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An Untimely Return of the Eastern Question?

Before the news of violence in Mount Lebanon broke in early June 1860, European public opinion was preoccupied with the issues of the unification of Germany, the war in Italy, the Balkan crisis, and the Arrow (Opium) War in China. The first reports of the civil war in the mountain that described Maronite superiority over the Druze aroused little interest.[1] But, when the course of the conflict reversed and the reports began to depict the sanguinary disturbances as 'massacres' of Christians by 'Muslim fanatics' in early July, religious sentiment was excited. Lebanese affairs provoked immense feeling, receiving much greater coverage from then on.[2]

In the absence of telegram lines in Syria and Asia Minor, news of an event in Lebanon would normally reach the European and Ottoman metropoles between one week to ten days later, depending on the schedule of the steamships. More often than not, this would mean discrepancies between the actions on the ground and the information at hand in the metropoles. For instance, in late June 1860, by the time the news of massacres in Lebanon reached Europe, fighting in the mountain had largely come to an end.[3] After the arrival of several Ottoman army corps under the command of prominent officers and admirals (including General Ismail Kmety, Mahmud Paşa, and Mustafa Naili Paşa), Mount Lebanon had become more tranquil. Moreover, the fact that four French battleships, one Russian frigate, and a British corvette had visibly anchored off Beirut to oversee the situation had instilled a degree of fear in the belligerents and a sense of security among the victimized inhabitants.[4]

[1] Julia Hauser, *German Religious Women in Late Ottoman Beirut: Competing Missions* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 52.

[2] E.g. in Spain the two major newspapers, the liberal leftist *La Discusión* and the absolutist *La Esperanza*, began to cover the Lebanese 'atrocities' in early July, when the Druze gained the upper hand in the civil war. *La Discusión*, 7, 12, 18, 19, 29, 31 July, 1 Aug. 1860; *La Esperanza*, 10, 13 16, 21, 24 July 1860. I should like to thank Rebeca Gonzalez-Rolfe and Elvira María González Salmón for drawing my attention to these sources.

[3] 'Kopiya raporta General'nogo konsula Rossii v Bejrute Lobanovu-Rostovskomu', 15 July 1860, AVPRI f. 133 (Kantselyariya), o. 469, e. 42, ll. 472–9.

[4] Fawaz, *An Occasion*, 101; Peter Akos, 'L'Intervention et l'activité du General Kmetty au Liban, 1860–62', in *Mélanges serpentini*, ed. Laszlo J. Nagy (Szeged: Universite de Szeged, 2014), 105–17; *La Patrie*, 7 July 1860; La Roncière to La Baronne de La Roncière Le Noury, 5 July 1860, in *Correspondance*

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Unaware of the situation, in Paris, the French foreign minister, Édouard A. Thouvenel, proposed to the courts of the four Powers an intervention in the Lebanese civil war in the shape of the dispatch of an international commission and a European expeditionary army. He appealed with an emotional vocabulary, arguing that theirs was a responsibility towards humanity.[5] He maintained that, in line with the beliefs of the majority of the European public, the Great Powers had to act urgently and decisively.

Even though Thouvenel's call received endorsement on the part of, first, Russia and then Austria, Prussia, and Britain, the Porte objected to the intervention plan. Ottoman ministers believed that, following the stipulations of the Treaty of Paris, the European Powers ought to respect the territorial integrity of the sultan's dominions as well as the internal affairs of his empire. They suspected that the Powers' eagerness to intervene stemmed from a foreign ploy. In their view, violence in Lebanon was part of a grand scheme that would serve as a pretext for Russian and French interventions in the Balkans and the Levant and help them realize their revisionist ambitions. A tug of war then began, when pro-interventionist Powers and Ottoman elites looked to influence European public opinion by means of funding newspapers and active lobbying. Britain increasingly suspected the real intentions of France and Russia, and more than once changed her position over the intervention.

The discursive practices employed by the Powers and the Porte in the 40 days between the arrival of the news of Christian 'massacres' from Mount Lebanon and the final decision of whether or not to send European troops to the Levant constituted a unique episode of the Eastern Question, which suddenly returned to the centre stage of inter-imperial diplomacy. The incongruence between time (the transmission of the news) and space (local realities) revealed one of the blind spots of the imperial gaze in the nineteenth century. The legal, commercial, religious, and strategic undertones of the intervention plan and the counter-intervention propaganda not only testified to the intersectoral aspects of the Eastern Question. Seen together, they also demonstrated how 'humanitarian' the ensuing intervention actually was.

Responsibility Towards Humanity: Thouvenel's Démarche

Having spent four years in Istanbul in times of grave political and financial crises for the Ottoman ministers, French Foreign Minister Thouvenel was well versed in the Eastern Question. In 1860, hearing the news from Lebanon, he was very

intime de l'amiral de La Roncière Le Noury avec sa femme et sa fille (1855–1871), ed. Joseph L'Hopital and and Louis de Saint-Blancard (Paris: Champion, 1928–9), 228.

[5] Circulaire de Thouvenel, Paris, 6 July 1860, AMAE CP Angleterre, 717/194.

sceptical about the Porte's competence and the local Ottoman authorities' willingness to safeguard Christians. He became even more assured of his suspicions after receiving intelligence that local Ottoman armed forces, having received no salary for several months, had done little to protect the Christians in Mount Lebanon, and had, in certain places, engaged in pillage themselves.[6] He therefore ardently campaigned for an armed intervention.

