

# Epilogue

‘... acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time... let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.’

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*<sup>1</sup>

Thus it all began. The first Great Power interventions in the Levant that were purportedly undertaken for the benefit of local inhabitants came into being in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the age of the Eastern Question. Ever since then they have become a frequent reality, and have fatefully aggravated many of the calamities that have struck the region. Even though each armed, legal, and administrative intervention considered in this book had diverse specific properties unique to its immediate context, I will conclude by making a few general remarks before pondering what these historical ordeals tell us about the Levant and the wider world today.

First of all, the historical actors, both European and Levantine, saw a continuity in the affairs of the region from at least the late eighteenth century. For nearly 150 years, the patchwork Eastern Question hinged together their threat perceptions and interests, forging a transimperial security culture in the Levant. Like most security issues, the Eastern Question was a dynamic and intersubjective process. Historical actors attributed different meanings and functions to it in different moments. And its intersubjective character helped the Great Powers manipulate it as a trope and authorized their interventionism.

After decades-long discussions in the eighteenth century, French strategists decided to pursue a proactive revisionist policy vis-à-vis the alleged weakness of the Ottoman Empire, largely as a result of the initiatives of the young General Bonaparte and Foreign Minister Talleyrand. Circumstances combined for the two in the late 1790s, when French power and influence in Europe was at its peak. When the interests of French merchants indebted to the Mamluk beys in Egypt were jeopardized, the merchants’ lobbying as well as the idea of obtaining new colonies, and turning the Mediterranean into a ‘French lake’ and thus into a buffer zone against the menacing might of the British navy, led to a radical move. France invaded Egypt in 1798.

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. David Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 60.

In the course of the long nineteenth century, the French Eastern Question took shape under the long shadow of these economic and strategic reckonings and the dreams of Bonaparte and Talleyrand. Moreover, the defeats during the Coalition Wars in 1801 and later in 1815 rendered the Eastern Question a matter of national prestige for the government in Paris. One reason for the French to join the Navarino intervention in 1827 was to assert their empire's position in the international order as a Great Power. The same desire also weighed during the intervention in Algiers in 1830. Yet the quest for prestige and glory in France became most evident in 1840, when the Thiers government almost went to war with the other four Powers and the Ottoman Empire over the Eastern Question, and then between 1841 and the 1860s, when France sought to reassert her religious and commercial influence in the Levant—something that French statesmen believed they had lost to Britain. This was one of the major reasons for the foreign minister, Thouvenel, to spearhead the 1860 intervention in Syria.

For Britain, having established dominant control in India after the Seven Years War (1756–63), and particularly after the loss of the American colonies in the late eighteenth century, the Levant became doubly important as a centre of commercial activity as well as a strategic gateway to her colonies in Asia. The British fought against the French in Egypt in 1801 with the purpose of securing these very interests—their commerce, transportation and communication routes, and India. Their troops did not evacuate Egypt on the date set by the treaties after the war, as Britain looked to leverage her presence in diplomatic talks with the Porte on the future administration of this bountiful country. They provided support for the Mamluk beys when a civil war broke out between Ottoman authorities and the beys, even attempting to invade Egypt in 1807 to secure India.

Yet, after the 1809 Treaty with the Porte, British authorities took a more defined position and assigned to themselves the responsibility of ensuring the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire—a responsibility that they did not renounce until the 1870s. Together with Austria, they looked to place the sultan's empire under the guarantee of European public law at the Congress of Vienna in 1814–5—but to no avail. The Navarino intervention, which the duke of Wellington eventually called an 'untoward event', was a hiccup in this history when Britain joined Russia and France so that she might check the potential ambitions of Tsar Nicholas I to turn Greece into a satellite state, but also because of domestic pressures. After Navarino, and especially from the late 1830s, the British strove to strengthen the sultan's army and navy to prevent the informal domination of the Ottoman world by any of the other Powers, and to ensure tranquillity and order in the Levant. The very same motive prompted them to lead the 1840 intervention with the Quadruple Alliance and the Porte, quelling the ambitions of Mehmed Ali, the paşa of Egypt. It was again the same motive that would make British authorities so wary of the 1860 French plan for an intervention in Lebanon.

