

## The Ottoman Imperial Gaze: The Greek Revolution of 1821–1832 and a New History of the Eastern Question

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### Abstract

This article traces what hindsight shows to be the failure paths of the Ottoman ruling elites in dealing with the Greek revolution of 1821–1832. It considers why Sultan Mahmud II and the Ottoman ministers were unable to quell the ‘insurgence’ definitively and fend off Great Power intervention diplomatically. To this end, it looks into the reaction of the Ottoman rulers to the adversity as well as rivalries among the pashas of the sultan, which strained the imperial front, heightened violence against the insurgents, and then tore apart the military campaign. At the same time, it seeks to re-instate in the historiography of the Eastern Question the much-neglected Ottoman positionality with a contrapuntal approach. It places the agency of European and Ottoman actors within the same analytical frame in its discussion of the Great Power intervention in 1827, disclosing why the Ottoman ministers rejected the European Powers’ proposals to mediate between the imperial authorities and the Greek revolutionaries. Consulting fresh archival and secondary sources in the Arabic, English, French, Russian, Ottoman, and modern Turkish languages, the article draws attention to several overlooked yet vital moments of the revolution’s storyline.

### Keywords

The Eastern Question, the Greek revolution, the Ottoman empire, Navarino, the great powers, imperial gaze

My article considers what hindsight proves to be the failure paths of the Ottoman imperial elites in suppressing the Greek Revolution of 1821–1832 and preventing the Great Power intervention in the 1820s. Nothing in the following pages should be interpreted as suggesting that the agency of Ottoman imperial elites was the only or main determinant of the developments in the period covered in the article. What we have here is, of course, a very complex process with multiple-actors and agendas at stake. The perseverance of the Greek revolutionaries throughout and unfolding new

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world order were fundamental in the shaping of the revolution. But how the Ottoman imperial elites viewed the developments, and why they reacted in the violent and uncompromising way they did is evidently of central importance to understanding its outcome.

The Ottoman imperial rulers gazed at the historical realities during the 1820s, subordinating the revolution in their eyes to what they believed to be Russian machinations. Their reaction was informed by deep-seated ontological insecurity, which prompted extreme reaction and violence at varying scales in different sites. Speaking strictly from the angle of the Ottoman state, the events that transpired in the 1820s are a textbook example of what Ann Kaplan calls the ‘imperial gaze’, a mental apparatus for building or maintaining empire, and a self-absorbed manner of gazing at the people under one’s rule, but failing or choosing not to look and see their realities.<sup>1</sup> Here, I will discuss what characterised and informed the Ottoman imperial gaze, its domestic and transimperial aspects, during the revolution.

There is, in fact, already budding literature on intra-imperial relations that documents how the Ottoman imperial elites dealt with the revolution, and investigates the role that Greek ‘rebellion’ played in triggering major shifts in domestic power structures of the empire. The works of Şükrü İlcak, Christine Philiou, Hakan Erdem and, more recently, Will Smiley and Yusuf Ziya Karabıçak, offer in the English language very well-researched analyses of the imperial response, panic, violence, the vocabularies adopted to make sense of the ‘rebellion’ and the weaponisation of Islamic law to suppress the aspirations of the Greeks.<sup>2</sup> Within this literature, my contribution will be very modest and aims to connect it with a different strand of scholarship that registers the revolution as part of the broader European histories of foreign interventions and the endeavours to settle yet another episode of the Eastern Question.<sup>3</sup>

The Eastern Question or the quandary of how to deal with the alleged, relative weakness of the Ottoman Empire since the late eighteenth century is usually considered by historians as a European question. As I have discussed elsewhere, there is less than a handful of studies that examine it from an Ottoman point of view, what it meant for the Ottomans, and how the Eastern Question was first and foremost an Ottoman question.<sup>4</sup> What was at stake, in the end, was the future of the manifold interests of Ottoman imperial elites and subjects, if not the existence of an entire empire. From an Ottoman perspective, the Eastern Question was the embodiment of an existential syndrome, a matter of the survival of the ‘Supreme State’, as they named their empire. It was about thwarting threats posed to its territorial integrity as well as to a multitude of its strategic, economic and financial interests.

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1. E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking at the Other: Feminism, Fame and the Imperial Gaze*, New York, London 1997, 61–73.
  2. C.M. Philiou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution*, Berkeley, CA 2011; Ş. İlcak (ed.), ‘Those Infidel Greeks: The Greek War of Independence through Ottoman Archival Documents’, 2 vols., Leiden 2021; W. Smiley, ‘Rebellion, Sovereignty, and Islamic Law in the Ottoman Age of Revolution’, in: *Law and History Review* (2022), 1–31; D. Ö. Pantazis, ‘Fortresses of the Peloponnese, Ottoman Defence and the Greek Revolution (1821–1828)’, forthcoming. Most of the studies in this strand predate the centenary, see especially Y.Z. Karabıçak, ‘Ottoman Attempts to Define the Rebels During the Greek War of Independence’, in: *Studia Islamica* 114 (2019), 316–354; Y.H. Erdem, ‘The Greek Revolution and the End of the Old Ottoman Order’, in: P. Pizanians (ed.), *The Greek Revolution of 1821: A European Event*, Istanbul 2011, 257–264; H. Erdem, ‘Do not Think of the Greeks as Agricultural Labourers’: Ottoman Responses to the Greek War of Independence’ in: T. Dragonas/F. Birtek (eds.), *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey*, London 2005, 67–84; Ş. İlcak, ‘The Revolt of Alexander Ipsilantis and the Fate of the Fanariots in Ottoman Documents’, in: P. Piziniars (ed.), *The Greek Revolution of 1821: A European Event*, Istanbul 2011, 225–239.
  3. For instance, A. Dialla, ‘The Congress of Vienna, the Russian Empire and the Greek Revolution: Rethinking Legitimacy’, in: *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 39 (2021) 1, 27–47; M. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution and the Making of Modern Europe*, Milton Keynes 2021; L. Mylonakis, *Piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean: Maritime Marauders in the Greek and Ottoman Aegean*, London 2021.
  4. O. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798–1864*, Oxford, New York 2021.

Consulting fresh archival and secondary sources in the Arabic, English, French, Russian, Ottoman and modern Turkish languages, my analysis here will use a new interpretation of what is considered to be the old, and even outworn, Eastern Question as a lens to consider the Ottoman perceptions of the Greek Revolution. A new history of the Eastern Question entails treating it from a holistic perspective, meaning (i) extending its actors beyond the European Great Powers and including into analysis Ottoman intra-imperial threat perceptions, interests and agency; (ii) emancipating it from the thin space of strategic calculations and including other sectors, such as economic and financial considerations, as well as the uneven dynamics of international law; and (iii) tracing its long-standing dynamics in a manner to explain how its different episodes tended to inform each other, which I will demonstrate below.