Besides, the French minister saw in military intervention multiple political, material, and moral gains. Since France was traditionally the protector of the Maronites in the Levant, she could consolidate her influence over them by being actively involved in their safeguarding. Secondly, even though before 1840 British subjects had been able to go to the Levant only with French passports, and their ships with French flags, London had managed to take the lead in commercial imports in the region in several sectors, and France could now seek ways to return to the status quo ante 1840.[7] Thirdly, it would be a good opportunity to divert public attention from France's recent annexation of Savoy and Nice while interfering in Italian affairs. The Catholic right, which had despised the interference in Italy, would be silenced, and popular support, much shaken since the annexation of Savoy, would be retained. Fourthly, the construction of the Isthmus of Suez was under way, which rendered Mount Lebanon doubly important for geostrategic reasons.[8] Fifthly, the crisis between the Druze and Maronites had heavily damaged cocoon production in Syria, which had led to a crisis in the French textile industry, and this could be rectified.[9] Finally, France could regain the prestige she had lost in the Levant since the 1840 intervention, and by this means realize the dream of Bonaparte and Talleyrand by turning the Mediterranean into a French lake.

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Thouvenel was an international lawyer by formation. He knew well the legal complications of the intervention arising from the Treaty of Paris, and was familiar with the legal doctrines of the time that upheld the principle of non-interventionism. The latter had been brought to the fore by the jurists of international law following the Monroe Doctrine of 1823.[10] As the Oxford don

[6] Lavalette to Thouvenel, 13 June 1860, AMAE CP Turquie 345/49; Lavalette to Thouvenel, 25 July 1860, AMAE CP Turquie 345/333.

[7] [French Consulate in Beirut] to Lhuys, 29 May 1854, AMAE 42CCC/7/11; Marcel Émerit, 'La Crise syrienne et l'expansion économique française en 1860', *Revue historique* 207(2) (1953): 211–32, at 212–13.

[8] Ibid. 217–21; see also Karl Marx, 'Events in Syria, Session of the British Parliament, the State of British Commerce', in *Karl Marx and Frederic Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 17, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 429.

[9] 'Note sur les causes de l'évacuation de la Syrie par la France', n.d., AMAE Mémoires Turquie, 50MD/122/145; Bentivoglio to Thouvenel, 1 Aug. 1860, AMAE 42CCC July 18241.

[10] Ann Van Wynen Thomas and A. J. Thomas, Jr, *Non-intervention: The Law and its Import in the Americas* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1956), 14.

Montague Bernard maintained in 1860, non-interventionism was considered a cardinal condition for the continuation of the system of states, because it had:

> [a] direct tendency to produce mischiefs worse than it removes . . . It destroys national self-respect and self-reliance. It interrupts the natural process by which political institutions are matures through the ripening of political ideas and habits. What it plants does not take root; what it establishes does not endure.[11]

On a theoretical level, the problem was whether there was a rule that could admit interventions in the interests of humanity.

In his recent works, the Swiss scholar Davide Rodogno has aptly shown that the exception was intervention in 'the barbaric East', which instinctively created a ground for justification for the European powers. 'The vast majority of European scholars either assumed that intervention [in the Ottoman Empire] was . . . permissible', because it was often seen as a barbaric or semi-civilized country 'whose sovereignty was neither fully recognised nor respected'.[12] Intervention was thus justified on 'moral and political grounds', and in legal discussions over the question of intervention in the Ottoman Empire, the terms 'civilization', 'humanity', and 'humanitarian' were emotionally exploited to galvanize public support, in which selectiveness rather than universality prevailed and through which interventions were legalized.[13]

As importantly, Christian rhetoric was simultaneously adopted as a coda to tip the scales when attempts at intervention were barred. This was partly why and how European scholars and statesmen often overlooked the fact that 'equality before the law and religious freedom in their own states, let alone colonies, did not exist', and that the French rule in Algeria was 'a far more intolerant, discriminating and despotic one'.[14] All these factors rendered the peripheral experience of international law dramatically different from the experience of the Great Powers in the mid-nineteenth century.

Thouvenel managed to garner the support of European public opinion at large. In early July, the news from the Levant had stirred up 'deep feelings' in Paris.[15]

[11] Montague Bernard, *On the Principle of Non-intervention: A Lecture Delivered in the Hall of All Souls College* (Oxford: J. H. & J. Parker, 1860), 9–10. Eliav Lieblich underscores that much of Bernard's reasoning contended with the rejection of consent as a 'justification for intervention'. 'First, he rejected the legality of forward-looking intervention treaties . . . which are concluded in advance for the maintenance of a particular dynasty or of particular institutions.' He went on to deal with the issue of ad hoc intervention requested by a legitimate sovereign, which, he believed, could not exist since 'there was no such thing in international law . . . as a legitimate ruler': Eliav Lieblich, 'International Law and Civil Wars: Intervention and Consent' (doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 2012), 244.

[12] Davide Rodogno, 'European Legal Doctrines on Intervention and the Status of the Ottoman Empire within the "Family of Nations" Throughout the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the History of International Law* 18 (2016): 5–41, at 6, 11. For similar arguments, see Simpson, *Great Powers*, 244.

[13] Rodogno, 'European Legal Doctrines', 36.

[14] Ibid. 8–9.

[15] *Le Moniteur*, 17 July 1860.

French public opinion was almost unified in its attitude towards the incidents in Syria. *Le Moniteur*, the official organ of the empire, and government-funded papers such as *Le Constitutionnel*, *La Patrie*, and *Le Pays*, as well as opposition and progressive papers including *Le Siècle* and *Les Débats*, and Catholic newspapers, particularly *L'Ami de la religion*, made spirited pleas for active European interference to suppress the 'massacres'.[16] Their publications teemed with references to a 'war of humanity' and 'Christian civilization' against 'barbarism'.