The Russian policy with respect to the Eastern Question oscillated between an eager revisionism (c.1762–95, 1807–12, 1824–9, 1849–64), which was more than ever bent on the idea of (and even concrete plans for) total dismemberment of the sultan's empire, and a preservationist (from the 1800s, 'weak neighbour') policy (c.1796–1806, 1812–23, 1829–49) which looked to keep the Ottoman Empire intact but still weak, lest she grow into a threat in the southern borders of Russia again. In the 1820s, Russian involvement in the Greek crisis was less about obtaining guarantees for her co-religionists and more about dissolving in Russia's favour the lingering territorial disputes with the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the Caucasus, which duly happened first at Akkerman (1826) and then with the Treaty of Edirne (1829). Four years later, in 1833, when Tsar Nicholas I intervened in the civil war between Cairo and Istanbul and signed a defensive treaty with Ottoman ministers, his aim was to establish a dominant Russian influence in Istanbul, reinforcing the 'weak neighbour' policy. At the end of the decade Russia abandoned her privileged position so as not to be isolated in the Concert of Europe, but also after seeing that anti-Russian Ottoman ministers had gained the upper hand in Istanbul and the prolongation of an alliance treaty with the Porte had thus become less likely. The tsar's return to a revisionist policy in the 1850s resulted largely from a precocious quest for glory in competition with the aspirations of Emperor Napoleon III of France.

For Austria, the Eastern Question largely concerned containing Russian expansionism towards the Mediterranean as well as in her backyard, the Balkans. Yet the court in Vienna hardly ever followed this policy by confronting the Russians, aiming instead to cooperate with them—in the eighteenth century by way of forming alliances against the Ottomans, and in the nineteenth, by guaranteeing the territorial integrity of the sultan's empire by means of European public law. Austria failed to achieve this diplomatic objective in 1815 during the Congress of Vienna, but finally reached her goal with the Treaty of Paris in 1856. Austrian officialdom involved itself in armed intervention only when the Porte sought the assistance of the Powers or, at least, consented to it. This being said, Austria played a leading role in the legal and administrative interventions of the 1840s and 1850s with the aim of reviving the Ottoman Empire rather than partitioning it.

Prussia became a more vocal actor only after a new international (Vienna) order was established by way of the Concert of Europe in the 1810s and 1820s. The Great Powers strove to promote new sets of norms and codes to govern their behaviour such as moderation, restraint, and cooperation in order to minimize their differences and thereafter prevent another total war. However, it is important to note that the Vienna Order did not bar colonial expansionism or informal imperialism elsewhere in the world. It even licensed the five Powers to assume managerial responsibility over the 'weak other' and of 'governing the world'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin Press, 2012).

By the same token, their competition in the Levant never came to an end. The Powers did endorse joint action from the 1810s onwards, the Russo-Ottoman war of 1828–9, Russian intervention in 1833, and the Crimean War of the 1850s being the only exceptions. Again, from then on, forming a majority within the Concert became of vital importance in inter-imperial decision-making processes. This was how Prussia occasionally emerged in a unique position with respect to the Levant. For instance, in the late 1850s, when Russia and France were considering the idea of dismembering the Ottoman Empire, they sought the support of the cabinet in Berlin in order to strong-arm Britain and Austria in a likely conflict of interests. But the Prussians remained loyal to conservative principles where the Eastern Question was concerned. They persistently followed the policy of not getting involved in any major revisionist scheme, and of maintaining the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.

The Eastern Question developed out of and endured through these differing and dynamic European perceptions, and truly became the most ‘complicated and dangerous question’ of international politics during the long nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Yet the alleged weakness of the Ottoman Empire—or, in European parlance, her ‘disorder’, the ‘barbarities’, ‘massacres’, ‘atrocities’, ‘piracy’, ‘religious fanaticism’, and the ‘irregularities’ that occurred in the sultan’s dominions—also provided the Powers, either individually or collectively, with quasi-legal pretexts to ensure security or licence to intervene as the so-called ‘civilized’ superior authorities.

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Secondly, it is important to add that the Eastern Question was not a European question alone, as existing literature, and even some late Ottoman writers, would have us believe. Besides the reckoning among the major Powers, the situation persisted through other relational dynamics, such as the interactions of Ottoman imperial agents and subject peoples among themselves and with European actors. In other words, the Eastern Question was also an Ottoman question—a question of how to deal with their empire’s alleged weakness, and her precarious characterization among the other major European Powers as one whose identity and durability was disputed.

