations, building ships, and fortifying the defiles in the Taurus mountains. In fact, he did not give up his ultimate ambition to build his own, independent empire or at least obtain hereditary possession of his territories to ensure the security of his family, though he was reminded by the Russian agents not to entertain such dreams time and again.<sup>83</sup>

Tensions between Cairo and Istanbul became critical when the sultan demanded from the paşa a sum of 50 million piastres for arrears of tribute clearing the war indemnities along with the payment of annual tributes starting from the Mohammedan year 1250 (May 1834). Mehmed Ali refused to pay arrears for a battle he had actually won. He deferred the payment of the tributes, fearing that the sum would be used against him and for military investment. He moreover demanded from the sultan the dismissal of Hüsrev, his arch-enemy, from the post of *serasker* as a condition for the recommencement of the payments. He even sent a letter to Valide Sultan, the mother of Mahmud II, to try and effect this, but to no avail. The stubborn paşa then ordered his regiments to remain in Urfa, and continued his effective occupation much to the irritation of the sultan. Finally, the sourness and caprice of Mahmud II was aggravated when the paşa did not follow the tradition of deputing a member of his own family to be present at the wedding of the sultan's daughter, as a sign of respect.<sup>84</sup>

For the hot-headed Sultan Mahmud II, the Kütahya truce was only a temporary measure to save the day. After the military and diplomatic defeats in 1832 and 1833, the Porte had begun summoning a new army. Serasker Hüsrev Paşa's plan was to bring in European officers to train and discipline the soldiers until the imperial army matched the might of Egyptian forces. In the meantime, the eastern

<sup>81</sup> Lamb to Ponsonby, 30 Sept. 1833, Beauvale Papers, BL, Add. MS 60474, f. 23.

<sup>82</sup> Kutluoğlu, *Egyptian*, 109.

<sup>83</sup> Vice Chancellor to M. Duhamel, 31 Dec. 1834, BOA HR.SYS 1847/1/7.

<sup>84</sup> BOA HAT 351/19816A.



army of the empire would oversee an insurrection that broke out in Syria in May 1834 against the authority of Mehmed Ali as a consequence of heavy taxation and unwelcome conscription.<sup>85</sup> The Ottoman imperial council resolved to supply military support to the dissenting Syrians and send the imperial fleet to the eastern Mediterranean to cooperate in the prospective attack upon Mehmed Ali.<sup>86</sup>

The Porte hoped that Russia would assist it in the operation, and immediately enquired about it. The sultan's ministers had good reason for this belief because, since the Russian intervention in the crisis with Egypt in April 1833 and especially after the Hünkâr İskelesi Treaty, relations between Istanbul and St Petersburg had improved remarkably. The tsar had specifically ordered his agents in Istanbul to keep the sultan content by all means possible.<sup>87</sup> In December 1833, he signed a convention with the Porte in St Petersburg, in which, as he promised before the July 1833 treaty, he made concessions with regard to the indemnities of the 1828–9 war in favour of the sultan, and agreed on the evacuation of Russian forces from Silistra and the semi-autonomous provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia.<sup>88</sup> He thus looked to tie the Porte even more tightly to his plan, and to strengthen the hand of pro-Russian Ottoman ministers in Istanbul.

However, in July 1834, Butenev responded unfavourably to the Ottoman inquiry regarding potential Russian assistance in the sultan's offensive against Mehmed Ali. The Russian ambassador told the Reisülküttâb that if the Porte attacked Mehmed Ali, it would be the aggressor. The Hünkâr İskelesi Treaty concerned purely defensive engagements, and would therefore not bind Russia to assist the Ottoman Empire on this occasion. It was true that the Russo-Ottoman alliance was merely of a defensive nature, according to the 1833 treaty. Yet Russian policy was also founded on the understanding that the existence of Mehmed Ali as a threat would lead the Porte to 'look more and more for rapprochement with Russia and only further strengthen our legitimate influence in the East'.<sup>89</sup>

The sultan did not take the Russian response well, wondering ever more strongly now whether his alliance with Russia was a mistake. But he did not know how to free his rule from Russian influence while the threat of Mehmed Ali was still imminent. To find an answer to this dilemma, he secretly approached the British ambassador, Ponsonby, through an agent (Stephanaky Boghorides, prince of Samos), and expressed his anxiety that 'the rivalry existing in the Ottoman Empire serves the purposes of Russia by disorganising [his] government . . . wasting its resources and exciting [his] fears which make him look to Russia for

<sup>85</sup> Dispatch by Ponsonby, 16 Aug. 1834, in 'Proceedings in Turco-Egyptian Question', TNA FO 78/472, f. 95. See Ch. 9 for more on the uprisings in Syria.

<sup>86</sup> BOA HAT 9674. <sup>87</sup> Nesselrode to Boutenieff, 20 July 1833, BOA HR.SYS 1847/1/27.