On July 10, Paulin Limayrac of *La Patrie* wrote: 'la France est toujours la nation des Croisades.'[17] 'Christian Europe and especially France' would stop the Druze, who appeared as 'the last and odious representatives of Eastern barbarism'.[18] *Le Moniteur* announced that the massacres of Christians provoked in French public opinion 'a painful emotion' of commiseration for the victims and indignation against 'their barbarous murderers'.[19] French military intervention had to take place, the moderately liberal *Journal des Débats* wrote, 'for our honour, for our legitimate interests and for the rest of the world'.[20] These arguments were boosted by the distorted and exaggerated description of events in Lebanon, where for example Maronite women were said to have been 'bathed in their children's blood before being burnt by the Muslims', while several petitions from the Maronites of Lebanon, demanding military intervention by French troops 'to protect them', were presented to the parliament by Catholic deputies.[21]

The deeply emotional atmosphere made the Eastern Question of primary importance to Emperor Napoleon III, whose attention had been previously been fixed primarily on Italy.[22] Thouvenel was given authorization to speak with Russian and Prussian agents about possible scenarios involving the partition of the Ottoman Empire.[23] Pamphlets were published to determine the course of action France ought to follow. For example, conservative historian Adolphe de Lescure suggested dealing with the 'unexpected and painful awakening of the Eastern Question' by means of a unilateral intervention instead of letting the Concert of Europe, 'that disparate association, which stifle all generous initiatives' and prevent France from 'the Mediterranean rule' to which she was 'predestined'.[24] But Thouvenel remained committed to multilateral action, as it was

[16] Roger Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), 46.
[17] *La Patrie*, 10 July 1860. [18] Ibid. [19] *Le Moniteur*, 17 July 1860.
[20] Bouyrat, *Devoir d'intervenir*, 120.
[21] Davide Rodogno, 'The "Principles of Humanity" and the European Powers' Intervention in Ottoman Lebanon and Syria in 1860–61', in *Humanitarian Intervention: A History*, ed. Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 166–7.
[22] Panchenkova, *Politika Francii*, 36.
[23] Robert Heinrich Ludwig Graf von der Goltz to Alexander Gustav Adolph Freiherr von Schleinitz, 27 July 1860, Paris, GStA III. Ha MdA I. Nr. 7303, f. 100–103.
[24] Mathurin François Adolphe de Lescure, *La Nouvelle Question d'Orient* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1860), 5, 13, 27.

practically impossible to gain support of the majority of the Powers, given that Prussia was disinclined to join Russia and France in a scheme of the partition.[25]

When the foreign minister circulated his plan to the imperial metropoles, he received the instant support of Russia. The correspondent of *The Times* reported on 15 July that there was but 'one voice, one cry' in Russia: 'We must succour the Christians, exterminate their barbarous oppressors, revenge religion and outraged humanity, finish with the Turks and drive them out of Europe.'[26] But no other response came from the other metropoles. They all laid low for the moment.

Their silence was broken when a new series of tragic news was received from Damascus, just hours away from Mount Lebanon. On 9–10 July, a Muslim group led by impoverished artisans, shopkeepers, and local notables that allegedly included Mustafa Bey al-Hawasilim Rashid Agha and Al-Sayyif Mahmud al-Rikabi, was joined by the Druze of anti-Lebanon and Hawran who chased after the runaway Maronite refugees, and attacked Bab Tuma, the Christian district of the town.[27] More than 3,000 people were killed. Christian properties, including those of the French and American consuls, were pillaged and looted. It was also reported that the American consul, Mikhail Mishaqa (1800–88) was wounded, and the Dutch Consul S. A. Cutsi (Coetzee or Contzi[28]) was 'murdered'.[29]

Consular and journalistic reports suggested that the Ottoman governor of Damascus, Ahmed Paşa, another allegedly conservative and anti-Christian figure, and the troops under his command, did nothing to end the violence. Instead they joined the perpetrators in pillaging.[30] Hundreds of Damascene Christians took refuge in the mansion of a respected inhabitant, Abd al-Qader the Algerian. Once these events had ended on 10 July, the Christians under his protection began to stream into Beirut every day, in bands of 200 or 300 and escorted by Ottoman soldiers, the sight of whom brought great fear to Lebanon.[31]

The news of the Damascene massacres immediately rekindled religious hysteria in Europe. *Le Constitutionnel* wrote that Muslim fanatics were no longer respecting the rights of humanity.[32] The Cabinet of Vienna instantly responded to

[25] See Ch. 11. [26] 'Foreign Intelligence', *The Times*, 25 July 1860, 10.

[27] Al-Bitār, *Ḥaliyyāt*, vol. 1, 263–5; Ibrahim 'Urbaylī, *Mudhākarāt Ibrahim 'Urbayli* (1913), 155–6; Rogan, 'Sectarianism'; Kamal S. Salibi, 'The 1860 Upheaval in Damascus as seen by al-Sayyif Muhammad Abu'l-Su'ud al-Hasibi, Notable and Later Naqib al-Ashraf of the City', in *Beginnings of Modernisation in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 185–204; Abdul-Karim Rafeq, 'New Light on the 1860 Riots in Ottoman Damascus', *Die Welt des Islams* XXVIII(1/4) (1988): 412–430.

[28] The name of the Dutch consul appears in different forms in Dutch newspapers and parliamentary meetings. But in the two letters I was able to see he signs his name as 'Cutsi'.

[29] 'Per Telegraaf', *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 16 July 1860. I would like to thank Bert-Jan van Slooten for this source. 'The Massacres at Damascus', *The Freeman's Journal*, 3 Aug. 1860; BOA HR.SYS 1520/3/107; Van Camet (Smyrna) to W. E. Frecken (Beirut), 20 July 1860, HNA 2.05.32.213.05.32.31/9.