As the military and technological power differentials between the Ottomans’ western and northern neighbours and their ‘Well-Protected Domains’ became more evident in the eighteenth century, imperial agents in Istanbul shared the belief that their empire was in decline. They found themselves in everlasting ontological insecurity. The British historian F. A. K. Yasamee suggests that it became ‘just as important for Ottoman statesmen to assess the nature and dynamics of the overall international system of which their empire formed a

<sup>3</sup> Schroeder, ‘The 19th-Century International System’, 6.

part and upon which its fate depended'.<sup>4</sup> The Ottomans proactively responded to this evolving system by having the position of their empire affirmed among the militarily strong powers of Europe in the 1790s. For this reason, they undertook wholesale reforms, in an attempt to revive the underlying philosophies of security (such as 'the circle of justice'). They employed propaganda, through pamphlets written for European audiences. And they initiated alliance-seeking diplomatic endeavours. However, when the sultan's empire became engulfed in the Coalition Wars after the French expedition to Egypt in 1798, reform attempts were greatly jeopardized and ontological insecurities were heightened. The hardliners in Istanbul gained greater power, and the subsequent policy of isolation led to an Ottoman rejection of involvement in the Vienna Order in 1815.

Ottoman isolationism did not last long. A series of developments unfortunate for the Porte—the 1827 Navarino 'catastrophe', humiliating defeat in the Russian–Ottoman war of 1828–9, the French invasion of Algiers in 1830, the independence or semi-autonomy of Greece, Samos, Wallachia, Moldavia, and Serbia in the early 1830s, and most importantly Mehmed Ali's imperial dreams—all prompted the Ottoman authorities to pursue a more dynamic strategy. By the 1830s, reforms had picked up their pace, while Ottoman statesmen altered their diplomatic parlance. Observing that the notion of civilization was gaining traction in European international thought, they came to frame their empire among the civilized nations of the world, first, to enlist Great Power assistance in the ongoing civil war against Cairo (1832–41) and then, from 1841–2 onwards, to fend off foreign intrusions into their affairs. They created their own 'uncivilized others', and habitually blamed the instability of their empire on the latter's 'misguided' ambitions. The *Gülhane Edict* was a late 1830s adaptation of the 'circle of justice' married with the idea of 'civilization'.

In the 1850s, *medeniyetçilik* (civilizationism) prevailed. It was upheld as an ideology for reforming and, more opportunistically, for securing the Ottoman Empire by making it a member of the Concert of Europe, an objective finally attained in 1856. Yet the political and economic path to obtaining this end—the Crimean War—was so dangerous that in the immediate aftermath of the Treaty of Paris, the empire was more destabilized than ever, with incessant uprisings, rebellions, and even the imminent risk of partition at the hands of the revisionist Great Powers. The principles of guaranteeing the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire by means of European public law and respecting the sultan's relations with his subject peoples, both articulated in 1856, did not translate into practice as smoothly as Ottoman and European preservationist statesmen had hoped.

<sup>4</sup> Yasamee, 'The Ottoman Search for Security', 61.

The French-led 1860 intervention in Syria therefore not only meant for the Porte a violation of the Treaty of Paris, but also rekindled the sense of insecurity at a time when the Porte had become almost entirely dependent on European loans. The Ottoman government reluctantly consented to the intervention in the end, and equally grudgingly cooperated with the European agents on the ground, which led to the formation of a unique administrative structure in Lebanon, the *Mutasarrifat* regime.

An official declaration in November 1916 attests that the Ottoman ontological insecurity persisted until the very end of the empire. Two years into the First World War and the abolition of the capitulations, after negotiation with its allies, the German and Austrian governments, the Sublime Porte lurched toward a historical showdown with its enemies—Britain, France, and Russia—with a note of defiance.<sup>5</sup> Dated 1 November 1916, and published the next day in the semi-official organ *Hilal* (The Crescent),<sup>6</sup> the Porte's note proclaimed that the imperial Ottoman government had been led, during the events of the nineteenth century, to sign in various circumstances two important treaties with the European Great Powers, the Treaty of Paris of 1856 and the Treaty of Berlin of 1878.

The first established a state of affairs, a balance which the latter destroyed in very great part, but both were misunderstood by the very signatory Powers who violated their engagements, either openly or covertly, so as to obtain the execution of the clauses unfavourable to the Ottoman Empire, [but] they did not care about those which were stipulated to [the empire's] advantage; [they were] much more opposed to [these clauses] without discontinuity.<sup>7</sup>

The two treaties (the note continued) had stipulated commitments to respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, and excluded all interference in the relations between the imperial government and its subjects. But such commitments had not prevented the French government from exercising an armed intervention in Ottoman Syria in 1860 and from demanding the establishment of a new local regime. The co-signatory Powers had associated diplomatically with this act in order not to 'leave France free in her designs', fearing the latter could have annexationist aims. The Ottoman government would then grant Lebanon 'an organization of purely administrative and limited autonomy which gave a certain interference to the Great Powers'. Nor did the legal

<sup>5</sup> Ambassade Impériale Ottomane (Berlin) to the Minister, 14 Oct. 1916; H. Abro to Munir Bey, 15 Oct. 1916, BOA HR.HMS.ISO 65/12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, note dated 14 Oct. 1916; Abram Isaac Elkus (Constantinople) to Secretary of State, 6 Nov. 1916, NARA RG/M363, 'Relating to Political Rel. between Turkey and other states', 1910–29.