Due to limitations of space, the interests and threat perceptions of the Ottoman imperial subjects, and in this case the Greeks, will not be discussed in depth here. The focus will be on the Ottoman ‘imperial gaze’, how the ruling elites viewed the revolution and how their perceptions were coloured by the Eastern Question and domestic factors. The analysis will draw attention to some of the overlooked yet still vital moments of the revolution’s storyline, such as whether or not the Ottomans had already been aware that an independence movement was simmering when the news of its outbreak reached the imperial palace in March 1821 or how the dynamics of Russo-Ottoman relations in the second half of the 1820s helped to bring the Sultan to his knees and enabled the proclamation of an independent Greek Kingdom.

## 1. The Ottoman eastern question and an intimate revolution

The Ottomans reached the 1820s with burdensome encumbrances in their diplomatic relations with their Romanov rivals. In the last 100 years or so, the Russo-Ottoman balance of military power had upended in favour of the Russians who emerged victorious in all bilateral wars against the Sultan. A most devastating defeat for Sultan’s empire occurred during the well-known 1768–1774 war. It witnessed a Russian-backed Greek insurgence in Orlov in 1770/1771, its brutal suppression by the imperial elites, and in 1774, the infamous Küçük Kaynarca Treaty, which granted Russia outposts on the shores of the Black Sea as well as the role of the protection of the Greek church in Istanbul.<sup>5</sup>

Nine years later, on 1783, a commercial Russo–Ottoman treaty ascertained shipping rights of the Russian merchants on the Black Sea and included Russia in the capitulatory system. Shortly after, Empress Catherine II annexed Crimea. As one British onlooker anxiously observed at that time, there was ‘little to oppose the Russians’ taking possession of Istanbul with a light army and a few ships in the line before any Power could give the Ottomans effectual assistance.’<sup>6</sup> This sparked what subsequent commentators would call the Eastern Question.<sup>7</sup>

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5. E.I. Druzhinina, *Kyuchuk-Kajnardzhijskij Mir 1774 goda*, Moscow 1955; S.F. Oreshkova, ‘Osmanskaja imperija i Rossija v svete ih geopoliticheskogo razgranichenija’, in: *Voprosy istorii: Ezhemesyachnyj zhurnal* 3 (2005), 34–46.
  6. ‘Report by Captain George Frederick Koehler, 1793’, Robert Ainslie Papers, National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS) MS. 5570, ff. 5–42.
  7. For the rich literature of the Eastern Question in the English language, which, however, treats it from a predominantly European perspective, see, for instance, M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations*, New York 1966; A.L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923*, London, New York 2013; K.A. Roeder Jr., *Austria’s Eastern Question*, Princeton 1982; M. Šedivý, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, Pilsen 2013; C. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830–1841: Britain, the Liberal Movement and the Eastern Question*, New York 1969; H. Yılmaz, ‘The Eastern Question and the Ottoman Empire: The Genesis of the Near and Middle East in the Nineteenth Century’, in: M.E. Boine (ed.), *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*, Stanford, Ca 2011, 11–35; L.J. Frary/M. Kozelsky, ‘Introduction’, in: idem (eds.), *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered*, Wisconsin 2014; A. Bitis, *Russia and the Eastern Question: Army, Government, and Society, 1815–1833*, Oxford, New York 2006. The one exception is N. Çiçek, *The Young Ottomans: Turkish Critics of the Eastern Question in the Late Nineteenth Century*, London, New York 2010.

For nearly 130 years, the question of how to deal with the alleged, comparative weakness of the Ottoman Empire vis-à-vis its Russian and western neighbours repeatedly came back to the agenda of European politics. However, the Eastern Question constituted at once a deep-seated ontological insecurity on the part of the Ottoman imperial elites, which presented an ambiguity as to how to define the position of their empire in the global imperial order, on which the fate of their empire depended time and time again. It gained different connotations in various periods because each major empire with a stake had a specific answer to it at distinct moments. This is what makes the Eastern Question, as the American historian Paul Schroeder once put it, one of the most complex international issues of the time.<sup>8</sup>

In 1806, the Ottomans and Russians were at war again, which ended when Napoleon Bonaparte's Grande Army began its march to invade Saint Petersburg in 1811. Despite their several victories at battles, the Russians agreed to sign the Treaty of Bucharest with the new Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II. However, the 1812 treaty led to new disputes between the courts of Istanbul and Saint Petersburg. The differences centred on four points, all of which lingered into the 1820s and directly affected the course of the Greek Revolution.

I have discussed these disputes elsewhere,<sup>9</sup> and I will only broadly note that the first of these was the treaty stipulation on partial autonomy to the Serbians, which the Ottoman rulers did not respect. The second was the Ottoman non-compliance with the capitulatory agreements, as specified by the 1783 treaty. The other two pertained to the non-ratified secret articles related to the Phasis valley in the Caucasus and Moldova and Bessarabia in the Balkans, which, as the Ottoman elites believed, Russia purposefully continued to violate.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1810s, besides the disputes over Poland, the Eastern Question was related to resolving these disagreements between the courts of Istanbul and Saint Petersburg. Neither Emperor Alexander nor Mahmud II made any concessions. They also could not risk another war with each other, with one (the tsar) having fixed his eyes on the Napoleonic Wars and then the restoration of peace after 1815, and the other (the Sultan) looking to renovate his army by abolishing the long-corrupted Janissary units and consolidate his power before the local rulers, or the so-called 'partners of the empire'.<sup>11</sup>

During the Congress of Vienna, in February 1815, the then-self-defined European Great Powers, Austria, Britain and France, proposed to the Sublime Porte involving the European dominions of the Sultan in the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna and thus warranted their security by international public law, while at once offering mediation to resolve Sultan's differences with Emperor Alexander. However, Sultan Mahmud II and figures including one of the most influential statesmen in Istanbul, Mehmed Said Halet Efendi (1761–1822), harboured immense mistrust towards the European international system in this period.<sup>12</sup> The fickle alliances of the European empires during the wars, their rumoured designs to partition the Ottoman Empire and end it for good, the British blockade of Istanbul in 1807 that had precipitated the fall of Selim III (Mahmud's uncle), and the hasty conclusion of the Russo-Ottoman war in 1812 only when

8. P.W. Schroeder, 'The 19th-Century International System: Changes in the Structure', in: *World Politics* xxxix (1986), 1–26, 6.

9. O. Ozavci, 'A Priceless Grace? The Congress of Vienna of 1815, the Ottoman Empire and Historicizing the Eastern Question', in: *The English Historical Review* 136 (2021) 583, 1450–1476.

10. Robert Liston to Lord Castlereagh, 13 July 1812, NLS MS. 5627, f. 9.

11. For excellent discussions on this, see V. Aksan, *The Ottomans 1700–1923: An Empire Besieged*, Second Edition, London, New York 2022, and A. Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions*, Stanford, CA. 2016.

12. S.Y. Gürgen, *Devletin Kâhyası, Sultanin Efendisi: Mehmed Said Halet Efendi*, Istanbul 2018.

Napoleon Bonaparte's Grande Army was marching onto Russia, had all stirred the Sultan toward an isolationist diplomacy.<sup>13</sup> It was above all this distrust that had led to the negative response of the Ottoman imperial elites to the Powers' 1815 proposal.<sup>14</sup>

By 1820, Mahmud II was still of the belief that the issues in the Balkans and the Caucasus would sooner or later flare up again and turn into an armed conflict when a moment expedient for either of the contenders came.<sup>15</sup> There was almost no progress in Russo-Ottoman disputes. It was then that the Sultan and his minister probably became aware of the Greek 'uprising' for the first time.