[30] Johann Gottfried Wetzstein (Damascus) to Theodor Weber, 16 July 1860, GStA I. Ha Rep 81 XI Nr. 66, f. 95–8. See also Kurd 'Alī, *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 3, 84.

[31] Sami Kuri, *Une histoire du Liban à travers les archives des jésuites, 1816–1845* (Beirut: Dar el-Marchreq, 1986), 270.

[32] *Le Constitutionnel*, 19 July 1860.

Thouvenel's proposal, agreeing to endorse France to stop the course of 'excesses' and prevent the recurrence of such 'atrocities'.[33] On 20 July, it assented to the French proposals, but, because the cabinet did not want to leave Venice without troops, Austria preferred not to send her forces to Syria.[34] In Berlin, Foreign Minister Baron Alexander von Schleinitz expressed his agreement with Thouvenel's sentiments about acting in the 'interests of humanity', though Prussia herself could not contribute to the expeditionary forces because of material obstacles.[35]

Only the British cabinet remained hesitant over Thouvenel's proposal. In fact, as soon as the first news of 'Lebanese massacres' received in London and even before the French proposals were dispatched, the immediate reaction of Sir John Russell, the British foreign secretary, was no different from his French counterpart. The facts spoke for themselves, he believed: the issue was 'a question of humanity'. He told Jean Fialin, duc de Persigny, the French ambassador to London, that he desired an accord between the British and French governments concerning the situation in Syria.[36]

However, Russell found Thouvenel's proposition of military intervention 'too serious and even dangerous'.[37] He dithered, reminded Persigny that the sultan had already sent new battalions, and (as we will see) had also sent his foreign minister, Fuad Paşa, to Syria. But Persigny assured him of the 'disinterestedness' of the French plan, and that Britain would assume 'a terrible responsibility' if she declined the proposal. The news of the Damascene massacres, during which the Dutch consul had allegedly been murdered, and the persistence of the violence, proved a strong enough impetus for the British cabinet to subsequently endorse the plan. Britain agreed, but not without guaranteeing to confine the French expedition by means of a convention that would limit the size of the expeditionary army, set temporal limits to the intervention, and involve the Porte's signature.

Orders were then sent to Marseilles and Toulon to make ready at once for the transport of the French troops. General Charles-Marie-Napoléon de Beaufort d'Hautpoul (1804–90), who was reporting from Nice and the Savoy border at the time and who had served in the 1830 campaign in Algiers as well as under Ibrahim Paşa in Syria in 1834–7, was appointed as the commander of the French expeditionary army.[38] Thouvenel even drafted a convention for the Powers.[39] But just before the embarkation day (24 July), a counter-order to suspend military

[33] De Moustier to Thouvenel, 14 July 1860, AMAE CP Autriche 477/216.
[34] De Moustier to Thouvenel, 20 July 1860, AMAE CP Autriche 477/242.
[35] Auvergne to Thouvenel, 12 July 1860, AMAE CP Prusse 336/252; Auvergne to Paris, 21 July 1860, AMAE CP Prusse 336/280.
[36] Persigny to Thouvenel, [13?] July 1860, AMAE CP Ang 717/193.
[37] Persigny to Thouvenel, 18 July 1860, AMAE CP Ang 717/226.
[38] Papiers de personelle, Beaufort d'Hautpol, AMAE 393QO/281.
[39] Thouvenel to Lavalette, 21 July 1860, AMAE CP Turquie 133/345/297.

preparations was suddenly submitted.[40] 'Something must have occurred since yesterday to occasion the counter-order,' *The Times* reported in confusion.[41]

Against Intervention: Propaganda and Diplomacy

What happened was that once the news of Thouvenel's enterprise reached Istanbul, the Porte's agents in Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna, Turin, and London (but, due to poor relations with Russia, not in St Petersburg) had embarked on a vigorous lobbying campaign to stop the intervention.[42] They had achieved their ends for the time being.

As noted above, in the eyes of the sultan's ministers, events in the Levant were considered to be machinations on the part of Russia and France. As early as 1859, intelligence had conveyed that some Arabs (Algerians) with French passports who were connected with Abd al-Qader had arrived at Syria ostensibly looking for settlement but had immediately caused disturbances.[43] In the eyes of Ottoman ministers, this intelligence fitted well with Emperor Napoleon III's 1858 schemes for carving out from the Ottoman Empire an Arab kingdom under Abd al-Qader's rule. The ambassador in Paris, Ahmed Vefik, wrote that it followed 'from all the facts . . . that the Franco- Russian entente', which the Porte had been closely following since 1859, was not 'unrelated to the deplorable events'. He had gathered intelligence himself and suspected that the command of the French expeditionary force to be dispatched to the Levant purportedly to suppress violence in Mount Lebanon and Damascus would be extended to Abd al-Qader in Damascus, which would be placed under the latter's authority in due course.[44]

Given all these, the Porte believed that it was not coincidental that two 'disturbances' occurred in the Balkans and Syria simultaneously. Nor was it that the Kisrawan army of Tanyus Shahin had hoisted French flags during their rebellion.[45] Nor the fact that the 'French-backed' Maronites had prepared for the war for a year and had attacked the Druze first.[46]

Faced with the crises in the Balkans and the Levant, the sultan's ministers acted with alacrity. In early June, Grand Vizier Kıbrıslı Mehmed Paşa had departed for Herzegovina for inspection and punishment of the culpable there. And in early

[40] Russell to Bulwer, 24 July 1860, TNA FO 195/659/26.
[41] 'Foreign Intelligence. France', *The Times*, 26 July 1860.
[42] Aristarchi Bey (Berlin) to Fuad Paşa, 11 July 1860, *ODD* 90; Musurus (London) to Safvet Efendi, 12 July 1860, *ODD* 91; Rüstem Bey (Turin) to Safvet Efendi, 12 July 1860, *ODD* 94.
[43] BOA HR.SYS 1528/23.
[44] Ahmed Vefik to Musurus, 20 July 1860, BOA HR.SFR.3 52/3/11.
[45] According to Ussama Makdisi, the flags had been used to undercut traditional French support of the Maronite Khazin sheikhs whose property the Maronite peasantry had seized: Makdisi, *Culture*, 101–2.
[46] Ahmed Vefik to Musurus, 20 July 1860, BOA HR.SFR.3 52/3/11.