<sup>7</sup> *Hilal*, 2 Nov. 1916; cf. Abram Isaac Elkus (Constantinople) to Secretary of State, 6 November 1916, NARA RG/M363, Relating to Political Rel. between Turkey and other states, 1910–29.

commitments with regards to respecting Ottoman independence and territorial integrity hinder

the French government from occupying Tunis [1881] and establish a protectorate over this dependence of the Empire; nor did it prevent the British Government from occupying Egypt [1882] and to establish there her effective domination, nor from making a series of encroachments of Ottoman sovereignty south of the Yemen at Nedjid, in Kuwait, in El Qatar as well as in the Persian Gulf, nor did these same provisions inconvenience the four Governments who are now at war with Turkey in modifying by force the status of the island Crete and in creating there a new situation in flagrant contradiction with the integrity which they had undertaken to respect.<sup>8</sup>

On account of all these legal violations, the Ottoman ministers maintained, the Porte would no longer consider the provisions of the treaties of Paris and Berlin as binding on its part, and would abolish the special status of the *Mutasarrifat* system in Lebanon.<sup>9</sup> The note ended with a bold statement: the Ottoman Empire ‘definitely abandons her somewhat subordinate position under the collective guardianship of the Great Powers which some of the latter are interested in maintaining. She therefore enters the group of European Powers with all the rights and prerogatives on an entirely independent government.’<sup>10</sup>

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The 1916 note not only signals Ottoman historical resentments and her desire to redefine her position in the global imperial order as a government which enjoyed ‘all the rights and prerogatives’ of the group of European Powers, and thus end her sense of exclusion and subjugation. It also indicates how international law was perceived and experienced inversely by the so-called ‘peripheral’ historical actors in the long nineteenth century. This brings us to the third concluding remark, which concerns the intersectoral relational dynamics or the sectoral continuum that the historical actors saw in the affairs of the Levant.

The sequence of armed, legal, and administrative interventions ought not to be traced only in relation to the strategic calculations of the Powers and the Levantines. Emancipating the Eastern Question from this constricted arena, and heeding at least the legal, economic, financial, and religious factors through an

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Hilal*, 2 Nov. 1916; cf. Abram Isaac Elkus (Constantinople) to Secretary of State, 6 Nov. 1916, NARA RG/M363, ‘Relating to Political Rel. between Turkey and other states’, 1910–29.

<sup>10</sup> Emphasis mine. The Ottoman demands in relation to the *Mutasarrifat* regime were duly accepted by the German authorities one week later—although the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, commented on 11 Nov. that the treaties of Paris and Berlin were concluded between a large number of Powers and the Porte needed the consent of all of them. Hakki Pasha to M. Zimmerman, n.d., BOA.HR.HMS.ISO 65/14/4.

intersectoral kaleidoscope, allows us to see in a new light the complexity with which the intervening actors were confronted. For instance, we must take into account French indebtedness to Egypt in the late eighteenth century, in order better to understand the origins of the 1798 intervention—a factor that is usually omitted in the literature. For the same reason, without documenting the doomful Ottoman experience with international law especially during the Coalition Wars (1793–1815), we cannot explain why Ottoman statesmen refused to send a representative to the Congress of Vienna in 1814 when the Powers invited them to do so. Again, without recognizing that the Powers' proposal of guaranteeing the European dominions of the sultan under European public law was combined with demands to reregulate the customs tariffs in order to liberalize trade in the Ottoman dominions, we cannot explain why the sultan's ministers turned the Powers down once again in March 1815.

It is well known that the 1838 commercial agreements between the European Powers (starting with Britain) and the Porte, which reduced the import tariffs to the Powers' advantage and abolished monopolies, permitted Istanbul to enlist the support of the Powers in its civil war against Cairo (1832–41) the following year. Much less chronicled are the 1861–2 commercial conventions, which were the last of the periodical customs tariff negotiations between the Porte and the Powers. The latter stipulated the reduction of the average export duties by 1% per year until only a nominal duty would be levied over eight years. In the midst of an unprecedented financial crisis at the time, the Porte was able to secure, in exchange for this monumental concession, only a small loan. These economic and financial developments following the Crimean War signified a financial turn in the Eastern Question. The survival and revival of the Ottoman Empire was no longer a strategic question, and did not simply concern her prized possessions. At stake also were the interests of European lenders and owners of Ottoman bonds.

