

8 Escalation of the Eastern Question and the Path to Its Culmination

Metternich was deeply disappointed by Britain's ongoing policy towards the Ottoman Empire. He had high expectations after Wellington's appointment as Foreign Secretary and hoped for a complete reassessment of Great Britain's approach to the Near East.¹ However, the Tory government was dominated by anti-Russian members who had no intention of altering the previous course. British suspicion of St Petersburg was widespread across European embassies, with Granville, for example, observing that Russian armaments created the impression that the Russian navy might one day unexpectedly appear on the Thames.² Public opinion was another significant factor, as Russia was widely considered Albion's main enemy. For Austrian politics, Ponsonby and David Urquhart³ posed the greatest threat in Constantinople, with Metternich referring to Ponsonby as an "empty brain."⁴ He pressured Wellington to remove him from Constantinople, but before this could happen, Peel's government fell, and Palmerston was reappointed. The main objective for British diplomats in the Ottoman capital was to limit Russian influence.⁵ Throughout their tenure, they actively fuelled Palmerston's Russophobic views through diplomatic reports, bolstering public opinion in favour of anti-Russian policies.⁶ Austria, on the other hand, saw Britain's aggressive policy as the primary threat to European balance:

Austria, which desires the preservation of peace and hates revolutions, propaganda, and all the disorder that comes from it, will see more danger in England's aggression than in the occupation of Constantinople by Russia, and it will no longer oppose the latter.⁷

Following the establishment of a new cabinet in London in 1835, it became clear to Metternich that Britain would not reconsider its current international approach.⁸ Somewhat unexpectedly, he turned instead to France. In terms of inter-

1 Metternich to Hummelauer, Vienna, 31 October 1834, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 208.

2 Aponnyi to Metternich, Paris, 27 January 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, Frankreich 299.

3 David Urquhart was appointed as Secretary to the British ambassador in 1835. He was considered an expert on the Middle East in Great Britain. In 1833, he published a study entitled *England, France, Russia, and Turkey*, which was full of anti-Russian opinions.

4 ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 552.

5 RODKEY, Frederick Stanley, *Conversation on Anglo-Russian Relations in 1838*. In: *The English Historical Review* 50, 1935, p. 197, p. 120.

6 BOLSOVER, *David Urquhart*, p. 449.

7 Aponnyi to Metternich, Paris, 25 January 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, Frankreich 299.

8 Fox-Strangways to Palmerston, Vienna, 30 May 1835, TNA, FO 120/149.

national politics, the Quadruple Alliance was an illusion for the Austrian Chancellor. Making Louis Philippe cooperate with continental Powers could be key to isolating British diplomacy in the Near East and Western Europe.⁹ The aim of this approach was not to form an official partnership with the Orléans regime but to limit its cooperation with Great Britain. The success of this vision depended on St Petersburg's attitude. Even after five years of rule, Nicholas I maintained a strong personal antipathy towards Louis Philippe. Despite advice from Nesselrode and Orlov, the Russian Tsar did not soften his stance and refused to consider cooperation with France. Nor did he heed Metternich's advice that closer ties with Paris might reduce anti-Russian sentiments in the Eastern Question.¹⁰ Even so, relations between the two countries were not tense enough to threaten the outbreak of war. As late as 1836, Louis Philippe expressed his firm stance against war:

If ever my Ministers show a tendency in the Council towards war, I will break them in my hands, and that at all risks and perils, even to the point of abandoning the whole world as I abandoned Soult, Molé, Gérard, etc. I will change my Ministry on the spot. I am not saying this because I feel capable of doing it – I will do it. You can give Prince Metternich the most positive assurance about this.¹¹

By contrast, relations between Russia and Great Britain in the second half of the 1830s were much more strained.

Ponsonby sought to weaken Russia's position at the Sultan's court.¹² One opportunity arose when, on 5 May 1836, British reporter William Churchill shot a young Ottoman citizen at a hunt, mistaking him for a quail. The court in Constantinople sent him to prison, and they also flogged him fifty times before he began serving his sentence. The Ottomans violated international treaties by not allowing the British Embassy to assist in the judicial process. Ponsonby demanded that two pro-Russian ministers, Mehmed Akif and Ahmed Paşa, be dismissed.¹³ The Porte attempted to reach an amicable solution by releasing Churchill and apologising but refused to dismiss the two ministers. Ponsonby insisted that Akif be dismissed and informed Palmerston of his demand, threatening to resign if the Sultan did not comply.¹⁴ Simultaneously, he asked the British cabinet to officially support his position. The government was divided on the issue.¹⁵ Melbourne opposed Ponsonby

⁹ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 560.

¹⁰ LINCOLN, p. 214.

¹¹ Apponyi to Metternich, Paris, 24 January 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, Frankreich 299.

¹² TODOROVA, *British and Russian*, p. 23.

¹³ It was no coincidence that both statesmen were signatories to the Russo-Ottoman Treaty of 1833. Metternich to Hummelauer, Vienna, 15 June 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 215.

¹⁴ Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 10 May 1836, TNA, FO 78/274.

¹⁵ TODOROVA, *British and Russian*, p. 21.

and refused to intervene. Meanwhile, Palmerston supported Ponsonby, and during a discussion with the British Prime Minister, he declared: "Ponsonby has really done us valuable and important service, and has acted with courage, firmness and ability."¹⁶ Palmerston refused to acknowledge that Ponsonby's threats might have exceeded the limits of domestic instructions and instead believed they were rationally justified.¹⁷ In this regard, he overlooked Lamb's reports from Vienna, which warned of the British ambassador's dangerous policies.¹⁸

Tense relations with Great Britain due to the Churchill Affair led Mahmud II to request Austrian diplomatic intervention in London. What surprised Metternich most about the British ambassador's actions was not the excessive demands but rather the threats suggesting Britain's approval of the division of the Ottoman Empire. Metternich called Ponsonby "a madman" favoured by the British Foreign Secretary and added: "What arrogance! This style is clearly from the school of Lord Palmerston."¹⁹ He strongly urged Palmerston not to dismiss the Ottoman minister.²⁰ In his view, the conflict only served to benefit French policy in the Near East.²¹ Ponsonby remarked that he "was not prepared for the part Austria had acted."²² Lamb wrote a noteworthy report to London stressing the need for cooperation with Austria and Russia in the Near East, correctly observing that European peace depended on it.²³ Even so, he declined Metternich's request to propose Ponsonby's dismissal to the British government, temporarily straining their relations.²⁴ After extensive debate, London ultimately refused to grant Ponsonby official support. One reason was the ambassador's considerable unpopularity within parts of the British cabinet, as well as Russia's reaction to British interference, which saw four Russian ships withdrawn from Constantinople to Odessa.²⁵

¹⁶ Palmerston to Melbourne, London, 19 July 1836, WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. II, p. 847.