July, after negotiations with the Powers' agents in Istanbul, the foreign minister, Fuad Paşa, was appointed as extraordinary envoy invested with special administrative and military powers to establish full order and tranquillity in Syria.[47]

A man with considerable international stature, charisma, and a good knowledge of the French language and of European diplomatic habits, as well as a famous wit, Fuad's appointment was received with satisfaction and approval on the part of the Powers. At his disposal an army of 16,000 men, supplies of grains, and funds for reparations and indemnities that emptied the imperial treasury, he left for Syria on 12 July and landed five days later.[48] His object was to show the world that the Ottomans could handle this domestic 'disturbance' on their own.[49] However, while Fuad was still on his way to Beirut, the emerging news of the Damascene massacres undermined the full effect of the sultan's move.

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In mid-July, the French proposals for an armed intervention had transformed the suspicions of the Ottoman ministers over foreign 'machinations' into an inexorable conviction.[50] While an active propaganda campaign for intervention was under way in Europe, Ottoman diplomats complained to European statesmen about the level of exaggeration in the press about the events in Lebanon and the constant calls for a crusade against Islam. They strove to explain that Ottoman Lebanon had been administratively reorganized in 1842 under pressure from the Powers.[51] They reminded their interlocutors that the Porte had been forced to send its troops previously stationed in Syria to the borders of Montenegro and Serbia, and that their absence had prevented them from stopping the 'carnage' in Mount Lebanon.

They also placed blame on the 'barbarism' of the Syrians. By this means, they tried to separate and distance 'civilized' Istanbul from its 'uncivilized' periphery in order to avoid any responsibility. Equally importantly, they warned that if European (Christian) troops landed in Syria under the pretext of ensuring the security of the Christians, in the rest of Asia, Christians of other cities would inevitably find themselves exposed to dangers: '[t]roublemakers would inevitably spill into the interior life in the name of religious vengeance.' However, if the Porte took the same measures against Muslims, no such vengeance would occur.[52] In

[47] BOA HR.SFR.3 53/12/4.

[48] Lavaletta to Thouvenel, 20 June 1860, AMAE CP Turquie 345/98; Abro Sahak Efendi to Cabouly Efendi, 17 July 1860, *ODD* 97; Fawaz, *An Occasion*, 106.

[49] Aali Pasha to Musurus, 14 July 1860, BOA HR.SFR.3 53/4/2.

[50] Aristarchi Bey to Fuad Pasha, 11 July 1860, *ODD* 90.

[51] Rüstem Bey (Turin) to Safvet, 12 July 1860, *ODD* 70; Aristarchi Bey to FP, 18 July 1860, *ODD* 82.

[52] Cabouly to Musurus, 18 July 1860, *ODD* 80; Aristarchi Bey to FP, 18 July 1860, *ODD* 82; Musurus to Palmerston, 18 July 1860; Musurus to Safvet, 19 July 1860, BOA HR.SYS.3. 52/3; Ahmed Vefik to Musurus, 15 July 1860, BOA HR.SFR.3 52/3/3; Musurus to Ahmed Vefik, 18 July 1860, BOA HR.SFR.3 52/3/4; Diran Bey to Safvet, 19 July 1860, BOA 1520/3/232; Ahmed Vefik to Musurus, 20 July 1860, BOA HR.SFR.3 52/3/4.

addition to these, Sultan Abdülmecid I himself sent letters to French Emperor Napoleon III (July 16) and Queen Victoria (20 July) to give assurances that he would employ all means in his power to re-establish order and security and to punish the guilty severely.[53]

These Ottoman efforts were disregarded in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and St Petersburg. In these capitals the unwavering belief was that the sultan's men were liable for the 'atrocities' in Syria due to their inertia. Only in London did Ambassador Musurus Bey find a ready ear to Ottoman concerns.[54] This was because Britain had only reluctantly agreed on the proposed armed intervention in the first place. Both Russell and Palmerston had found the Porte's counter-arguments plausible, and they were both suspicious of French intentions.

Since 1840, the status quo in the Levant had been in favour of British economic and political interests.[55] Palmerston and Russell were concerned that, with this expedition, France might upset the status quo by suppressing the Druze, the so-called perpetrators of the massacres, with whom Britain had forged a special relationship since 1841.[56] Moreover, particularly after Palmerston returned to office in 1859, Britain had played up Anglo-French rivalry to justify her high level of military expenditure, and had been seeking to regain an independent voice in international affairs.[57] In 1860, France, traditionally seen as a rival, was perceived by London as a great threat given her naval expansion under Napoleon III.[58] While the Cobden–Chevalier free trade treaty of January 1860 had ameliorated relations and led Palmerston to reluctantly acquiesce to French annexation of Savoy and Nice, French expansionism led Queen Victoria to complain angrily that the French were 'the universal disturbers of the world'.[59]

In addition to these strategic considerations, the British cabinet kept in mind the warnings of cautious public voices in Britain. In the House of Lords, the conservative politician Sir James Ferguson recommended caution in dealing with Syrian affairs, because the Druze-Maronite quarrel there had 'very little to do with religion', but had arisen from racial differences, and had been fomented by French

[53] 'The East', *The Times*, 21 July 1860, 9; Cowley to Russell, 20 July 1860, TNA FO 195/659/12.