Ottoman documents that have been studied by historians to this date, and therefore the existing literature, usually tend to consider the Greek Revolution as unexpected for the imperial elites.<sup>16</sup> Yet, a document that I came across in the private papers of Robert Liston, the British ambassador to Istanbul between 1812 and 1820, appears to tell us otherwise. This is a letter from Liston to British Foreign Minister Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh dated 25 April 1820. It reads:

A number of extraordinary reports have been current here for the last ten days, which have reached the ears of the [Ottoman] Government, and appear to have excited a degree of alarm and had the effect of further exasperating the sultan against Ali Paşa.

It has been confidently affirmed that a very numerous association has been formed among the Christian subjects [...] in the Morea, in Albania, and in the neighbouring provinces with a view to the liberation and independence of those countries: that the members take oaths of fidelity and secrecy; that they assemble frequently under the pretence of holding Free Masons' Lodges: that a great number of the inhabitants of the Ionian Islands have joined the confederacy and demonstrate great zeal in support of it since the visit made at Corfu by Count Capodistrias; that the plan is countenanced and supported by the Emperor of Russia [...].<sup>17</sup>

If Liston's account was true, and one cannot fathom why it should not be, then the sultan and his ministers were most likely aware that an independence movement had already been simmering in the Morea and Albania in 1820 in relation to the conflict with Ali Pasha of Ioannia. The Ottoman imperial elites did not react to these reports immediately, or at least the available Ottoman sources do not reveal anything about it. Was it because the subject was discussed in secret, i.e., only verbally, as was usually the case among the imperial elites when it came to sensitive issues? Was it complacency or did they choose to believe that it was a matter to be tackled with Ali Pasha of Ioannina alone, or was it the fact that the sultan's newborn son had passed away just about the time these reports arrived and distracted the sultan? These questions beg further research. Nevertheless, we do know that in April 1820, the Sultan nominated Nişancı Hamid Bey and Skarlatos Callimachi to frequent meetings with Baron Sergey Stroganoff, the Russian special envoy in Istanbul.<sup>18</sup>

The 1820 reports and the impressions of foreign agents including the new British envoy to Istanbul, Percy Clinton Smythe, sixth Viscount Strangford (1780–1855), all persuaded Mahmud II that what would soon become a widespread Greek revolution was in fact a Russian machination. This is why, in March 1821, when the news of Alexandros Ypsilantis's (1792–1828) march into Moldowallachia arrived in the Topkapı Palace, Sultan Mahmud II (1785–1839) was probably

13. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 115.

14. Ozavci, 'A Priceless Grace', 1476.

15. H.Ş. Ilıcak, 'A Radical Rethinking of Empire: Ottoman State and Society during the Greek War of Independence', Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Harvard University, 2011, 101–102.

16. Ilıcak, 'The Revolt', 225.

17. Robert Liston to Lord Castlereagh, 25 April 1820, NLS MS. 5636, f. 65.

18. Robert Liston to Lord Castlereagh, 26 June 1820, NLS MS. 5636, f. 101.

hardly surprised.<sup>19</sup> What came as a genuinely bitter surprise to the 36-year-old ruler and his ministers was not that a 'mischief' (*jesad*) had unfolded, but its intimacy and magnitude.

The (alleged) connection of such senior Phanariotes<sup>20</sup> as Kostaki Muruzi (dragoman of the Ottoman imperial council) and Patriarch Gregorius with the Hetairia, along with tens of others, was truly unprecedented.<sup>21</sup> A prodigious conspiracy had long been simmering right under the nose of the imperial elites.<sup>22</sup> According to Mahmud II, 'had [the Russians] not promised to help and interfere, the Greeks could not dare [to revolt].'<sup>23</sup> There was the 1770 precedent at Orlov. The Sultan's obstinate and stubborn diplomacy in the 1820s was shrouded, in part, by recent memory and his unshaken beliefs about Russia.<sup>24</sup>

Distressed and outraged by the occurrences, Mahmud II's immediate reaction to the adversity tended to violence. On 24 March, he instructed his men to kill all Greek Christians in Istanbul.<sup>25</sup> However, Sheikh-ul Islam Hacı Halil Efendi asked for more time (and compassion) to 'separate the guilty from the innocent' first.<sup>26</sup> Even though the latter was dismissed from his position as a result, the sultan did not proceed with his order either. Against a potential Russian attack, effectual measures were taken to keep a winter army in the principalities. A number of pashas were ordered to keep themselves in readiness to cross from Asia to Europe at the shortest warning. As an observer noted, in appearance, the empire was 'in a state of war, yet no enemy comes forward to attack the Turks and justify the measures pursued as if a great foe were galloping this way from the Danube.'<sup>27</sup> The Sultan also erected a great battery at a Belgrade village up to the northern side of the field over Kiricos establishment, as he was not satisfied with the number of batteries erected on both sides of the Bosphorus, and he stationed a pasha at Büyükdere with 8,000 troops. The Muslim population in Istanbul, from the sultan to the porters, went about armed with pistols, muskets and swords by order of government. This order was repeated everyday and published in every mosque. If any Muslim was found without an arm, he was accused of disobedience and punished accordingly, while the armoury of the Greeks (and Armenians) in Istanbul was collected with the fear that the city's Orthodox population might rise and seize the Ottoman fleet, which remained in the capital in case a Russian naval attack took place.<sup>28</sup> The same onlooker concluded, '[a] scene so singular was never witnessed in this country.'<sup>29</sup>

Mahmud II and Halet Efendi architected the safeguards and plotted the violence perpetrated against the Greek populations in Istanbul, the Morea, the Aegean islands and western Asia

19. Robert Liston to Lord Castlereagh, 25 April 1820, NLS MS. 5636, f. 65; Tarih-i Cevdet, VI, 2723.

20. Greeks serving under the Ottoman state.

21. *Şânizâde* II, 1053.

22. A. Cunningham, *Anglo-Ottoman Encounters in the Age of Revolution: Collected Essays*, ed. by E. Ingram, London 1993, 200; Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 119–120.

23. BOA/HAT 51343, see Ilıcak, 'The Revolt,' 225–6.

24. Ibid. Ottoman chronicler Ataullah Mehmed Şânizâde details the outbreak of the 'Greek mischief' from the perspective of the Ottoman elites in Z. Yilmazer (ed.), *Şânizâde Mehmed Atâ'ullah Efendi, Şânizâde Tarihi II (1223–1237/1808–1821)* [hereafter *Şânizâde*], Istanbul 2008), 1012–1015. Şânizâde embeds the Greek rebellion into the long history of Russo-Ottoman tensions since the 1690s, *Şânizâde* II, 1034. He draws a direct link between the rebellion and Russian Foreign Minister Ioannis Capodistrias's visit to Corfu in 1819, *Şânizâde* II, 1037.