The list of intersectoral relational dynamics can be usefully extended by pointing out the use of religion as an instrument for mobilizing people, forming (transimperial) networks, or as a factor to tip the scales when strategic and economic considerations produced an impasse. The latter was exemplified by Britain's dithering in the 1820s as to whether she should join Russia in interfering in the Greek crisis, or when the international commissioners on Syria had to give their final advice concerning the verdict on the Druze feudal lords during the retributive justice proceedings, with extremely scarce evidence and information. On both occasions, Christian sentiments unblocked and facilitated the decision-making processes.

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The fourth and last general conclusion pertains to the repercussions of Great Power interventions for the subject peoples of the Levant. It would be a gross exaggeration to claim that the armed, legal, and administrative interventions of



the Great Powers were the chief cause of the civil wars that the local actors suffered through in the period covered in this book. A 'before and after' analysis suggests that circumstances for violence had pieced together and pre-dated these interventions and the civil strifes that erupted in Egypt (1801–11), Greece (1821–7), the wider Ottoman world (1832–41), and Lebanon (1841–60). The interventions tended to intensify and perpetuate violence in a manner that required further interventions, subsequently plunging the region into a violent vortex.

Egypt had already been in partial anarchy before the French intervention in 1798, and had witnessed comparable civil wars amongst local and Ottoman imperial actors due largely to their struggles to control the lucrative customs taxes and regions of the country. The Greek independence movement had already been growing through kinetic intellectual, emotional, and political momentum. 'Uprisings' of sorts were not a new occurrence in the 1820s, though the eventual, collective support of the Great Powers to the Greeks was. Mehmed Ali Paşa of Egypt launched his own struggle for independence not because he had been advised to do so by British and French agents, but because he wanted to secure his reign and the future of his family by means of control of the Taurus Mountains and Syria. The 1827 Navarino intervention and the 1830 French invasion of Algiers (a project he was involved in initially) signalled to him that the time had come to realize his ambitions. But none of these forced him into his Syrian *démarche*. And finally, the Lebanese had already fought with one another over sectarian and class issues before the Gülhane Edict of 1839, which marked a new epoch in Ottoman imperialism, and before the 1840 intervention of the Quadruple Alliance and the Porte which launched a (semi-)colonial contest in the country.

To argue otherwise, and trace the origins of civil wars merely to imperialist ambitions, reforms and Great Power interventions, would be to give too much credit to imperial agents and too little agency to the aspirations of local actors. For this reason, the popular, recently reiterated postulation that 'European and Ottoman imperial actors created the conditions for a sectarian storm [in Ottoman Lebanon]' appears to be misdirected.<sup>11</sup> New archival evidence suggests that the rise of egalitarian ideas among the Maronite clergy and peasantry, their claims for property in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the establishment of new representative institutions at the time, Druze aspirations for autonomy, the religious/class conflicts of 1820s and 1830s, and the establishment of quasi-sectarian councils in the early 1830s had already forged a degree of sectarian and class consciousness and sparked violence before the *Tanzimat* reforms and the Eastern Question reached Lebanon.

<sup>11</sup> Makdisi, *The Age of Coexistence*, 64.

Such popular beliefs are not only historically specious but also potentially perilous, for they unintentionally underpin the ‘paranoia-turned-myth of imperialism’ as the main cause of all tragedies in what has been called ‘the Middle East’—the Levant, Mesopotamia, parts of North Africa, Persia, and Arabia—since the 1900s.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the aspirations to expand and sustain empires or to exert a dominant influence indisputably and incalculably fuelled the miseries of the region. It is well documented that the European and Ottoman imperial authorities dispatched armed forces, annexed or partitioned territories, perpetrated genocides, created new polities, and suppressed local voices during the (post)imperial and (post)colonial histories of these regions. And it is evident that Western and regional imperial agents have never ceased to interfere with and influence Middle Eastern politics.