[54] Musurus to Safvet, 20 July 1860, BOA HR.SYS 1520/3/323; Russell to Cowley, 23 July 1860, TNA FO 195/659/22.

[55] Musurus to Fuad Pasha, 5 Apr. 1860, *ODD* 35. In 1860, imports into Britain from the Ottoman Empire had risen from the previous year and amounted to £2,682,058, while exports to the Ottoman Empire, including Syria and Palestine, equalled on average TL4,668,346 per annum.

[56] See Ch. 10.

[57] David Brown, 'Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations, 1846–1865', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 17 (4) (2006): 675–692, 683.

[58] Ibid. 681.

[59] Queen Victoria to the King of the Belgians, 8 May 1860, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence between the Years 1837 and 1861*, ed. A. C. Benson and Viscount Esher, 3 vols (London: John Murray, repr. 1908), vol. 3, 386, 399.

and Russian agents.[60] The German intellectual Karl Marx, resident in London at the time, similarly argued that Russia and France deliberately sought to bring about a politico-religious row—the former on the Dalmatian, the latter on the Syrian coast, 'both movements supporting each other, since the troubles in Montenegro and the Herzegovina compelled the Porte to withdraw almost the whole Turkish army stationed in Syria, so as to leave the arena open to the high-pitched antagonism of the barbarous clans of the Lebanon.'[61] The London newspaper *The Globe*, which was close to the Whigs, suggested that the British ought not too easily 'lend their ear to the denunciations against Turkey', and should thoroughly consider the 'indirect foreign influences' in the outbreak of violence before causing 'injustice to the Porte' by putting the responsibility for tragic events onto Istanbul.[62]

All these diplomatic efforts, lobbying, public warnings, and political calculations—and, perhaps most importantly, the arrival of the news of a truce made between the Maronites and the Druze on 21 July—led Palmerston to decide to wait and see.[63] It was then that Britain asked France to defer or abandon the plan to dispatch troops, using the argument that news of violence had stopped since the Damascene massacres and sending troops to Syria at this point would degrade the sultan's dignity.[64] Meanwhile, Russell gave Musurus 14 days to assess the results of Fuad's measures on the ground.[65]

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When Thouvenel heard the news that the British had reversed their decision, he was enraged. The information of a Maronite–Druze truce had not reached him. He could not accept Russell's reasoning. But he did what he had to do. He put the embarkation in Toulon on hold so as not to strain relations with Britain. France reacted immediately, though, by the publication of an open letter on 25 July signed by Emperor Napoleon III.

In this open letter, the emperor first tried to soothe British anxieties about Italian affairs and the French invasion of Savoy and Nice, explaining why he had intervened, and that his actions in central Italy were bound by the Treaty of Villafranca. He then turned to the Eastern Question, and stressed that when his ambassador, Charles marquis La valette, had travelled to Istanbul in early 1860, the instructions the emperor had given him were confined to using every effort to

[60] BOA HR.SYS 1520/3. [61] Marx, 'Events in Syria', 429.
[62] *The Globe*, 11 July 1860; cf. *Journal des débats*, 12 July 1860.
[63] Persigny to Thouvenel, 22 July 1860, AMAE CP Ang 717/243; Lavalette to Thouvenel, 25 July 1860 AMAE CP 133/345/333. In fact, Thouvenel was right. The residents of Deir al-Qamar had refused to comply with the truce.
[64] Persigny to Thouvenel, 22 July 1860, AMAE CP Ang 717/244; Cowley to Russell, 22 July 1860, TNA FO 195/659/18.
[65] Musurus to Safvet Efendi, 20 July 1860, *ODD* 110.

maintain the status quo. 'The interest of France is that Turkey should live as long as possible.' The emperor further argued that, if he instantly proposed an expedition to Syria during the civil war, it was because 'my feelings were those of the people which has put me at its head, and the intelligence from Syria transported me with indignation. My first thought, nevertheless, was to come to an understanding with England. What other interest than that of humanity could induce me to send troops into that country?'

He concluded by noting that, as 'an honest man', he would very much wish to be obliged to undertake the Syrian expedition, and in any case not to undertake it alone. First, this was because it would be a great expense, and secondly, because 'I fear that this intervention may involve the Eastern Question'; on the other hand, he did not see how he could resist public opinion in his country, which would never understand that 'we could leave unpunished, not only the massacre of Christians' but 'the burning of our consulates, the insult to our flag, and the pillage of the monasteries which were under our protection'.[66]

In the interim, *Le Constitutionnel*, which was close to Thouvenel, published pieces that echoed Lamartine's pacific arguments during the 1840 crisis almost word for word.[67] The Eastern Question should not entail the division of Europe, it maintained; on the contrary, it should unite the European Powers in the defence of interests and principles which imposed the same obligations on 'all Christian states'.[68]

While in public Thouvenel sought, with positive messages, to prevent an international crisis between France and Britain, in private, he did not hold back in his audience with Henry Wellesley (1804–84), earl of Cowley, the British ambassador to Paris.[69] As an Italian witness details, in a 'violent' discussion, Thouvenel shared with Wellesley the latest correspondence from Syria which reported the disastrous state of affairs as late as 12 July, when the Damascene massacres, the alleged murder of the Dutch consul, the situation of the refugees, and the state of the premises of foreign consuls were reported.[70] He then strongly instructed the British ambassador to announce to his government that he would address a circular to all platforms telling them that Christians had been slaughtered in Syria, that all the Powers had agreed to stop this horrible slaughter, but that only the British cabinet had opposed this action.