25. *Şânizâde* II, 1072. Also cited in, Karabıçak, 'Ottoman Attempts', 347.

26. *Şânizâde* II, 1072–1073.

27. B. Pisani to Robert Liston, 25 September 1821, NLS, MS 5665, f. 202.

28. BOA HAT 1084/44138; BOA HAT 1294/50258.

29. B. Pisani to Robert Liston, 25 September 1821, NLS, MS 5665, f. 202.

Minor.<sup>30</sup> Islamic law was used as a weapon to enslave the Greeks in 1822.<sup>31</sup> Numerous janissaries, opportunist soldiers, undisciplined Albanian soldiers, and furious mobs pillaged and plundered the Greek population, killing thousands, if not enslaving them, including women and children. Some made immense material gain from the gruesome violence by slave trade and sequestering Greek property, which fanned the spiral of murder and pillaging in other sites.<sup>32</sup>

Religious sentiments also played a role all along. The news of the mass killing of thousands of Muslims (and Jews) at the hands of the Greeks in the Morea had created immense hysteria. According to British historian William St Clair, 'upwards of twenty thousand men, women, and children were murdered by their Greek neighbours in a few weeks of slaughter.'<sup>33</sup> The Ottoman historian Cevdet Paşa argues in hindsight that in Tripolitsa alone, nearly forty thousand were killed in September 1821 after the town's capture by the Greek revolutionaries under Theodoros Kolokotronis.<sup>34</sup> The Muslim (and Jewish) inhabitants' sudden disappearance, 'unnoticed by the rest of the world', is of importance for the purposes of this article because it partly triggered the involvement of Mehmed Ali Pasha (1770?-1849), the governor of Egypt, in the Greek uprising, which led to a drastic turn of events for the revolution.<sup>35</sup>

Mehmed Ali had been ruling Egypt since 1805. After his ascendance to power in times of a fiendishly complex tripartite civil war, he had secretly pursued dreams of declaring independence and founding his own empire.<sup>36</sup> To this end, he introduced substantial bureaucratic, military and economic reforms.<sup>37</sup> The news of the Greek uprising was particularly intriguing to him.<sup>38</sup> In the beginning, he sympathised with the revolutionary Greeks and the resistance of Ali Pasha of Ioannia, giving the runaways refuge and permitting the Greeks residing in Cairo and Alexandria to join the revolution against the Sultan.<sup>39</sup> The developments in Greece possibly made him wonder if the revolution could be an opportune moment or at least an inspiration for his own independence plans, which had been long in the making now. Yet after the heartrending news of the Greek rebels' killing of Muslims barged in, the dreadful fall of Ali Pasha in 1822, and in return for Sultan's appetising pledges, the pasha altered his position and came to support the Porte's cause against the Greeks. At first, he offered advice to the sultan through his agents in Istanbul. Later, however, at the request of Mahmud II, he began to send men and military supplies.<sup>40</sup>

One quandary for Mehmed Ali here was the fact that the Ottoman imperial navy was entrusted to Mehmed Hüsrev Pasha (1769–1855), one of his old nemeses. The two had fought against Bonaparte's armies in Egypt in 1801 during the last phase of the French occupation, but after the War of the Second Coalition (1798–1802) was terminated, their swords turned against each other, resulting in a civil war that culminated with Mehmed Ali's rise. Their paths crossed again

30. Strangford to Castlereagh, 25 May 1822, TNA FO 78/108, see T.C. Prousis, 'British Embassy Reports on the Greek Uprising in 1821–1822: War of Independence or War of Religion?', in: *History Faculty Publications* 21 (2011), 214. On Halet, also see especially Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*.

31. Smiley, 'Rebellion', 2.

32. Tarih-i Cevdet, VI, 2850–2851.

33. W. St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free: The Philhellenism in the War of Independence*, Oxford 1972, 1.

34. Tarih-i Cevdet, VI, 2838.

35. St Clair, *That Greece*, 1.

36. For a detailed account, see K. Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt*, Oxford 2009.

37. K. Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, his Army and the Making of Modern Egypt*, New York 1997.

38. [A Jewish from Damascus] to Mehmed Ali Pasha, 30 October 1822, DWQ Bahr Barra File 10, No 412.

39. J.V. Petrunina, *Social'no-'ekonomicheskoe i politicheskoe razvitie Egipta v period pravleniya Muhammeda Ali v Rossijskoj obshhestvenno-politicheskoy mysli XIX v.*, Moscow 2008, 246.

40. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 136.

about 20 years later, in 1823, as they had become two of the most powerful men in the Ottoman world.

Hüsrev was the Grand Admiral of the Ottoman Empire. He had overseen the sea campaign against the Greeks since late 1822. However, Hüsrev could not break the Greek resistance in most of the sites due to the weakness of the Ottoman navy in the absence of the Greek sailors.<sup>41</sup> On the ground, the unruly Albanians fought the revolutionaries with limited success.<sup>42</sup> This added to the insecurities of the Sultan and his ministers. The failure to suppress the ‘mischief’ at its outset and especially the heavy defeat at the Morea campaign in 1822 prompted a questioning of the legitimacy of his rule on the part of the Janissaries and the wider populace, a more violent response by the sultan and his ministers, as well as a desperate invitation to bring in Mehmed Ali.<sup>43</sup> Mahmud II was conscious that the Egyptian army, which had been trained by disbanded French soldiers and with its better discipline and organisation, was well-suited for the mission.

Before responding to Sultan’s invitation, Mehmed Ali tried to have Hüsrev relieved from his post temporarily to be replaced by his son Ibrahim as the commander of the Ottoman navy, lest the past hostilities between the two surfaced again in the middle of warfare. However, the sultan hardly trusted the pasha and turned down these demands, even though he suggested dividing the tasks of Hüsrev and Mehmed Ali’s army.<sup>44</sup> The appointment of rival pashas in the same cabinet, if not in the same campaign, was an age-old strategy that the Sultan used to counterweigh powers. In the end, the Pasha of Egypt agreed to send about 17,000 men under the command of Ibrahim in the spring of 1824, since sultan’s pledges of land were too difficult to turn down and, as mentioned above, his religious sentiments were enticed by the news from the Morea.<sup>45</sup>

Mehmed Ali’s involvement changed the course of the revolution in Greece expeditiously in at least two ways. First, it hastened the Ottoman control over a variety of sites. In Kasos and Psara, immediate victories were gained by Otto-Egyptian armies, followed by tragic destruction and mass killing of the Greek inhabitants. By 1827, the ‘rebellion’ was largely suppressed in many locations on the ground.<sup>46</sup>

When Hüsrev and Ibrahim saw each other in Bodrum while seeking shelter from a storm in September 1824, their cordial relations led the sultan to think that the old animosities between the two had faded in time. In the next year, he sent Hüsrev to Egypt to repair the fleet and bring reinforcements as a new Missolonghi campaign was about to begin.<sup>47</sup> Thus Mehmed Ali and Hüsrev saw each other for the first time since the Egyptian civil war in the 1800s. This brings us to the second point, which deals with how Mehmed Ali’s involvement in the Greek crisis affected the revolution.