<sup>88</sup> Dispatch by Bligh, 24 Feb. 1834 TNA FO 78/472, f. 81; also see Hayreddin Pınar, 'Ahmed Fevzi Paşa'nın Petersburg Seyahati ve Petersburg Anlaşması', *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 29 (2003): 179–89.

<sup>89</sup> A. O. Duhamel, *Avtobiografiya Aleksandra Osipovicha Dyugamelya* (Moscow: Univ. Tip., 1885), 71; Dispatch by Ponsonby, 20 Aug. 1834, TNA FO 78/472, f. 99.

protection'.<sup>90</sup> He then inquired whether Britain would side with him in a planned attempt at 'compelling [Mehmed Ali] to retire within proper bounds and thus liberate the [s]ultan from the alarms which have been the cause of his alliance with Russia'.<sup>91</sup>

Although the British ambassador was pleased with Mahmud II's approach, he replied that Britain would not attack Mehmed Ali without special cause of offence. The London cabinet was of course willing to see the Porte freed from Russian domination as swiftly as possible, but since France was opposed to a recurrence of war between the Porte and the paşa, and because the Russian attitude in such a scenario was unpredictable, Britain would avoid any 'action against the clock'.<sup>92</sup> To Foreign Secretary Palmerston, it was 'of utmost importance to the interests of [Britain], and to the preservation of the balance of power [and peace] in Europe, that the Turkish Empire should be maintained in its integrity and independence', but risking a war with Russia initiated by Britain for this purpose would be at best a counterproductive move.<sup>93</sup>

Palmerston was still looking to reinvigorate the Concert of Europe. Reading the reports of Lord Beauvale from Vienna, he was encouraged. Beauvale described the Austrian court's reservations about the tsar's real intentions, and concluded that Metternich now suspected that the policy of Russia towards the Porte was 'to weaken and to degrade the [s]ultan, and to avail herself of every opportunity of aggrandizement by progressive acquisitions of portions of the Turkish territory'. The Austrian chancellor would be ready to send auxiliary troops if a danger similar to the 1832–3 crisis menaced the Ottoman Empire, for he deplored the thought of a return of Russian troops to Istanbul and would do everything in his power to prevent it.

Even though, by the end of 1834, Metternich still had some trust in St Petersburg, he was likewise of the belief that the best way to handle the 'Eastern Question' of the time was to return to the Vienna system of 1815–22 and to undertake a concerted action at least by a majority of the powers. The intra-European disagreements and divergences, the powers' polarization, and the prioritization of their own interests were only perpetuating, if not exacerbating, the problems of the Ottoman Empire. 'The political rivalry of the Powers', he told Lord Beauvale, 'exercised... a fatal influence on the position of the sultan by exposing him to a variety of influences... [T]he security which [the powers'] rivalry afforded against schemes of partition was but negative, whereas the union of the Three Powers against one... would be positive.'<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Dispatch by Ponsonby, 15 Sept. 1834, TNA FO 78/472, f. 105.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> 'Instructions pour M. Lapiere, premier drogman de l'ambassade de France', 2 Sept. 1834; 'Rapport à Son Excellence Reis Effendi', 4 Sept. 1834; Ponsonby to Reis Efendi, 23 Nov. 1834; Roussin (Therapia) to Reis Effendi, 20 Nov. 1834, in BOA HR.SYS 933/1, f. 42, 48, 53, 56.

<sup>93</sup> Kutluoğlu, *Egyptian*, 111.

<sup>94</sup> Dispatch by Lamb, 2 Nov. 1834, TNA FO 78/472, f. 126.

At the end of 1834, the powers were still in a diplomatic logjam. The hardline unilateralist camp in St Petersburg, or the so-called *ruskaiaia partiaa* (Russian faction), was still strong and fixated on the possibility of war. But Metternich and Palmerston saw a solution elsewhere. As had been the case in 1815, Austria and Britain conceived of a joint Great Power action regarding the Ottoman Empire in line with the transimperial security culture of the time.<sup>95</sup> In 1815, their object had been to prevent a Russo-Ottoman war by warranting the sultan's European dominions under European public law. In 1834, the 'Eastern Question' pertained to preserving Ottoman territorial integrity against domestic threats such as Mehmed Ali's aspirations and containing the advantageous, dominant position Russia had acquired for herself.

Only concerted action could put an end to the Russian tutelage over the Porte and the embarrassment of the sultan, whose sovereignty and authority had now been jeopardized both externally (St Petersburg) and from within (Cairo). It was perhaps militarily impossible or too dangerous to *push* Russia out of Istanbul by way of force. But it could be possible to *pull* St Petersburg back into the security system in Europe and thus prevent the renewal of the 1833 Hünkâr İskelesi Treaty that would expire in 1841. The question remained: how could Palmerston and Metternich persuade the tsar to give up his privileged position in the Levant now?

<sup>95</sup> See Ch. 4.