Yet the local actors, both subjects/citizens and states, have never been the ‘gullible objects’ or ‘bargaining chips’ merely in need of foreign aid. Nor has the region been passive grass, so to speak, trampled by the elephants wrestling above. Quite the contrary: in the nineteenth century, in the age of the Eastern Question, local actors were always the prime agents of oligarchical, strategic, class, and sectarian violence during the aforementioned civil wars. Even though it is true that, amongst others, the British promised the Mamluk beys protection ‘in the most solemn manner’, the Russians to the Porte, and the French to Mehmed Ali and the Maronites before turning their back on their Levantine interlocutors, it was as much through local agency that Great Power interferences were procured, that the civil wars in question were transimperialized, and that Levantine actors became conscious proxies.

Again, what I mean by this is not the fact that the local actors have simply to be attributed the role of troublemakers. What I suggest here is a need to inquire how violence prevailed and how it could have been quelled, first and foremost, in the rational and emotional positions that the local actors adopted towards each other. An early example of this is the collective resistance of the Egyptians in the 1800s. Shattered by years of inter-imperial wars and anarchy, a wide coalition formed by Cairene merchants, ulama, and the fellahin brought Mehmed Ali to power, and kept him there, despite British opposition and Ottoman reluctance, helping to subsequently end the strife in the country.

<sup>12</sup> For the origins of the term ‘Middle East’, see Alfred Thayer Mahan, ‘The Persian Gulf and International Relations’, *National Review* 40 (Sept. 1902): 39; T. E. Gordon, ‘The Problems of the Middle East’, *The Nineteenth Century* 37 (Mar. 1900): 413; Clayton R. Koppes, ‘Captain Mahan, General Gordon, and the Origins of the Term “Middle East”’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 12(1) (1976): 95–8. This ‘paranoia-turned-myth’ is manipulated time and again in contemporary politics. For example, the Kurdish question in Turkey has long remained unaddressed and even undisputed, mainly because the nationalist official narrative has tended to view it as a by-product of (British, American, and Russian) imperialist designs, heedless of the democratic aspirations of the Kurds, while Kurdish politicians have insistently sought foreign material and political assistance in obtaining their ends, although such efforts have usually proved counterproductive as they have only bolstered exclusionary Turkish nationalism.

Another example is the fact that peace in Lebanon endured from the 1860s until the First World War even though the Eastern Question was not definitively settled and inter-imperial competition had not come to an end. In fact, as of the late 1870s, during the so-called era of high imperialism, when the annexationist nibbling of the Ottoman territories became rampant, and especially after the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, Lebanon played host to a contest for domination between the Hamidian, conservative Ottoman paşas who tried to establish a more direct rule, and French agents looking to bolster their regional influence.<sup>13</sup> The inter-imperial struggle again became religiously tinged, and even overlapped with the decline of the silk industry (as at the time silk prices were dampened by increasing supply from Japan and China).<sup>14</sup> Yet, due in part to a change in political attitudes towards sectarian and class differences since the early 1860s, and in part because of the appalling memory of the recent conflicts and the improved security apparatus, local response to the difficulties proved to be more pacific, and tended to emigration rather than violence.<sup>15</sup>

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The early history of Great Power interventions in the Levant provides us with important lessons. To borrow from the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), these lessons constitute ‘the classical set of examples for the interpretation of our entire culture and its development. [They are] the means for understanding ourselves, a means for regulating our age—and thereby a means for overcoming it.’<sup>16</sup> Taking into account the temporal and sectoral continuum that historical actors saw in the affairs of the Levant in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries enables us to discern and apprehend that the degree of complexity of regional affairs at the time was even greater than has been previously recognized. This complexity repeatedly left the historical actors uncertain as to how to act, react, secure their interests, and ward off perceived threats.

We must recall the British consul Colonel Rose’s bemusement in 1844, and his questions as to when the moral obligations that induced the Great Powers to interfere in the governance of another state began and ended; whether the Great Powers could creditably further interfere if the locals, albeit only some of them, were opposed to their political schemes; and whether it was fitting that the Powers should be occupied in endeavouring to conciliate the jarring interests and the

<sup>13</sup> Akarh, *The Long Peace*, 41–57.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (London: Hurst, 2014), 33.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 30; Makdisi, *The Age of Coexistence*, 64–74; Hakim, *Lebanese*, 149–158. For a skilful analysis of the Lebanese emigration, see also Akram F. Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Struggle between Science and Wisdom* (1875); cf. Nandita B. Mellamphy, *The Three Stigmata of Friedrich Nietzsche: Political Physiology in the Age of Nihilism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 125.

animosities of locals in a foreign country.<sup>17</sup> These questions constitute the core of the discussions over foreign interventions today that tend to overlook ‘what imperialism has done and what orientalism continues to do’.<sup>18</sup>