With his participation in the counter-insurgency campaign, the Ottoman front was at once strengthened but also severely weakened from within. On the one hand, the Egyptian armies proved extremely instrumental in suppressing Greek aspirations militarily. Yet, on the other hand, political schisms created tensions in the Ottoman world, especially after Hüsrev’s visit to Alexandria.

In fact, in the beginning, the grand admiral received a warm welcome from Mehmed Ali in August 1825. The two pašas’ acts of benevolence and courtesy led many observers to conclude that ‘these two

41. On the details of Hüsrev’s campaign before the arrival of the Egyptian fleet, see Y. Çelik, *Şeyhü’l-Vüzerâ Koca Hüsrev Paşa*, Ankara 2013, 193–203. Also see *Es’ad Efendi Târîhi*, 260, 268–269, 332–333, 335, 352, 402.

42. Ilıcak, ‘A Radical Rethinking’, chapter 3.

43. On the legitimacy of the Sultan’s rule and how it created tensions with the Janissaries, see *ibid.*, chapter 4.

44. BOA C.DH. 83/4140; BOA C.AS. 1/40, n.d.; *Es’ad Efendi Târîhi*, 301–302.

45. J. ‘Ubayd, *Qissat al-ihtilâl Muḥammad ‘Alî li-l-yunân*, Cairo 1990, 611–612.

46. Ilıcak, ‘A Radical Rethinking’, 199.

47. *Es’ad Efendi Târîhi*, 418–419.



most powerful men of the Ottoman Empire' were no longer enemies.<sup>48</sup> However, the following weeks exposed how hasty such conclusions were. Mehmed Ali complained to Hüsrev about the latter's failures to support the campaigns of his son on the ground by shying away from direct confrontation with the insurgents. The Pasha of Egypt was right as Hüsrev and his men truly lacked the competence to fight the Greek ships in the absence of Greek sailors who had once been the backbone of the Ottoman fleet. Mehmed Ali was too blunt, which led the more circumspect Hüsrev to leave Egypt with bitter sentiments on 22 October 1825.<sup>49</sup> Just before the new campaign in Missolonghi, the relationship between Grand Admiral Hüsrev and Ibrahim Pasha took a turn for the worse.

Aside from Ibrahim Pasha, Hüsrev's 'slave-turned-son' Reşid Pasha was also on the ground, commanding the Ottoman imperial forces against the revolutionaries. He had overseen the siege of Missolonghi in April 1825. However, the Greek garrisons of about 3,000 men had managed to resist the siege for 7 months. On top of this, when Reşid called for Hüsrev's naval support in December, according to Russian reports, the Grand Admiral's miscalculation of the size of the Greek squadron led to an embarrassing defeat at sea.<sup>50</sup>

From December 1825 to January 1826, Ibrahim Pasha sent reinforcements and set up a fortified camp before Missolonghi. Messengers were sent to the castle calling for the surrender of the Greeks. However, the insurgents were adamant and rejected Ibrahim's demands. 'We buried three Turkish armies in front of our walls, and yours will be the fourth,' they contended, referring to the sieges of 1822 and 1823 and the failed attempt of Reşid Pasha since the previous April.<sup>51</sup>

The Egyptian assault began on 24 February 1826 and culminated on 10 April with the capture of the castle and the exodus of Greeks, many of whom were killed by the Egyptian soldiers as the latter were aware that they were on their own in the field and might not receive support from Grand Admiral Hüsrev's forces in case of a popular revolt.<sup>52</sup> Missolonghi was clearly a paramount military victory for the Ottomans, even though it also proved disastrous with the re-surfacing of the suppressed hostilities between Hüsrev and Ibrahim.

During the celebrations, the two openly accused each other of the casualties incurred in the campaign.<sup>53</sup> Emotions prevailed, and the inter-personal hostilities led Mehmed Ali to demand the demission of Hüsrev one more time, otherwise the Egyptian armies would withdraw. Since he was in dire need of Mehmed Ali's succour, the sultan duly complied with these demands in February 1827. He did not entirely give up on Hüsrev though. Instead, he brought him to Istanbul and eventually appointed him as *serasker* (the Ottoman equivalent of minister of war), again to the frustration of Mehmed Ali. During these critical hours of the revolution, the Otto-Egyptian front was thus much strained and likely to be torn apart with the first sizeable impact. That impact found the Ottoman world eight months later in the Bay of Navarino.

In sum, the Greek Revolution was perceived by the imperial elites as a Russian machination throughout. It saw an immense, genocide-like imperial violence informed in part by the lingering Ottoman ontological insecurities. Yet, on another level, the domestic threats to the legitimacy of the sultan's rule, as well as inter-personal rivalries, distrust, and differences among the Ottoman pashas, injected a new degree of vulnerability. These insecurities and violence constituted the Ottoman

48. De Livron to Ministre des Finances et Président du Conseil, 12 Oct. 1825, in É. Driault, *L'Expédition de Crète et de Morée (1823–1828). Correspondance des consuls de France en Égypte et en Crète*, Cairo 1930, 91.

49. BOA HAT 639/31467; 857/38261.

50. Московские ведомости, 24 February, 1826, see Petrunina, *Sociol'no*, 254.

51. *Ibid.*

52. For the siege of Missolonghi and Ottoman strategies, see *Es'ad Efendi Târîhi*, 547–550.

53. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 139.

imperial gaze in the 1820s, and prompted the split in the Ottoman front after the Great Powers' 1827 intervention.

## 2. Akkerman, the Navarino moment, and the 1828/1829 war

On 20 October 1827, the joint naval forces of Britain, France and Russia destroyed the Otto-Egyptian fleet supported by the Bey of Tunis in a sea battle at Navarino. The fighting saw thousands of Ottoman, Egyptian and Tunisian, and dozens of European sailors perish in only a few hours.<sup>54</sup> Viewed in hindsight as an 'untoward' event by British and even Russian imperial agents, Navarino was a landmark juncture in the histories of the Greek Revolution and the Eastern Question.

How did the Great Powers, and particularly Russia, come to intervene in the Greek Revolution? As Lucien Frary has shown, the Russian imperial elites were in fact not involved in the Greek Revolution in its initial stages and even denounced it. The participation of officers in the service of the Tsar to the revolution stemmed from their own decentralised initiatives. Some of these officers were sacked from the tsarist army shortly after the news of Ypsilantis's demarche reached the tsar.<sup>55</sup>

The change in the policy of Alexander I from indifference to interventionism resulted in part from his resentment following allegations made by the Sublime Porte that he incited the 'mischief'. Crucially, as a new power — public opinion — came to take hold in the early nineteenth century, the agitated public sentiments that arose after the news of the 'massacres' of Greeks at the hands of Ottoman and Egyptian armies led his philhellene ministers to ask for a more interventionist policy in 1823/24. The agency of the Greek revolutionaries was also decisive here. They turned the tables on the Ottomans when the latter weaponised Islamic law and legitimised slavery. As Ada Dialla tells us, for their part, 'the revolutionaries used the arguments of slavery to delegitimise the rule of the Sultan.'<sup>56</sup> However, this did not instantly pave the way for the ultimate joint intervention of the Powers.