¹⁷ Palmerston to Lamb, London, 26 July 1836, TNA, FO 120/150.

¹⁸ The British diplomat returned to his post in Vienna during June 1836. Hummlauer to Metternich, London, 17 June 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 213; Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 5 August 1836, TNA, FO 120/153.

¹⁹ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 568.

²⁰ Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 5 August 1836, TNA, FO 120/153.

²¹ Metternich to Hummelauer, Vienna, 8 June 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 215.

²² Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 22 July 1836, TNA, FO 120/155.

²³ Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 22 July 1836, TNA, FO 120/153.

²⁴ BOURNE, Palmerston. *The Early Years*, p. 362.

²⁵ This act was intended to demonstrate that Russia would not participate in the protection of the Ottoman Empire if Great Britain interfered in its internal affairs. Hummelauer to Metternich, London, 17 July 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 213.

In the meantime, the Sultan dismissed Akif in June 1836, appointing Ahmed Houlousi.²⁶ The British ambassador celebrated a diplomatic success, which was an apparent defeat for Metternich. His diplomatic intervention in London had been for nothing. The Austrian Chancellor never forgot this and would be reluctant to provide the Ottoman Sultan with similar help in the future. During September 1836, Metternich continued to criticise London, pointing out the contradiction in Great Britain claiming to defend the Ottoman Empire's unity while simultaneously acting in a way that undermined it:

The so-called affair has dispersed like smoke, and what remains is reduced to such simple elements that they no longer arouse interest nor even the attention of anyone. What remains is a weakened Ottoman Power, which, in large part, owes this weakening to the abandonment in which it was left by the Court of London; a strong Russia, whose increase in power must in part be attributed to the English complicity.²⁷

The Tsar's response was naturally much stronger. St Petersburg demanded Ponsonby's immediate dismissal. Metternich, after all and surprisingly, did not want to support Nicholas I. He did not want the same as in the British case: that pressure from the Powers would restrict the Sultan's sovereignty. In early 1837, Churchill received compensation, and the entire affair calmed down.²⁸ Great Britain enjoyed a diplomatic victory from the matter, and Ponsonby temporarily consolidated his position in Constantinople.²⁹

Before Churchill's case was resolved, another scandal shook Anglo-Russian relations, with Urquhart behind the scenes.³⁰ He established a newspaper entitled *Portfolio* in 1835 to support his anti-Russian positions.³¹ Its objective was to discredit St Petersburg's position in Constantinople and turn the Eastern Powers against each other. Some of its articles were directly aimed at reducing Austro-Russian cooperation. Palmerston tolerated Urquhart's opinions and identified with his politics. Like him, he believed that the Russians aimed to occupy and control the Straits.³² Metternich followed these events with great contempt. He considered the accusation that Russia was trying to occupy the Bosphorus and estab-

²⁶ Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 22 July 1836, TNA, FO 120/155.

²⁷ Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 29 November 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 215.

²⁸ BOLSOVER, *Lord Ponsonby*, p. 111.

²⁹ CLAYTON, p. 75.

³⁰ ŠTERMENSKI, p. 36.

³¹ COLLIER, p. 100.

³² Palmerston to Ponsonby, London, 28 July 1836, TNA, FO 78/272.

lish its protectorate in Constantinople to be preposterous.³³ He understood *Portfolio's* desire to dismantle cooperation between the conservative Powers.³⁴

Urquhart went even further in his anti-Russian campaign. From his position as Secretary at the British Embassy, Urquhart began to support the Caucasus peoples fighting St Petersburg for their independence.³⁵ He ordered the British schooner *Vixen* to be sent to the Black Sea coast, with supplies on board meant for the Caucasus.³⁶ The cargo was then seized alongside the ship, on 27 November 1836, by a Russian warship when it deliberately broke the naval blockade declared by the government in St Petersburg.³⁷ The goods being transported included salt, which was subject to Russian regulations. The entire case was written about in the press, drawing the attention of British public opinion, and the London government was forced to respond.³⁸ Palmerston received the first official information on the ship's seizure in January 1837.³⁹ Metternich was informed of the situation at the same time.⁴⁰

The Foreign Secretary protested to Nesselrode via Durham, considering the Russian intervention unjustified because the *Vixen* was sailing in international waters.⁴¹ He also questioned Russian sovereignty in the Caucasus. At this time, a commission was set up under the supervision of Admiral Mikhail Petrovich

33 He considered it all the more imprudent when he received a message from Palmerston calling for joint action on the Eastern Question two weeks before the incident: "*It must always be a leading object of the policy of Great Britain to cultivate the most friendly relations with Austria; and it will at all times afford the sincerest gratification to His Majesty's government to interchange with the Cabinet of Vienna the most confidential explanations of views and sentiments upon the political transactions of Europe.*" Palmerston to Metternich, London, 11 November 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 215.

34 ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 573.

35 ARDELEANU, Constantin, The Lower Danube, Circassia and the Commercial Dimensions of the British–Russian Diplomatic Rivalry in the Black Sea Basin (1836–1837). In: BILIARSKY, Ivan, CRISTEA, Ovidiu, OROVEANU, Anca (eds.), *The Balkans and Caucasus: Parallel Processes on the Opposite Sides of the Black Sea*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2012, p. 47.

36 The *Vixen* sailed from Constantinople to the Caucasus port of Soudjouk-Kalé on November 15. Alexander Polden and Thomas Morton to Palmerston, London, January 27, 1837, *Papers Relating to Seizure and Confiscation of the Vixen by Russian Government. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1837*, TNA, FO 352/61c.

37 DIACONU, Eusebiu-Costel, In the Service of His Majesty: The British Consular Service in Black Sea Ports. Administration and Personnel (1825–1842). In: *East European Journal of Diplomatic History*, 9, 2022, Bucharest, p. 13.

38 James Yeames to Durham, London, 22 December 1836, TNA, FO 65/233.

39 INGLE, Harold, Nesselrode and the Russian Rapprochement with Britain 1836–1844, Berkeley, 1976, p. 64.

40 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 4 February 1837, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 216.