The experience amassed in the period between the late eighteenth century and the early 1860s served as a model or inspiration for generations. For example, as early as 1866–9, when another Great Power intervention took place in Ottoman Crete, the ‘Lebanese solution’, as a contemporary put it, was implemented and a consociational administrative system inspired by the *Règlement organique* of Lebanon was introduced in Crete with the mediation of the Powers.<sup>19</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the 1860 intervention was considered a potential prototype when, in 1912–14, the five Great Powers intervened again in the Armenian–Kurdish civil war in eastern Anatolia.<sup>20</sup> But the February 1914 settlement was never set in motion, as the First World War broke out. The following year, when hundreds of thousands of Armenians perished as Ottoman authorities ‘dared to annihilate the existence of [the] entire [Armenian] nation’ of the empire, to cite the Ottoman minister of finance, Mehmed Cavid Bey, British diplomats explicitly turned to the 1860 model, and discussed a plan to stop the ‘Armenian massacres’ in the same fashion as the intervention in Syria, i.e. by persuading the Ottoman authorities to end the massacres.<sup>21</sup> But they quickly withdrew the idea of ‘taking inspiration from 1860’ from the agenda, and decided to ‘provide the parallel to that by defeating the Turks, not by writing to them’.<sup>22</sup>

Historical actors repeatedly turned to early instances of foreign interventions to make sense of and grapple with the bewildering realities of the Levant. Yet, despite their insufficient grasp of these realities, limiting the Eastern Question to a strategic dilemma and ignoring the intricacies of local politics ‘as questions of detail’ to be addressed eventually, they foolhardily carried on staging interventions that went to such lengths as carving out new, inorganic mandates or (semi-) independent states out of the Ottoman Empire in the 1910s.

As the Eastern Question was arguably terminated with the fall of Osman’s dynasty just before the Lausanne Conference in 1922–3, what we may term as its successor in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Middle Eastern Question, has likewise proved to be a very long list of much more fragmented yet still interconnected issues and questions, cutting across time and sectors:

<sup>17</sup> Rose to Canning, 25 Mar. 1844, CRAS 46–8.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), xvi–xvii; cf. Jessica Whyte, “‘Always on Top’? The “Responsibility to Protect” and the Persistence of Colonialism”, in *The Postcolonial World*, ed. Jyotsyna G. Singh and David D. Kim (London: Routledge, 2016), 311.

<sup>19</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, 126.

<sup>20</sup> Ozan Ozavci, ‘Honour and Shame: The Diaries of a Unionist and the “Armenian Question”’, in *The End of the Ottomans: The Genocide of 1915 and the Politics of Turkish Nationalism*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser, Margaret L. Anderson, Seyhan Bayraktar, and Thomas Schmutz (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 193–220.

<sup>21</sup> Ozavci, ‘Honour’, 213.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Massacre of Armenians by Turks’, 28 Apr. 1915, TNA FO 371/2488/51010.

demographic engineering, population exchanges, insecurity in the mandate states, violent independence struggles and their brutal suppression, oil (and other energy) competition, the Arab–Israeli controversy, sectarianism, (militarist) authoritarianism, etc. A new superpower rivalry during the Cold War in the global north provoked new interventions, further political instability and violence, and further quests for power and influence among the global powers like the United States, Russia, and (to a lesser extent) the European Union and China, as well as among the historically, strategically, economically, and/or religiously motivated aspirant regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

The actors on the stage have changed and increased in number since the nineteenth century. Empires have collapsed. Time and space have been compressed to an unprecedented degree thanks to technological advances. But, with its institutionalized hierarchies and repertoires of power that have persisted through the changing pecking order of international security institutions, cross-border interventions (now usually through remote warfare, with missiles and drones), proxy wars, the manipulation of civil wars, (neo-)liberal advances, and an international law with neo-imperialist and unequal undertones, the pattern has remained. In this specific sense, we today share with actors of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a common, counterproductive culture of security. We are their contemporaries.

Remember the discussion in the run-up to the United States-led occupation of Iraq in 2003. The ambitions of the neo-conservative administration in Washington, DC, the ‘altruistic’ and ‘noble’ role self-tailored by the United States as a transformative global power and the latter’s appeal to coercion to achieve its security objectives, were likewise regarded by many, including the neo-conservatives themselves, as properly imperialistic.<sup>23</sup> Even though the British prime minister, Tony Blair, would, four months into the occupation, state before the US Congress that ‘a study of history provides so little instruction for our present day’, Middle East experts, even proponents of war, would turn to the recent past in an attempt to justify the intervention.<sup>24</sup> Among them was the late Fouad Ajami, the American-Lebanese Middle East expert, and one of the most popular and influential proponents of the Iraqi war to reportedly advise neo-conservative leaders in Washington, DC.