The courts of London and Paris were wary that Russia could run the field freely and establish in Greece a satellite state, which triggered their involvement in the affairs of Greece. For Britain, financial considerations also played a considerable role after the 1824 and 1825 loan agreements made with the Greek revolutionaries Ioannis Orlandos (1770–1852) and Andreas Louriotis (1789–1854).<sup>57</sup> Another determinant was the mounting piracy in the Aegean Sea since the outbreak of the crisis, which hampered their commerce.<sup>58</sup> On 4 April 1826, the Saint Petersburg Protocol was signed between Britain and Russia in the name of 'the principles of religion, justice and humanity' to secure the eastern Mediterranean and create an autonomous Greece through an Anglo-Russian mediated agreement between the Sultan and the insurgents.<sup>59</sup>

In the Greek Revolution, Alexander I (and after his death in December 1825, Nicolas I) found a providential bargaining chip to use against the Sultan with respect to the enduring border disputes in

54. D. Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914: The Emergence of a European Concept and International Practice*, Princeton 2012, 83.

55. On Russian policy, see the fascinating work of L.J. Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity*, Oxford, New York 2015.

56. Dialla, 'Rethinking Legitimacy', 36.

57. G. Sluga, 'Who Hold the Balance of the World?' Bankers at the Congress of Vienna and in International History', in: *American Historical Review* 122 (2017) 5, 1418–1420.

58. See Erik de Lange's contribution to this issue.

59. G.J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*, New York 2008, 130, 135.

the Balkans and the Caucasus.<sup>60</sup> Two documents from 1826 and 1827, both of which can be found in the Ottoman archives, testify this point and permit us to see in a new light the diplomatic choices made by Mahmud II and his ministers.

The first of these is in the French language.<sup>61</sup> It is the April 1826 ultimatum submitted to the Sublime Porte by the Russian imperial authorities only one month after the Saint Petersburg Protocol. It forcefully calls the Ottoman authorities to evacuate their troops from Wallachia, which they had entered to suppress the Greek revolt. Otherwise, there would be war. The Tsar believed that the Ottoman forces were violating the provisions of the Treaty of Bucharest (1812) by keeping their regiments in Wallachia:

Now the respective position of the [Sublime] Porte and of Russia in relation to political power and material force is such that the Porte has everything to lose and nothing to gain by way of arms. She has nothing to hope from her friends either; because none has a right, none has an interest, and consequently none has the will to quarrel with Russia for questions, which concern only the direct relations of the latter with Turkey... [T]he Russian demands are all contained within the circle of treaties; they attack neither the honour nor the independence of the Porte; they do not offend her religious laws, and they still provide her with the means of asserting her own claims by inviting her to resume the negotiations opened in 1816.

After the Congress of Vienna, the negotiations that had re-begun (in 1816) progressed at a bewilderingly sluggish pace. However, with the departure of the Russian envoy Stroganoff from Istanbul in August 1822, as a reaction to Ottoman claims that the Tsar was behind the uprising (and to protest the execution of the Greek Patriarch), the Russo-Ottoman diplomatic relations became severely strained. Now, four years later,

[...] [i]f the Emperor [Nicolas I] wanted war, the pretext for declaring it and the means to make it would not fail him; it is not a question in Russia of hastily collecting an army, nor of appealing to fanaticism: everything is ready, the army exists, formidable in its number. More formidable in its discipline, and far from being obliged to excite fanaticism [...].

According to the Russian agents, with this note, the emperor was only extending his hand to 'stifle any germ of misunderstanding' and place future relations between the two courts on solid foundations:

[I]sn't peace with Russia the most dazzling victory, the most decisive, the richest in results in the war against the insurgents, and the day when Russia invades Ottoman territory, the Greeks will become [...] its natural allies [...] while today the just and magnanimous policy of Emperor Nicolas, far from nourishing the illusions of the rebels or protecting their cause, is strictly confined with the limits of the treaties?<sup>62</sup>

The document ends with what appears to be no less than a threat: the very day the Russian authorities received the refusal of the Porte to their demands, the Tsar's armies were ready to 'flood the two Principalities.'<sup>63</sup>

This was a humiliating message for Sultan Mahmud II. Yet, it was accurate as far as the Ottoman isolation in the European system and the weakness of its army – as compared to that of Russia – were concerned. The Sultan was about to start a major military reform — a revolution even — by

60. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 124.

61. BOA HR. SYS 1676/2, 29 April 1826.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

abolishing the Janissary units for good.<sup>64</sup> He was in no position to risk a war with Russia. One month after the elimination of the janissaries (8,000 were executed and 18,500 were banished) in June 1826, when the imperial capital was in tumult, the Sultan agreed to restart the diplomatic negotiations with Saint Petersburg for the settlement of the disputes in the Balkans as well as the enduring ones in the Caucasus.<sup>65</sup> For this, he unwillingly sent two of his able diplomats to Akkerman.

The talks at Akkerman lasted a few months with several hiatuses along the way. Neither of the powers were willing to make concessions for their border claims that had troubled Russo-Ottoman relations since at least 1812. During the negotiations, the Tsar's agents promised that 'the Greek question would simply die of neglect' if the Sultan were to agree on Russian terms.<sup>66</sup> To the Sultan, giving up his border claims was the lesser of the two evils that surrounded his empire at the time. An agreement was duly made with favourable conditions for Russia in the disputed territories. The Sultan believed that with this, he had resolved the Greek crisis as Russia was no longer behind the insurgents. Moreover, the Otto-Egyptian forces were swiftly gaining control in a variety of locations. However, the revolution did not end.

While the Greek Revolution lost its urgency in the agenda of the Tsar, the news of violence from the Morea hastened the interventionist momentum in Britain. Under Prime Minister George Canning (1770–1827), the British took over the flag of clamouring the others for interference, even though Austrian and Prussian agents, and particularly the Chancellor Prince Metternich, found in their plan a 'miserable violation of international law' and a double standard (pointing to the Tsar's rejection of Great Power mediation in the Polish question). Outnumbered and thus outpowered within the Concert of Europe, Metternich was unable to stop Canning. France and Russia followed suit in order to have a say in the affairs of Greece. According to an Ottoman chronicler, the Russian agents denied that a secret agreement was made at Akkerman with respect to the Greek crisis.<sup>67</sup>

On 6 July 1827, the three Powers, Britain, France and Russia, signed the Treaty of London 'in the name of the most holy and undivided Trinity' and at 'the invitation of [the Greeks] to the conflict.' With this treaty, they set to secure maritime commerce against piratical acts and to establish an autonomous Greece under Ottoman suzerainty with the mediation of the Powers.

On 16 August, the treaty was communicated to Reis Efendi Pertev (the Ottoman counterpart of foreign minister) by the chief dragomans of the three signatory Powers.<sup>68</sup> They invited the Porte to accept the Powers' mediation within four weeks. However, since Mahmud II was disinclined to inter-imperialise the crisis, he denounced the treaty, viewing it as an infringement of his sovereign rule. His decision was the result not simply of his 'relentless spirit of a fanatic despotism,' as the British ambassador Stratford Canning complained to his cousin George<sup>69</sup>; he had also expected the Russians to comply with the promises they had made at Akkerman.