41 Palmerston to Durham, London, 21 March 1837, TNA, FO 65/231.

Lazarev, which produced evidence that the *Vixen* was carrying guns and gunpowder in addition to salt.⁴² Nesselrode deliberately disregarded these findings and concealed this fact in a discussion with Durham. The detained sailors were even released and sent to Constantinople. From the outset, Metternich supported Russia and realised that Urquhart was involved.⁴³ The only aspect he did not make a statement on was the issue of international law, on which basis the Russians detained the ship.⁴⁴ Lamb wrote to London about his discussion with Metternich:

Prince Metternich said to the question of maritime and territorial rights, upon which he would pronounce no opinion, that there were three parties who might pretend to the right of sovereignty over the countries in question – the Turks, the Russians, and the native inhabitants. That he knew little or nothing of the ground of the pretensions of either party.⁴⁵

The British ambassador continued to hope that Metternich would eventually side with London's interpretation of what had happened.⁴⁶

The affair not only deepened the divide between the Great Powers, but also exposed growing divisions within the British diplomatic apparatus. Urquhart's aggressive policy began to gain traction from January 1837, causing more disruption in the worsening British–French relations. Etienne-Guillaume-Theophile de Bionneau, Marquis d'Eyragues, First Secretary of the French embassy in the Ottoman Empire, complained in a letter to Ponsonby about the conduct of Urquhart, stating that it threatened not only cooperation between London and Paris but also the preservation of peace in Europe.⁴⁷

Yet another target of Urquhart's assaults was both Palmerston and his superior at the embassy. In his reports, Urquhart made it clear that it was he, not Ponsonby, whom the home government had appointed to run the embassy.⁴⁸ He topped off his absurd assertions with the view that British diplomacy had left the Ottoman Empire at the mercy of Russia, a view he communicated to the officials

⁴² DIACONU, p. 10.

⁴³ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 574.

⁴⁴ Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 8 February 1837, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 218.

⁴⁵ Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 3 February 1837, TNA, FO 120/161.

⁴⁶ Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 25 February 1837, TNA, FO 120/161; Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 4 March 1837, TNA, FO 120/170.

⁴⁷ d'Eyragues to Ponsonby, Therapia, 6 January 1837, Esterházy to Metternich, London, 8 February 1837, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 216.

⁴⁸ Ponsonby to d'Eyragues, Pera, 15 January 1837, Esterházy to Metternich, London, 8 February 1837 AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 216.

of the Porte itself.⁴⁹ Ponsonby was deeply outraged by these reports and considered them highly inappropriate and scandalous. In reply to d'Eyragues, he wrote:

I am forced to believe that Mr Urquhart's deviations from the right course have not been confined to the absurd affectation by which he makes himself ridiculous, but that they extend to multiplied intrigues against me. [. . .] I confess that I have since that period heard so much from so many different quarters as to Mr Urquhart's disposition and actions toward me, in a light that marks deep hostility against me, or the wildest and most extravagant ambition and insanity, as the foundation of his conduct, that I can no longer turn away from the cogent circumstantial proofs in the affair itself that fix Mr Urquhart as an accomplice in the deception.⁵⁰

He subsequently reported the whole affair to Palmerston in London, where he described Urquhart's plot in detail, adding: "I feel myself obliged to tell you that I cannot carry on the business of this Embassy if Mr Urquhart be left here."⁵¹ In February 1837, Palmerston received comprehensive information on the situation in Constantinople and the problems his Secretary had brought about. Most of all, however, he was outraged by the potential disruption of British–French cooperation, which was crucial to furthering British foreign policy and upon which he relied in the current affair.

At the same time, Palmerston called upon Ponsonby to discuss the future Near East strategy. The outcome was London's request to clarify the legality of the affair. The British press and Urquhart called for a stronger response, ideally military, against Russia.⁵² When Urquhart became dissatisfied with his government's response, he began denigrating British foreign policy in articles in the *Portfolio*, even accusing the Foreign Secretary of betrayal.⁵³ Palmerston came to his defence in Parliament on 17 March 1837. While he did not recognise the Russian blockade, he prioritised peace over war.⁵⁴ Due to his negative campaign, Ur-

49 d'Eyragues to Ponsonby, Therapia, 6 January 1837, Esterházy to Metternich, London, 8 February 1837, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 216.

50 Ponsonby to d'Eyragues, Pera, 15 January 1837, Esterházy to Metternich, London, 8 February 1837 AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 216.

51 Ponsonby to Palmerston, Pera, 18 January 1837, Esterházy to Metternich, London, 8 February 1837 AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 216.

52 ŠTERMENSKI, p. 37.

53 ARDELEANU, p. 51; KING, Charles, *Imagining Circassia. David Urquhart and the Making of North Caucasus Nationalism*. In: *The Russian Review. An American Quarterly Devoted to Russia Past and Present* 66, 1952, 2, p. 247.

54 INGLE, p. 69.

quhart was removed from Constantinople, and upon his return to London, he continued to criticise Palmerston's policies.⁵⁵

In the meantime, Metternich also requested a legal statement from St Petersburg. For him, this was more about acquiring arguments against Palmerston's accusations.⁵⁶ Lamb tried fruitlessly to get the Austrian Chancellor on Britain's side as he awaited the Russian statement: "I will appear to you a singular reproach, but the chief one I have to make to Prince Metternich in this affair is indirection. Why did he assume an attitude which he was not prepared to support?"⁵⁷ However, this judgement was unsound, as Metternich consistently maintained his position while awaiting the Russian government's official statement. He also believed the entire matter should be resolved between Great Britain and Russia alone.⁵⁸

Russia's response on the act's legality arrived in Vienna on 18 March 1837. This document stated that the Caucasus territory had been transferred to Russia in the Treaty of Adrianople and that Russia's acts regarding the *Vixen* were undisputed. Metternich was satisfied with this explanation and informed Esterházy in London of his position. From his situation in London, Palmerston sought to win Austria to his side and influence the course of events. On the contrary, the Austrian ambassador resisted the Foreign Secretary's advances, agreeing that

it was not only futile, but also necessary, to avoid being drawn by the Principal Secretary of State onto the sterile, ungrateful, and compromising ground of discussing contentious issues or potentially reigniting similar conflicts.

Instead, Esterházy resolved

to hold firmly to the advantageous position Austria maintained in this isolated case, emphasising the utmost importance of not unsettling their stance within the favourable circumstances in which it was fortunately situated.⁵⁹

He later assured the British Foreign Office that it was in Vienna's highest interest to see such threats removed in the future.