Before the intervention, Ajami wrote that the British Empire’s moment in Iraq had come after the First World War when she was economically exhausted, and

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Michael Cox, ‘Empire, Imperialism and the Bush Doctrine’, *Review of International Studies* 30(4) (Oct. 2004): 585–608; Caroline Daniel, ‘Bush’s Imperial Presidency’, *Financial Times*, 5 July 2006; Richard N. Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 553, n. 61. For a critique of this categorization, see Daniel H. Nexon and Thomas Wright, ‘What’s at Stake in the American Empire Debate’, *Political Science Review* 101(2) (May 2007): 253–71.

<sup>24</sup> Louise Kettle, *Learning from the History of British Interventions in the Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 1.

had therefore failed.<sup>25</sup> It was now the United States' moment in Iraq and its driving motivation (that 'imperial burden') should have been 'modernising the Arab world', above and beyond toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein.<sup>26</sup> Three years into the war, in 2006, Ajami argued that since the war was an effort to decapitate the despotic, sclerotic, and lethal regime of Saddam Hussein, which 'would have lasted a thousand years' had the occupation not happened, it was a legitimate 'imperial mission,' 'a *foreigner's gift*' to the Iraqi inhabitants.<sup>27</sup> It was a 'noble war', the outcome of which would 'determine whether it is a noble success or a noble failure'.<sup>28</sup>

Given the death toll during and after the war, the descent of Iraq into further disastrous strife since the mid-2000s, and the economic losses incurred because of the intervention, hindsight suggests that it is quite evident whether the 2003 occupation and the subsequent military and naval missions in Iraq have been a success or failure. Even so, foreign armed interventions in the Middle East continue in an equally foolhardy fashion. Almost every Middle Eastern society, especially Syria, Yemen, Libya, and to a lesser extent Lebanon, Turkey, and Palestine, is engulfed in internationalized civil wars or political and economic tragedies.<sup>29</sup> The political actors, both Western and regional, keep tossing their resources into the infinite complexities of the region, at the expense of exhausting their economies and polities and provoking even greater misfortune on the ground.

Seen from the perspective of the last two centuries, we can conclude that they do so with a haughtiness and pomposity akin to that of their imperial forebears in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Just as Ajami and the neo-conservatives depicted the 2003 invasion of Iraq as a 'foreigner's gift', despite their 'push-and-pull' factors, each historical intervention covered in this book was, almost without exception, also initiated by their entrepreneurs under the façades of 'disinterested' 'service', 'aid', 'favour', 'priceless grace', or 'friendly assistance' to the Levantine inhabitants. Needless to say, the discourse of noble disinterestedness was always a beguiling delusion. In reality, each of these interventions was formed through manifold layers of threat perceptions and interests which I have tried to peel away in this book. The immense historical and global complexities of the

<sup>25</sup> In Aug. 2002, Ajami was cited by then US Vice President Dick Cheney on how Iraqi inhabitants would welcome the Americans, in the aftermath of the expedition, with kites and boom boxes. L. Carl Brown, 'The Dream Palace of the Empire: Is Iraq a "Noble Failure"?' *New York Times*, 12 Sept. 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Fouad Ajami, 'Iraq and the Arabs' Future', *Foreign Affairs* (Jan./Feb. 2003), accessed 20 Mar. 2018: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2003-01-01/iraq-and-arabs-future>

<sup>27</sup> Brown, 'Dream Palace'; Fouad Ajami, *The Foreigner's Gift: The Americans, the Arabs and the Iraqis in Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2006). Emphasis mine.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, 'Dream Palace'.

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed study of the inter-connectivity of civil wars in the Middle East in the 2010s, see William Harris, *Quicksilver War: Syria, Iraq and the Spiral of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For a global outlook on the civil war in Yemen, read esp. Isa Blumi, *Destroying Yemen: What Chaos in Arabia Tells Us about the World* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

region, and the political and diplomatic incapacity to deal with them holistically, were precisely why, as is the case today, Great Power interventions tended to bring to the nineteenth-century Levant only further vulnerability and insecurity through heightened antagonisms, new rivalries, and contentions. However goodwilled they might have been, the repercussions of these 'gifts' proved to be nothing but detrimental and dangerous.