Responsibility for a probable recurrence of violence was too great a risk for Britain to take. It was beyond her control. France had given public and private

[66] 'The Policy of the Emperor Napoleon Towards England', *The Times*, 1 Aug. 1860, 9.
[67] See Ch. 8. [68] *Le Constitutionnel*, 25 July 1860.
[69] Pollone to Cavour, Paris, 25 July 1860, Carteggio Cavour-Nigra, IV, 104–5; cf. Lynn M. Case, *Edouard Thouvenel et la diplomatie du Second Empire*, trans. Guillaume de Bertier de Savigny (Paris: A. Pedone, 1976), 339.
[70] Cowley to Russell, 22 July 1860, TNA FO 195/659/28.

assurances, the intervention would be bound by a convention, the (albeit dated) news of disastrous massacres was still arriving, the majority of the public were calling for military intervention, and there was still no concrete news as to the achievements of Fuad Paşa in establishing order in Syria—though it was practically impossible to receive news due to the absence of telegraph lines in Syria at the time. The day after Lord Wellesley withdrew from Thouvenel's audience and reported the content of the interview to Russell, the British cabinet caved.[71] The French ambassador triumphantly reported from London that Russell was willing to approve the dispatch of troops on the condition that they would act under the requisition of Fuad Paşa.[72] Thouvenel had won the tug of war.

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The five European Powers thus agreed on a concerted action in Syria. Since, aside from France, it was not logistically possible for the other Powers to supply troops, Paris would take over the responsibility—a fact well known by Thouvenel since the beginning. Preparations in Marseille and Toulon began once again. Only two things stood in the way now. First, the Powers had to reach agreement over the wording of the convention in order to set temporal limits to the expedition and decide on the number of troops and the rules in the field; second, they had to obtain the consent of the Porte for the armed intervention.

Thouvenel wasted no time in organizing a conference in Paris for the preparation of the convention. It began on 25 July, and, in accordance with Russell's suggestions, the Ottoman ambassador to Paris, Ahmed Vefik Paşa, was also invited to the gathering, along with the ambassadors of the five Powers.[73] Ahmed Vefik received no instructions from Istanbul until the end of the month because the Porte aimed to delay the expedition of French forces as much as possible, in the interim allowing Fuad Paşa enough time to establish full order and tranquillity in Syria, which would render the intervention redundant.[74]

All the while the French ambassador in Istanbul had been urging Âli Paşa for the Porte's consent. 'With a tone of conviction and despair', Âli repeated to Lavalette, a Christian intervention would only destabilize the entire Ottoman Empire.[75] On 21 July, the Ottoman Council of Ministers categorically refused armed intervention. On 22 July, Lavalette went to see Sultan Abdülmecid I, whom he found 'pale, nervous, agitated, silent' due to the political and (equally important) financial distress of his empire. In a friendly interview, the French ambassador gave his assurances as to Napoleon III's affectionate feelings for the sultan, and managed to obtain the sultan's promise to urge his ministers to consider the

[71] Pollone to Cavour, Paris, 25 July 1860, Carteggio Cavour-Nigra, IV, 104–5; cf. Case, *Thouvenel*, 339.
[72] Persigny to Thouvenel, 25 July 1860, AMAE CP Angleterre 717/268.
[73] Cowley to Russell, 26 July 1860, TNA FO195/659/31.
[74] Lavalette to Thouvenel, 25 July 1860, AMAE CP Turquie 345/333.
[75] Lavalette to Thouvenel, 24 July 1860, AMAE CP Turquie 345/303.

matter again. After the meeting the sultan called Âli Paşa, and the next day (23 July), the latter informed France's agents in Istanbul that the Porte would agree to the intervention if France accepted the responsibility of the dangers that might result from sending troops to Syria, and if the troops disembarked and camped in the vicinity of Beirut only, and acted on the directions of Fuad Paşa. Lavalette refused these conditions.[76]

What changed the Porte's position five days later, and first allowed Ahmed Vefik to begin negotiations in Paris and finally submit to the Powers' plan, was a defining feature of the Eastern Question and the transimperial security culture woven around it. True, under the continuous pressure of Lavalette and Bulwer, Sultan Abdülmecid was both anxious and angry. But, as we will see, he also felt cornered: he needed the Powers' guarantees over the ongoing loan negotiations between the Porte and the European financial houses to remedy the disastrous financial situation of his empire.[77]

To Ottoman ministers, the situation was a choice between the hammer and the anvil. They believed that Russia was 'trying to establish a [link] between the acts committed by the Druze and the alleged grievances of the provinces of Rumelia [the Balkans]', and that she was pursuing an 'invasive intention in intervening'.[78] Yet Ottoman officialdom came to uphold what Prussian Foreign Minister Baron Schleinitz advised them to do at the time. It could be to the Porte's 'advantage that any European intervention has the character of collective action. It is only the isolated intervention that would pose serious dangers'—the very idea that had been propounded by Mustafa Reşid some 21 years earlier.[79] If the Porte agreed to collective intervention led by France in Syria, it could prevent another intervention in the Balkans.