⁵⁵ Palmerston to Ponsonby, London, 14 April 1838, TNA, FO 78/328; KING, p. 248.

⁵⁶ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 576.

⁵⁷ Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 21 April 1837, TNA, FO 120/161.

⁵⁸ Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 8 April 1837, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 218.

⁵⁹ Esterházy to Metternich, London, 29 April 1837 (first dispatch), AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 216.

Palmerston received Russia's official statement on 13 May 1837.⁶⁰ The Foreign Secretary acknowledged the breach of Russian law. In his response, he added to Durham:

The grounds of seizure of the Vixen, therefore, appear to have been twofold: first, the having on board a cargo not allowed to be imported at all; and secondly, an attempt to trade at a Russian port, where there is no custom-house, and where a cargo, even goods of which the importation was legal, could not properly be landed. His Majesty's Government, considering in the first place that Soudjouk-Kalé, which Russia acknowledged in the Treaty of 1783 as a Turkish possession, now belongs to Russia, as stated by Count Nesselrode, by virtue of the Treaty of Adrianople; and considering further, that this port is occupied, as stated in your Excellency's despatch of May 13, by a Russian fort and garrison, see no sufficient reason to question the right of Russia to seize and confiscate the Vixen in port of Soudjouk-Kalé, on the grounds set forth in Count Nesselrode's note.⁶¹

What initially appeared to be a step towards easing the strained relations between Britain and Russia was, in fact, merely a diplomatic *façade* concealing Britain's actual objectives.

Just four days after receiving a favourable response to Nesselrode's explanations, reports from St Petersburg indicated that Bell had been dispatched on another mission to the Caucasus, with the full support of the British Foreign Office and diplomatic representatives in Constantinople. Bell himself referenced this in his personal memoirs.⁶² Nesselrode also harboured these suspicions, which were further confirmed two weeks after the resolution of the incident when Ponsonby sent a new series of dispatches. He claimed that Russia aimed to partition the Ottoman Empire in collaboration with Muhammad Ali, who had allegedly been promised hereditary control over Syria by the Russians.⁶³

The entire matter was resolved by May 1837, and in contrast to the Churchill Affair, the Russians celebrated victory. It demonstrated how tense relations were between Great Britain and Russia in the second half of the 1830s. The question of war hung over the event, a confrontation which might grow into a general conflict at any time. In this case, though, the agitator for war would not be Russia but Great Britain, driven by Russophobic public opinion and supported by the Embassy in Constantinople.⁶⁴ Palmerston and the government in London fostered an evident aversion to St Petersburg's policies, which had their roots in 1833. Great

⁶⁰ Durham to Palmerston, St Petersburg, 13 May 1837, TNA, FO 65/234.

⁶¹ Palmerston to Durham, London, 23 May 1837, TNA, FO 65/231.

⁶² BELL, James Stanislaus, *Journal of a Residence in Circassia During the Years 1837, 1838, and 1839*, London, 1840, s. 5.

⁶³ Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 22 July 1837, TNA, FO 78/358.

⁶⁴ INGRAM, Edward, *The British Empire as a World Power*, London, 2001, p. 83.

Britain's leading foreign political objective remained a revision of current conditions within the Ottoman Empire and a desire for revenge.⁶⁵ The circumstances surrounding the *Vixen*, nonetheless, opened up a series of minor crises covering the Central, Near, and Far East.⁶⁶ For Metternich, Anglo-Russian rivalry unnecessarily threatened the already shaky integrity of the Ottoman Empire and Europe-wide peace.⁶⁷ The greater danger, he considered, was the approach of France and its rapprochement with Muhammad Ali. During the ongoing crisis over the *Vixen* Affair, Paris set an anti-Ottoman course that posed a danger not only to diplomacy in Vienna but also in London.⁶⁸

The antagonism between Great Britain and Russia was also reflected in Eastern Europe.⁶⁹ Palmerston attempted to exploit the tense atmosphere in Poland to encourage liberals there to fight against the Tsar and divert his attention from Asia.⁷⁰ Nicholas I's speech, in which he threatened the artillery bombardment of Warsaw, served as a justification. The unrest in Poland drew the attention of the three Eastern Powers to the Republic of Cracow (Krakow). Based on the 1815 treaties, this small city-state was meant to be independent and neutral under the protection of Austria, Russia, and Prussia. One of the articles establishing Cracow's neutrality expressly forbade the provision of asylum to refugees, deserters, and other suspicious persons within the territory.⁷¹ The republic became a refuge for revolutionaries from the November Uprising who had escaped Russian arrest. Since Cracow belonged to all three Eastern Powers, their representatives disapproved of this sanctuary for revolutionaries. Metternich viewed the republic as a place of dangerous conspiratorial tendencies for Austria. In February 1836, the Eastern Powers finally occupied Cracow, using the local unrest against Russian rule in Poland as a pretext.⁷²

Metternich sent an official note about the occupation to Paris but not London. At the time, the Thiers government wanted closer cooperation with Austria, and the Austrian Chancellor attempted to exploit this situation. Initially, Palmerston did not oppose the advance of the three Eastern courts. His pro-speech in the British Parliament was delivered in a spirit of understanding and with a deliberate dis-

65 HOBBSBAWN, Eric John Ernest, *The Age of Revolution Europe 1789–1848*, London, 1962, p. 105.

66 Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 18 February 1837, TNA, FO 78/301.

67 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 8 February 1837, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 218.

68 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 29 April 1837 (second dispatch), AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 216.

69 PURYEAR, Vernon John, *England, Russia, and the Straits Question 1844–1856*, Berkley, 1931, p. 30.

70 SATTTLER, p. 29.

71 ABBENHUIS, p. 52.

72 BELL, H., vol. I, p. 269.

tancing from the Cracow question. He even emphasised that the Russo-Ottoman treaty was a “dead letter,” which did not alter the real objective – the preservation of peace in the Ottoman Empire.⁷³ This somewhat surprising turn must be seen in a broader context, particularly in light of the ongoing British–French controversy over the Iberian Peninsula. Hummlauer informed Metternich that Palmerston’s only concern in this case was to divert the attention of the British Parliament, which was struggling with its traditional internal difficulties, from the affairs of Cracow. These words proved to be true.⁷⁴