Mahmud II's response only engendered the Great Power alliance to shorten the time frame for the Ottoman decision by two weeks, which was communicated with another ultimatum again by the

64. V. Aksan, 'Ottoman Military and Social Transformations, 1826–28: Engagement and Resistance in a Moment of Global Imperialism', in: S. Streeter/J. Weaver/W.D. Coleman, *Empires and Autonomy: Moments in the History of Globalization*, Vancouver, Toronto 2010, [61–78], on 61.

65. S. Richmond, *The Voice of England in the East: Stratford Canning and Diplomacy with the Ottoman Empire*, London 2014, 154.

66. Tarih-i Cevdet, vol. 6, 2998; Cunningham, *Anglo-Ottoman*, vol. 1, 302; Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 125; A. Akdağ, 'Akkirman Antlaşması: Sebepi, Müzakereleri, Tahlili, Tatbiki', Unpublished Masters Thesis, Istanbul 29 Mayıs Üniversitesi, 2019, 61.

67. Tarih-i Cevdet, vol. 6, 2998

68. Cunningham, *Anglo-Ottoman*, vol. 1, 309.

69. S. Canning to G. Canning, 24 April 1827, TNA FO 78/153, see Cunningham, *Anglo-Ottoman*, vol. 1, 304.

chief dragomans of France, Britain and Russia and, once again, at an unfriendly audience. When they were accepted in his room, the agents presented the document to Ottoman Reis Efendi Pertev 'without comment'. The Ottoman minister 'tried to refuse it. What was it? He asked.' The dragomans said they did not know. Pertev 'tried to give it back.' Without a word, the French dragoman laid it on Pertev's sofa and withdrew.<sup>70</sup> Pertev then opened the envelope and read the note: if the Porte refused the mediation offer of the Powers, they would have to take measures 'which they would judge to be most effectual.'<sup>71</sup>

This brings us to the second document that reveals what the Ottomans understood by all that had transpired up to this point. In Ottoman Turkish and dated 30 August 1827, the document was signed by Grand Vizier Mehmed Selim Pasha.<sup>72</sup> It explains how the Porte should act against the 1827 convention and the ultimatum it had received from the Powers. It also demonstrates why, from an Ottoman point of view, the alliance's endeavours to interfere in the Greek issue (*Rum maddesi*) either 'by way of mediation or through ensuring ceasefire' were 'impossible' (*muhal ender muhal*) to accept.

According to the Ottoman imperial elites, the powers had 'no right to interfere' in this issue 'either verbally or by action.' This was why their claims had previously been responded to with indifference, if not continuously and categorically rejected, by the Porte, who wanted to terminate their initiatives conclusively. Before the Treaty of London was signed, the Ottoman cabinet had received intelligence (*havadis kağıtları*) about the Powers' ambassadorial meetings to decide upon the articles of their convention. They followed with dread, and perhaps also with bafflement, the Powers' discussions over, firstly, using their fleet in the Mediterranean as an instrument of coercion against the Egyptians; secondly, if necessary, approving and declaring the independence (*serbestiyet*) of Greece (and appointing consuls in the sites that the latter controlled), and; thirdly, the departure of their ambassadors from Istanbul. The Ottoman ministers knew about the opposition of the Austrian and Prussian diplomats to these considerations; yet at the same time, they were persuaded that the alliance of the Europeans was a subject to which the Sublime Porte ought to remain indifferent because it had to focus on its own dealings and it had already given (many times) its definitive answer to the Powers: 'even if the entire world came together,' the Sultan and his ministers would not agree on their conditions.<sup>73</sup>

The fact that the three Powers demanded reparations for the damage incurred on their commercial ships during the uprising was received with surprise on the part of the Porte. It believed that the Powers' involvement in the crisis had prolonged the uprising and caused the Ottoman Empire greater material loss than the Powers had suffered. Now the Russian fleet was brought to the eastern Mediterranean allegedly for the protection of their commercial ships from piracy (*tasallut-eşkîya*), even though the French had to act more with circumspect in dispatching their ships due to their simultaneous war with Algiers (from May 1827). The Ottoman ministers believed that only stability in the empire could ensure the timely suppression of piratical practices at sea.

The document also suggests that in the eyes of Sultan's ministers, the plenipotentiaries of the powers did not have an agreement as to whether they were in a state of war against the Ottoman Empire. Most curiously, the day after the ultimatum (to agree on the conditions of the August 1827 Convention of London) was delivered to Pertev Efendi at the aforementioned unfriendly audience, the Russian ambassador sent a different dragoman to inform the Porte that 'the Greek issue was not a business of the Russian state' (*Rum maddesi Rusya devletinin maslahatında olmayıp*) — Saint

70. Stratford to Dudley, 19 August 1827, TNA FO 78/155.

71. Ibid.

72. BOA C.HR 105/5228.

73. Ibid.

Petersburg's 'real business' lied with other interests that it had already obtained, which possibly alludes to Akkerman. It was why the Russians were not as demanding as the other two Powers.<sup>74</sup>

According to the document, the Ottoman ministers expected that, with the re-merger of the Ottoman and Egyptian navies, which would now amount to a total of 70–80 ships, the Greek issue would be definitively settled (*Rum ga'ilesinin külliyyen indifâ'i*) in a short time. However, they were wary that the 'trickery', 'mischievous' and 'demonic' actions of the European Powers could still place the empire under great difficulties. It was now their duty to protect 'the honour, religion and State of the Islamic nation' (*millet-i islâmiyenin*) because even though the allies had not openly declared war on the Ottoman Empire, experience told them that they had to be cautious. They had to act like 'there was an apparent declaration of war.'<sup>75</sup> On 31 August 1827, the Porte notified the Powers that it was 'ready to protect [its] own interests [...] remaining unyielding in [its] determination not to accept any mediation of foreign powers.'<sup>76</sup>

Mehmed Ali Pasha was all ears in Egypt, finding it difficult to fathom how the Sultan could pursue such a brusque diplomacy against the Great Power alliance. He knew that the Otto-Egyptian forces could not match their naval power. He warned his agent in Istanbul that

the only possible outcome [if a naval battle took place] will be sinking the entire fleet and causing the death of up to 30,000 or 40,000 men [...] I have therefore stopped sending letters to my son urging him to fight on. Wars are not won only by depending on God and trusting Him, but also by putting all possible human effort into it.<sup>77</sup>

Mehmed Ali's fears came true exactly two weeks later, when the Egyptian fleet was destroyed in Navarino alongside the Ottoman and Tunisian navy. The Pasha was furious. He had been negotiating with British and French agents in Alexandria for some time, arranging the withdrawal of his men from Greece. After Navarino, the talks were formalised as the pasha set to warrant the safe evacuation of his son Ibrahim and the Egyptian armies.