As a result, on 29 July, Âli Paşa gave his explicit, if reluctant, consent to the dispatch of the troops 'to give her Allies a proof of [the Ottoman Empire's] confidence, and her loyal desire to suppress the disorders which she deplores more than anyone else'. In consenting to the armed intervention, the Porte looked to show its good faith and commitment to 'the Concert of Europe of which it saw itself a member'. At the same time, it aimed to save face by avoiding diplomatic embarrassment.[80]

On the day of the Porte's assent, Thouvenel's *Le Constitutionnel* elatedly wrote: 'Turkey herself, henceforth admitted into the great family of European states, must forget that she has been for centuries the personification of Mussulman fanaticism, for she has now promised to take part in the signal chastisement

[76] Ibid.
[77] MAE to [?], 28 July 1860, AMAE Corr. Ang. 8CP/717/278; Lavalette to Thouvenel, 1 Aug. 1860, AMAE CP Turquie 346/7.
[78] Aristarchi to Fuad Pacha, 28 July 1860, *ODD* 128; Diran Bey to Safvet, 2 Aug. 1860, *ODD* 133.
[79] Aristarchi to Fuad Pacha, 28 July 1860, *ODD* 128.
[80] Musurus to Russell, 30 July 1860, TNA FO 195/659/45.

demanded by humanity and Christian civilisation.'[81] Ministers in Istanbul must have been puzzled. Had the Porte not been admitted into the family of nations in 1856?

After the Porte's consent had been obtained, the stipulations of the convention were carefully revised in Paris in such a manner as to remove all that might have provoked the susceptibilities of Ottoman ministers, or that might have even indirectly attacked the sovereign independence of the sultan and tarnish his dignity. As the Porte feared, Russia made a last-minute move and suggested the insertion of an additional clause that would enable similar interventions in other regions of the sultan's empire.[82] But the other Powers, including France, immediately rejected the clause, from which we might be able to infer the absence of a fully fledged Franco-Russian entente at this hour.[83] On the last day of July and in early August, the Powers agreed to sign two protocols with respect to the intervention.

In the first, the juridical legitimacy of the intervention was placed in the Treaty of Paris of 1856, Article IX of which guaranteed the rights of Ottoman Christians—the intervention was vindicated with the argument that in Syria these rights had been violated. The second protocol (signed in September) set the conditions of the intervention.[84] The expedition was limited to a period of six months and 12,000 men, half of whom would be provided by the French. If more men were needed, the Great Powers would decide with the Porte on which countries among them would provide troops (Article II). Upon arriving in Syria, the expedition's commander would contact Fuad Paşa, with the aim of taking all measures necessary to occupy the positions that would allow the execution of the mission (Article III). In the meantime, the British, Austrian, French, Prussian, and Russian rulers would allow sufficient naval forces to monitor the Syrian coast so as to ensure its tranquillity (Article IV). The expedition would remain in Syria for no more than six months, and troops would only camp on the coasts—only one or two regiments would march into Damascus. And the expeditionary army's subsistence and supplies would be covered by the Ottoman government, despite its depleted treasury, so far as it was able.[85]

To conclude, in 1840, it was Foreign Secretary Palmerston's Britain that had spearheaded an intervention in the Levant to put an end to Mehmed Ali's reign in Syria, and it was only France among the Powers that had opposed the intervention. In 1860, the roles were reversed. Now prime minister, Palmerston hesitated over whether France had ulterior motives that included the ascendancy of Britain in Syria since the 1840s. In both cases, the agency of the Porte proved pivotal. It

[81] *Le Constitutionnel*, 31 July 1860. [82] Diran Bey to Safvet Efendi, 2 Aug. 1860, *ODD* 133.
[83] Thouvenel to Montebello, 30 July 1860, AMAE CP 112/221/277; Montebello to Thouvenel, 31 July 1860, AMAE CP 112/221/278; Thouvenel to Montebello, 1 Aug. 1860, AMAE CP 112/221/279; Montebello to Thouvenel, 1 Aug. 1860, AMAE CP 112/221/290.
[84] 'Copy of the Convention of September 5, 1860', TNA FO 93/110/16a. [85] Ibid.

had previously enlisted the Powers' intervention through commercial agreements, by the 1839 reform edict, and by helping incite a rebellion in Lebanon. In 1860, Ottoman ministers vigorously opposed European intervention by running their own propaganda campaign, and delayed it as long as they could. But both in 1840 and in 1860, the very same game of assuming European public sentiments and gaining the consent of a majority of the Powers determined what course of action ought to be taken.

In July 1860 the news of the Damascene massacres and the alleged murder of the Dutch consul would make it impossible for the hesitant British authorities to hold out any longer. This being said, even though the Dutch government, after heated debate in parliament, had decided to send three frigates to Lebanon, and issued protests to the Porte against the 'murder' of their consul, it became clear only after the decision of the intervention was taken that M. Cutsi (Coetzee) was actually alive.[86] As he wrote in a letter dated 20 July, when the 'frantic' crowds had arrived at his house during the mayhem, he had secretly taken shelter in his neighbour Muslim Huseyin Agha's house, together with his eldest son, and had hidden in the chimney for three days, before sheltering in Abd al-Qader's mansion along with other European ministers.[87] That his murder was false news received no mention in diplomatic correspondence among the Powers in early August.

By then, differences between the European Powers and the Porte had been addressed and the agreement on the intervention had already been reached, despite the lingering resentment of the sultan and his ministers. With the dispatch of French troops and an international commission to Syria in August and September respectively, the diplomatic struggle that had begun in the metropoles continued through incessant tensions over the limits of French military action and the European commissioners' right to interfere with Fuad Paşa's mission. Soon after the departure of French troops from Toulon, *The Times* dolefully reported, 'The Eastern Question has returned at a considerably less interval than most of our periodical difficulties.'[88] A new tussle at once began on the spot over how to return the sense of security in Syria.

[86] *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, no. 196, 17 July 1860; I should like to thank Bert-Jan van Slooten and Huub Mool for drawing my attention to this source.
[87] M. Cutsi (Damascus) to W. E. Fercken (Beirut), 20 July 1860, HNA 2.05.32.213.05.32.31/9.
[88] *The Times,* 16 Aug. 1860.