In the following months, Palmerston initiated a diplomatic intervention, sending a message in which he expressed protest against the actions of the Conservative courts.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Ancillon initially refused to receive it and only did so after intensified British pressure.⁷⁶ One of Palmerston’s efforts was to appoint a consul to Cracow. During an interview with Sébastiani, he said: “My colleagues [from the cabinet] shared this feeling, but because it was partly a personal matter for me, I asked them not to allow an unfortunate influence to be shown on the subject itself.”⁷⁷ The three Eastern Powers rejected this initiative.⁷⁸ After this refusal, Palmerston’s diplomatic dispatches escalated, continuing with a fierce attack on the Eastern Powers, disregarding the conventions agreed upon in 1815.⁷⁹ He compared the situation in Cracow to the partition of Poland in the eighteenth century. Metternich entered the debate, arguing the city was the centre of an international conspiracy that posed a threat to Austria’s domestic situation. He further explained that the intervention was justified under international agreements aimed at maintaining regional stability.⁸⁰ Russia responded similarly, and Palmerston could do nothing more than merely lodge further protests. He found no support from his government or France. The only one who joined the attack and accused Russia, in particular, of instigating the suppression of the freedoms and rights of Poles was the infamous *Portfolio*.⁸¹ Austrian troops remained in Cra-

73 Hummlauer to Metternich, London, 27 February 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 212.

74 Hummlauer to Metternich, London, 24 June 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 213.

75 Hummlauer to Metternich, London, 3 July 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 213; Palmerston to Russell, London, 15 April 1836, TNA, FO 64/204.

76 Palmerston to Russell, London, 3 May 1836, TNA, FO 64/204.

77 Hummlauer to Metternich, London, 3 July 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 213.

78 Hummlauer to Metternich, London, 30 December 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 213.

79 Canning and Palmerston’s speech to the British House of Commons, London, 1 March 1836, *The Republic of Cracow HC Deb March 1 1836 vol 31 cc1129–30* [quoted 2019-04-24]. Available at: https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1836/mar/01/the-republic-of-cracow#S3V0031P0_18360301_HOC_34.

80 BELL, H., vol. I, p. 270.

81 Hummlauer to Metternich, London, 15 April 1836, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, England 212.

cow until 1841, and Palmerston gained nothing from his counterattack. The Foreign Secretary's weak policy on Cracow stemmed from British diplomacy's full engagement in the Ottoman Empire, parliamentary struggles, and the Iberian Peninsula.

The Eastern Question had dominated European foreign policy throughout the 1830s. Palmerston was determined not to repeat his earlier mistake of 1833, while also seeking to restore Britain's lost influence in Constantinople.⁸² After the Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi was signed, he was forced to acknowledge the failure of British cabinet policy in the East and clarify his stance on the Eastern Question. During his 1838 speech, he retrospectively acknowledged that Metternich had been right:

What Metternich says of our shirking from helping the Sultan when Mehmet was at Acre and when a word might have stopped the Pasha without a blow is perfectly true, and there is nothing that has happened since I have been in this office which I regret so much as that tremendous blunder of the English Government. But it was not my fault; I tried hard to persuade the Cabinet to let me take the step. But Althorp, Brougham, and others, some from ignorance of the bearing of foreign affairs, some for one foolish reason, some for another, would not agree. Grey, who was with me on the point, was weak and gave way, and so nothing was done in a crisis of the utmost importance to all Europe when we might with the greatest of ease have accomplished a good result.⁸³

This statement encapsulates several of Palmerston's key ideas. The first part acknowledges the error in Britain's approach during the initial Eastern Crisis, while the latter portion shifts the blame to opposing factions within the cabinet, deflecting responsibility from himself. Ultimately, his goal was to realign the conditions in Constantinople to favour Britain.

Palmerston's interest in the Near East had grown steadily since 1832 for several reasons. British trade was continuing to grow with the help of steamships. Trade routes crossed the Suez to the Red Sea, or the Euphrates to the Persian Gulf.⁸⁴ In both cases, the Ottoman Empire and Muhammad Ali played a significant role in transportation. London was also suspicious of Russian activities in Asia and French influence within the Mediterranean Sea.⁸⁵ Palmerston considered the Egyptian governor a tool of Paris and viewed his interests as hostile to

⁸² TODOROVA, *Aspects of the Eastern Question*, p. 27; PAVLOWITCH, Stevan, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Serbia 1837–1839*, Paris 1961, p. 16.

⁸³ WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 283.

⁸⁴ CONNELL, Brian (ed.), *Regina vs. Palmerston. The Correspondence Between Queen Victoria and Her Foreign and Prime Minister 1837–1865*, London, 1962, p. 31.

⁸⁵ JUDD, Denis, *The Victorian Empire*, London 1970, p. 71.

British trade.⁸⁶ London's greatest concern, though, was that Egypt might attack Constantinople and Russia would enter a war, the outcome of which could lead to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁷

London attempted to isolate Muhammad Ali's influence and restrict his economic ambitions in the Near East.⁸⁸ At the same time, the Foreign Secretary, alongside Ponsonby, strove to achieve the most significant possible influence in Constantinople in 1837–1838.⁸⁹ In August 1838, they managed to secure an economic treaty with the Ottoman Empire, which was favourable to British economic needs.⁹⁰ This treaty reduced import duties and limited monopolies; overall, it did not benefit the Porte. Cheap British goods entered the Ottoman market, logically impacting domestic production. Metternich viewed the Anglo-Ottoman economic treaty very unfavourably. He knew it would negatively impact the Empire's economic situation, which would be reflected in the country's political stability.⁹¹ The agreement was essentially focused against Muhammad Ali's trade, threatening British economic interests in Syria and Adana. The Pasha responded to the treaty in 1838 by attempting to declare independence, something Great Britain and Austria refused to accept.⁹² It was evident from the Ottoman-Egyptian relations in 1838 that the Küthaya peace treaty had only had a temporary effect.⁹³ Mahmud II considered the acts of his vassal to be a symbol of his disloyalty and considered revenge to overcome the humiliating defeats.⁹⁴ Although Muhammad Ali abandoned his plan for independence by the end of August 1838, the Ottoman army was ready for a new conflict. Metternich advised the ailing Mahmud II to

86 MOSELY, Philip Edward, *Russian Diplomacy and the Opening of the Eastern Question in 1838 and 1839*, Cambridge, 1934, p. 94.

87 SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 193.

88 RODKEY, Frederick Stanley, *Colonel Campbell's Report on Egypt in 1840 with Lord Palmerston's Comments*. In: *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 3, 1929, 1, p. 103.

89 TODOROVA, *British and Russian*, p. 23.

90 The treaty was signed on 16 August 1838, in Balta Liman, and Mahmud II received British military guarantees in the event of war with Muhammad Ali.