For his part, Sultan Mahmud II was also fuming with anger not just because of what happened in Navarino, but also due to the 'betrayal' of both Russians and Mehmed Ali. He declared the Akkerman agreement null and void, began war preparations and wittingly hampered Russian commerce in the Black Sea. By the end of April 1828, Russia and the Ottoman Empire were effectively at war again. However, after the abolition of the Janissary units in 1826 and after Navarino, the newly formed Ottoman military under the command of Hüsrev Pasha was quickly embarrassed by the more-powerful Russian armies. Mehmed Ali turned down Istanbul's call for military aid, which increased the strain on the relations between Istanbul and Cairo.

In the end, when a peace treaty was signed in Edirne in September 1829 between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan had to give up his border claims in the Caucasus and the Balkans and make further concessions for the liberalisation of Russian commerce in his dominions. Militarily and diplomatically accosted, he had to submit to the Powers' demands and recognise Greece as a tributary state, which paved the way for its independence in 1832.

### 3. Conclusion

The Ottoman ruling élites failed to quell the Greek 'insurgence' and thwart the interference of the Great Powers in the 1820s due to a string of misperceptions and misreading of the inter- and

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. RGIA, f. 846, op. 16, e. 4479, l. 184, see Petrunina, *Social'no*, 262.

77. Fahmy, 'Mohammad Ali', 159.

intra-imperial developments. First of all, Sultan Mahmud II and his ministers misguidedly believed from the outset that Tsar Alexander I was the whisperer behind the Greek insurgents whose (sub-altern) liberal aspirations the Ottoman agents could never fathom, even though they could see by now that it was a national (*milletçe*) movement.<sup>78</sup> While the revolution was the work of a truly wide network that reached as far as the Ottoman imperial palace, the sultan's unshaken opinion of the revolution as a Russian plot magnified the extent of the threat in his eyes in the slipstream of the Ottoman Eastern Question, which duly intensified his violent response.<sup>79</sup> As the revolutionaries appealed to mass killings and pillaging at a comparable level, the weaponisation of law to justify violence against the Greek rebels and the enslavement of the women and children became an invitation for Great Power intervention. A new factor in European history, public opinion, took hold against Sultan's wants.

Equally decisive in the Ottoman imperial failure were the domestic vulnerabilities of Mahmud II and Halet Efendi, the weakening of the legitimacy of their rule before the Janissaries and the wider populace after the defeats in the Morea in 1822, and the ensuing inter-personal hostilities of the Ottoman pashas, Mehmed Ali and his son Ibrahim, on the one hand, and their rival, Hüsrev, and his slave-turned-son, Reşid, on the other. These men, who oversaw the campaign at sea and on land, harboured immense distrust towards each other, which fuelled brutal responses throughout the revolution. The Otto-Egyptian differences proved to be a particularly significant cause of swift military success as much as a deep division in the Ottoman front that was torn apart after Navarino.

Finally, the Sultan and his ministers erroneously interpreted the inter-imperial implications of the revolution. The Ottoman ministers remained either too indifferent to the formation of Great Power alliances from 1825 onwards or they focused too much on the differences among the European actors. It was not until 1827 that they identified the emergence of a new transimperial order following the Congress of Vienna. In this world order, the competition among the self-defined European Great Powers and the divergence of their interests were more often than not the main trigger of cooperation among them — be it military, naval or economic — lest the powers dragged each other into another total war.<sup>80</sup> It was in this context of inconvenient diplomatic cohesions and through the filter of Great Power interests that international decisions were made in the Levant from the late 1820s onwards. This being said, I must add that, despite all the differences, imperial violence and civil war among them, the perseverance of the Greek revolutionaries remained the prime mover of what transpired in the 1820s and their agency was the fundamental driving force of their success.

The failure paths of the Ottoman elites during the Greek revolution proved to be an invaluable learning curve. Inter-imperially, the Ottoman ministers strove to undo their 1815-decision and get their empire involved in the system of European public law. In 1828, they made a formal request to the Concert of Europe to guarantee the territorial integrity of the European dominions of their empire, but it was too late. They were immediately rebuffed by the Powers.<sup>81</sup>

Intra-imperially, the Sultan and his ministers learned the hard way that their policy towards the non-Muslim subjects, especially the weaponisation of Islamic law, was deeply flawed. Numerous independence movements broke open either concurrently (if not before) or followed suit, and this resulted in partitions and the emergence of autonomous administrations that were mediated by the Great Powers in Serbia, Moldova and Wallachia and finally (and most dangerously) in Egypt from

78. This is discussed diligently in Karabıçak, 'Ottoman Attempts', 318, 324.

79. The argument is made also in Ilıcak, 'The Revolt'.

80. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 9.

81. Ottenfels to Metternich, 10 Dec. 1828, HHStA, StA, Türkei, VI, 34; see M. Šedivý, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, Pilsen 2013, 44–45.

the early 1830s onward. As an independent Greek kingdom was founded under the supervision of the Powers with the May 1832 Convention in London and the July Treaty in Istanbul respectively, Mehmed Ali Pasha finally began his independence demarche and severely threatened the Ottoman dynasty in 1833 and later in 1839.


Only then did the sultan and particularly his ministers that were better informed of the new trans-imperial order, such as Foreign Minister Mustafa Reşid Pasha, come up with a new political stance. In 1837, the Sultan would publicly announce (through his agents) that ‘there were no [...] differences’ among his Muslim, Christian and Jewish subjects. They were ‘all [...] my true sons.’<sup>82</sup> Two years later, the Gülhane Edict of November 1839, which precipitated the famous *Tanzimat* era in the Ottoman world, pledged to guarantee the security, liberty and property of all subjects by law, largely in response to the aforementioned domestic adversities and also to redefine the position of their empire in the new world order.

The Ottoman ministers could not dare to include the term equality (*müsavat*) in the text of the 1839 edict so as not to provoke Islamist sentiments and due to imperial hubris; however, they did toy with the idea of ‘equality of public rights, a civil equality,’ between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects and make many believe that the edict ‘placed [non-Muslims] upon a footing of equality [...] at least [...] in the most essential points’ with a view to position their empire among the civilised nations of the world.<sup>83</sup> This sub-text was hardly translated into reality, and even after it became the main message of the 1856 Reform Edict, its ill-implementation brought about new uprisings and further mass violence in the wider Ottoman world.<sup>84</sup>

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82. D. Stepanov, ‘Sultan Mahmud II and the First Shift in Modern Ruler Visibility in the Ottoman Empire’, in: *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 1 (2014) 1–2, 141.

83. ‘Exposé fait par Rechid Pacha à M. Desgranges’, 21 Sept. 1841, AMAE MD Turquie, 44; Pisani to Bulwer, 25 Sept. 1839 and 17 November 1839, NOR BUL 1/17/1-63, 561X9.

84. For more information on the afterlife and ramifications regarding the Ottoman Empire, and on related themes, see: [the-lausanneproject.com](http://the-lausanneproject.com) and the posts on the [securityhistorynetwork.com](http://securityhistorynetwork.com). See also the work done by Şükrü Ilicak, Yener Bayar and Erik de Lange, whom I also would like to thank for having read the earlier drafts of the article, and for their most useful comments.