91 ŠEDIVÝ, Miroslav, *Metternich a Turecko*. In: *Historický Obzor* 11, 2004, 9/10, p. 203.

92 His drive for independence continued throughout the second half of the 1830s. However, he was limited by international support, with the exception of France. In response to this declaration, Palmerston threatened to block Egyptian ports with the British navy if Muhammad Ali took this step. Esterházy to Metternich, London, 26 June 1838, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 220; Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 27 June 1838, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 219.

93 ŠEDIVÝ, Miroslav, *Metternich a idea konference ve Vídni v roce 1839*. In: *Historický obzor* 12, 2005, 3/4, p. 82.

94 SAUER, Manfred, *Österreich und die Levante 1814–1838*, unpublished dissertation, Wien, 1971, p. 388.

abandon his preparations for war and trusted that the current peace could continue.⁹⁵

In contrast to the Austrian Chancellor, Ponsonby encouraged the Ottoman Sultan to take bold action, assuring him of Britain's support.⁹⁶ He would have to do everything in private because doing so would conflict with the official instructions from London, in which Palmerston had urged that a compromise be found between the Sultan and his vassal.⁹⁷ The Foreign Secretary discouraged the Porte from going to war with Egypt.⁹⁸ When Metternich received information in March 1839 on Ponsonby's warmongering, the Chancellor asked Palmerston to encourage his ambassador to be more moderate.⁹⁹ In the meantime, the Ottoman ambassador in London, Reshid Pasha, tried to negotiate an Anglo-Ottoman offensive alliance. Palmerston's dismissal of the proposal arrived in Constantinople in March 1839, leading to great disappointment.¹⁰⁰ The London government refused to participate in a direct war with Egypt, and the Foreign Secretary wanted to preserve peace in the Near East. Therefore, he considered there to be no reason for any kind of agreement.¹⁰¹

In the end, British "pacifism" could not stop Ottoman troops from marching to the Syrian borders and awaiting the order to attack. War was declared on 9 June 1839, and the Egyptian governor and his son were labelled as rebels. Initially, Muhammad Ali did not undertake a large counterattack, hoping the Ottoman soldiers would withdraw. Metternich called for a diplomatic resolution to be worked on by the Powers.¹⁰² Nevertheless, after the Ottomans directly occupied Syrian territory, the Egyptian army was mobilised under the command of Ibrahim Pasha. Shortly afterwards, on 24 June 1839, the decisive Battle of Nezib was fought, and the Sultan's army was utterly defeated.¹⁰³ Admiral Ahmed Fevzi Pasha's desertion and seizure of the Sultan's navy in Alexandria exacerbated the poor situation of the Ottoman armed forces. After six years, Muhammad Ali's

95 Metternich to Stümer, Vienna, 26 Feb, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Türkei VI, 71.

96 MIDDLETON, Charles R., Palmerston, Ponsonby and Mehmet Ali. Some Observation on Ambassadorial Independence in the East 1838–1840. In: *East European Quarterly* 15, Boulder 1982, p. 412.

97 Palmerston to Ponsonby, London, 11 May 1837, TNA, FO 78/300.

98 RODKEY, Lord Palmerston and Rejuvenation, p. 591.

99 Metternich to Hummelauer, Vienna, 28 March 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 225; ŠEDIVÝ, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, p. 738.

100 Hummelauer to Metternich, London, 15 April 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 222; UFFORD, Letitia, *The Pasha. How Mehmet Ali Defied the West 1839–1841*, Jefferson, 2007, p. 85.

101 SETON-WATSON, *The Russian Empire*, p. 122.

102 Milhanke to Palmerston, Vienna, 28 March 1839, TNA, FO 120/180.

103 CLAYTON, p. 80.

path to Constantinople was again open. Furthermore, before reports of the army's collapse arrived in the Ottoman capital, Sultan Mahmud II was dead, with his sixteen-year-old son, Abdulmejid I, succeeding to the throne.¹⁰⁴

Reports of the Ottoman army's rout arrived at European courts on 8 July 1839, causing a stir. Metternich knew that the Powers would need to mediate to achieve a regular peace acceptable to Constantinople.¹⁰⁵ He, therefore, rejected the proposals of his diplomats, such as Prokesch and Stürmer, who called for a free agreement between Muhammad Ali and Abdulmejid I.¹⁰⁶ The Chancellor took the situation into his own hands in July 1839. Fearing unrest within the Ottoman Empire, he ordered Stürmer to support the young Sultan alongside the representatives of the other Powers and express unity in preserving the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁷ The Porte's agreement with Muhammad Ali's demands could only be secured with the consent of all five Powers. Palmerston had to accept Metternich's initiative and send instructions to Constantinople to order cooperation with the other states.¹⁰⁸ From the Foreign Secretary, this was a brief overcoming of his suspicion and negative attitude towards the Austrian Chancellor.¹⁰⁹ This showed he could abandon his ideological battle to preserve general peace and cooperate in a matter of Europe-wide significance.

Contrary to Palmerston's belief, Ponsonby maintained his usual rhetoric, arguing that the outbreak of war was due to St Petersburg, which viewed the Sultan's defeat as an opportunity to gain control of the Straits.¹¹⁰ The question arises whether the Foreign Secretary took this step out of genuine conviction or due to a calculated fear of isolation. Cooperation with the Eastern courts might have offered Palmerston similar advantages to those gained from French cooperation during the First Carlist War – promoting his political interests and limiting Russian influence in the Near East. The outcome was a joint diplomatic note which committed Abdulmejid I not to conclude any agreement without the prior consent of the Powers.¹¹¹ This was Metternich's greatest success regarding the Eastern

104 ŠEDIVÝ, Miroslav, *Francouzská červencová monarchie v kritickém roce 1840*. In: Historický obzor 14, 2007, 3/4, p. 51.

105 KANTOR, Wera, Karl Ludwig Graf Ficquelmont. Ein Lebensbild mit besonderer Rücksicht auf seine diplomatische Mitarbeit bei Metternich, unpublished dissertation, Wien, 1948, p. 250.

106 LACHMAYER, Katharina, *Mehmed Ali und Österreich*, unpublished dissertation, Wien, 1952, p. 105.

107 Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 30 July 1839, TNA, FO 120/180; RICHARDSON, James L., *Crisis Diplomacy. The Great Powers Since the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, Trieste, 2012, p. 44.

108 Palmerston to Granville, London, 23 July 1839, TNA, FO 27/536.

109 GRUNER, Metternich, Palmerston, p. 24.

110 Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 22 July 1839, TNA, FO 78/357.

111 The Collective Note was written on 27 July 1839.

Question during the Second Turko-Egyptian War. The note became the foundation for establishing order in the Near East and preserving the overall balance of power.¹¹² As part of Metternich's plan, the government of Egypt would be definitively given to Muhammad Ali. The government of the entire Syria would be entrusted to Ibrahim Pasha. Upon the death of Muhammad Ali, Ibrahim Pasha would govern Egypt, and Syria would once again fall under the direct authority of the Porte, as previously agreed.¹¹³

Palmerston proposed an international conference to examine arrangements within the Sultan's empire. Metternich also came up with the same proposal, hoping to find a general agreement through cooperation with the Powers. Their joint objective was to preserve the Ottoman Empire's integrity.¹¹⁴ The old rivalry resurfaced over which city was to be the main diplomatic centre. Palmerston had little hope that the Powers would meet in London.¹¹⁵ In 1838, he proposed that delegates of the Powers meet in a city on the Thames to discuss the situation in the Near East.¹¹⁶ Because the Foreign Secretary had no hope of the conference being held domestically, he was reluctantly willing to accept Vienna as one of the options for a venue for discussions.¹¹⁷ He wrote to the Austrian capital in this regard:

The French government proposed that these matters should be discussed in a Conference of the Five Powers, to be held at Vienna. Prince Metternich has stated the reason why, in his opinion, these matters cannot properly be submitted to a formal conference, but he has proposed that Vienna should be the seat of negotiation on these affairs. Her Majesty's Government saw many strong reasons in favour of the French proposal and some of much weight against it; the proposal of Prince Metternich has fewer objections but offers less potential benefit.¹¹⁸

Not only was the city on the Danube closer to the epicentre of the problem, but Austria also had almost identical interests to Britain.¹¹⁹ Considering the great distance between the two cities, it was evident that the main focus of discussions would be left to Lamb, who at the time had become Baron Beauvale, which suited

112 RICHARDSON, p. 44.

113 Pisani to Ponsonby, Pera, 22 July 1839, TNA, FO 78/357; Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 2 August 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 225.

114 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 28 August 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 225.

115 ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich a idea konference, p. 83.

116 Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 25 October 1838, TNA, FO 120/169.

117 According to Metternich, this was to be a series of diplomatic discussions rather than a congress in the true sense.

118 Palmerston to Beauvale, London, 28 July 1839, TNA, FO 120/180.

119 Metternich to Apponyi, Vienna, 14 July 1840, AT-OESTA/HHSTA, StAbt, Frankreich 315.

Metternich.¹²⁰ The British Foreign Office's ability to respond swiftly was limited, as reports from Vienna took ten days to reach London.¹²¹

For Palmerston, the conference was the only solution to the situation.¹²² British troops were operating in Canada, Afghanistan, and Persia, and a war with China was on the horizon.¹²³ Her Majesty's army's operational capabilities were at their limits, and there were no funds for another conflict.¹²⁴ Beauvale also encouraged the Foreign Secretary's consent, supporting Metternich's ideas.¹²⁵ Britain's formal consent was sent on 29 June 1839, after Palmerston had learned that the French had accepted the proposal. A final response was expected from St Petersburg. During this period, a diplomatic dispute broke out between London and Vienna. The Foreign Secretary asked Metternich to agree to a joint intervention by the warships of Great Britain, Austria, Russia, and France in the Sea of Mar-

¹²⁰ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich a idea konference, p. 83.

¹²¹ RIDLEY, p. 221.

¹²² Parallel to the ongoing Second Egyptian-Ottoman War, Great Britain was also involved in the Far East during the First Opium War. The display of naval Power in China highlighted Britain's global military reach and reinforced its strategic position within Europe's complex diplomatic environment. On the other hand, it once again revealed the operational limits of the British navy, as Palmerston had to rely on cooperation with other Great Powers to enforce the declared policies in the Ottoman Empire. Initially, Palmerston considered Chinese affairs secondary, prioritising pressing European issues. His perspective shifted after 1835 when British policy towards China started to resemble its approach to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies during the Sulphur Crisis. The strategic importance of China to British interests became increasingly evident by October 1839, particularly in the context of rising tensions with Russia over the Ottoman Empire.

The possibility of renewed conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, along with the threat of Russian expansion into the Eastern Mediterranean, directly threatened Britain's control over key routes to India and the Persian Gulf. This situation compelled Palmerston, to some extent, to adopt a broader global strategy. The war also had significant implications for Anglo-French relations. Britain's victory in the war strengthened its influence in the Far East, which had long-term consequences for its relations with France. The government in Paris became fully aware of the shifting balance of power in Asia and grew more cautious in its dealings with Great Britain in this region. In light of Britain's growing influence, France was gradually forced to reassess its strategy in both Asia and the Mediterranean. MELAN ÇON, p. 863. More about British policy in relation to the First Opium War: PLATT, Stephen R., *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age*, New York, 2018.

¹²³ Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 2 August 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223; OTTE, Thomas, *A Janus-Like Power. Great Britain and the European Concert*, In: PYTA, Wolfram (ed.), *Das europäische Mächtekonzept*, Köln, 2009, p. 144.

¹²⁴ MORGAN, Gerald, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia, 1810–1895*, London, 1981, p. 30.

¹²⁵ Beauvale to Palmerston, Vienna, 1 July 1839, TNA, FO 120/180.

mara in the event of Ibrahim's army marching on Constantinople.¹²⁶ In a message to Paris, Palmerston wrote: "There can be no doubt that the perfect union of England and France will confirm Austria in the course which she was herself one of the first to chalk out. With Austria, Prussia will go; and it is impossible that Russia can be unwilling to concur in the same course."¹²⁷ The Austrian Chancellor initially accepted the proposal but withdrew his agreement, fearing St Petersburg's reaction. Palmerston escalated the situation, and through Ponsonby, he demanded the Sultan's unconditional approval for British and French navy ships to enter the Sea of Marmara.¹²⁸

Even the French were aware of the importance of Austrian naval cooperation:

In order the better to obtain the result which we have in view, it may perhaps be expedient that the Austrian flag should appear among some light vessels will be sufficient for the purpose. It is to be observed, moreover, that Prince Metternich has already expressed this opinion.¹²⁹

They were not yet aware of Vienna's change of opinion. The Austrian Chancellor considered the British proposal to the Sultan as unnecessarily provocative, and he had the same criticism of Paris.¹³⁰ His rejection of the Anglo-French request was, to some extent, influenced by the expectation of St Petersburg's agreement to hold a conference in Vienna.¹³¹ Metternich convinced his ally of his essential role in preserving the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and universal peace:

Europe wants the preservation of the Ottoman Empire and, particularly, that of the Sultan's throne. No one wants the downfall of the first, which would surpass the second. If the need arises, we must urgently come to the aid of those who would be threatened, and it is only Russia, with the Black Sea, that is in a position to offer effective help. The two Maritime Powers would have no objection to such an action.¹³²

126 Metternich to Ficquelmont, Vienna, 8 July 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Russland III 116. Palmerston to Beauvale, London, 28 July 1839, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. I, p. 117.

127 Palmerston to Granville, London, 30 July 1839, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. I, p. 227.

128 ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich a idea konference, p. 84.

129 Duke of Dalmatia to Bourqueney, Paris, 17 July 1839, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. I, p. 80.

130 Metternich to Apponyi, Vienna, 7 August 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Frankreich 315.

131 Metternich to Ficquelmont, Vienna, 29 July 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Russland III 115.

132 Metternich to Ficquelmont, Vienna, 21 July 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Russland III 115.

However, at the beginning of August, Metternich received an unexpected message from the Tsar, who refused to participate, arguing that the two warring parties should resolve their conflict without the intervention of external Powers.¹³³

This message was so discouraging for Metternich that it contributed to his physical and nervous collapse, and he was only able to return to his office later that year in September.¹³⁴ Interestingly, for Palmerston, the Tsar's refusal presented a path to closer ties with Austria:

A Power capable of utilizing all means of conciliation that contribute to the establishment and consolidation of a union between the Powers – a result that, if it can indeed be achieved, could only be attained through the moral and political position unique to Austria and the long-prepared paths laid by the foresight of its Cabinet. Not wishing to directly align with Russia, nor being able to do so with France, the rapprochement with Austria on this question, independent of the personal sentiments of British ministers, seems to me only all the more solidly established.¹³⁵

Esterházy added that the British Foreign Secretary sincerely regretted the obstacles in the relations between Austria and Russia. The refusal from St Petersburg was grounded in rationality, based on mutual treaties that stipulated only the Sultan himself could request military support, not foreign Powers.¹³⁶ Conversely, the British and Austrian approach on the Eastern Question was completely aligned, and both London and Vienna agreed on the fundamental principles of further political action.¹³⁷

In the meantime, a division had opened up between Great Britain and France. This resulted from the issue of supporting different sides of the conflict. While Palmerston backed Abdulmejid I, the French government, headed by Marshal Victor Soult, expressed its sympathies for the Egyptian governor and was unwilling to take part in military intervention on the Nile. Paris's agreement to a collective intervention in the Straits in July 1839 had been primarily focused against Russia. Furthermore, France had sought more significant territorial gains

133 Nesselrode to Medem, St Petersburg, 25 July 1839, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. I, p. 306.

134 ŠEDIVÝ, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, p. 770. During this critical period, even Palmerston was away from his office for several weeks, answering “only very rarely and on urgent matters.” Esterházy to Metternich, London, 25 September 1839 (second dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

135 Esterházy to Metternich, 22 August 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

136 Esterházy to Metternich, 14 August 1839 (first dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

137 Esterházy to Metternich, 14 August 1839 (second dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

for Muhammad Ali than Great Britain and Austria were prepared to give.¹³⁸ For Palmerston, it was tolerable if Muhammad Ali received hereditary possession of Egypt and some of Syria.¹³⁹ The French government furthermore demanded the right to the whole of Syria for the descendants of the Egyptian governor, stubbornly rejecting any other proposals.¹⁴⁰ This was too much for the Foreign Secretary:

As Count Sébastiani and I have always spoken and acted towards each other with unreserved confidence, we did not attempt to disguise, in this conversation, that the feelings of the British and French government, about the course to be pursued towards Mehemet Ali, are somewhat different, and that the French government leans much more towards the Pasha than the British government does [. . .] Count Sébastiani observed that this was a critical decision and implied a separation from France and a dissolution of the Alliance of the five Powers. So, on the present occasion, England might agree with Austria, Prussia and Russia, in thinking it necessary to employ against Mehemet Ali active measures to which France, for reasons of her own, might be unwilling to become a party.¹⁴¹

Paris's stance disconcerted Metternich, too.¹⁴² France's open support for Muhammad Ali was evident in July 1839. The Egyptian governor had connections with French journalists and was popular amongst the French public, for whom he was a hero and a "North African Napoleon."¹⁴³ The government in Paris was always sensitive to the response of its population, and as such, a pro-Egyptian course became a component of official French policy.¹⁴⁴ Although he enjoyed international support, Muhammad Ali did not have the backing of the Muslim population in the Near East, which complicated his negotiating position.¹⁴⁵

One of the first demands was that the seized fleet be returned to restore the Sultan's power. Soult opposed this, worsening relations with London.¹⁴⁶ In Sep-

138 The Viceroy of Egypt demanded hereditary possession of Egypt, Syria, and part of the Arabian Peninsula. Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia. 30 October 1839, TNA, FO 78/359.

139 TULASOĞLU, p. 241.

140 SHAW, Stanford, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Cambridge, 1967, p. 57.

141 Palmerston to Bulwer, London, 10 September 1839, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. I, p. 366.

142 Metternich to Kaisersfeld, Vienna, 25 November 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Russland III, 116.

143 SRBIK, Heinrich Ritter von, *Metternich. Der Staatsmann und der Mensch*, München 1925, Band II, p. 72.

144 Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 30 October 1839, TNA, FO 78/359; Granville to Palmerston, Paris, 2 August 1839, TNA, FO 27/541.

145 Metternich to Stürmer, Vienna, 28 August 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 225.

146 Palmerston to Clanricarde, London, 25 July 1839, enclosed in a letter: Ficquelmont to Metternich, St Petersburg, July 8 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Russland III 116.

tember 1839, Palmerston abandoned the idea of naval cooperation with France and began openly criticising it. As relations with Paris deteriorated, there was a rapprochement between London and St Petersburg.¹⁴⁷ Nicholas I shared Palmerston's objective of expelling Muhammad Ali from Syria, so he decided to negotiate terms for cooperation.¹⁴⁸ The Tsar sent Russia's ambassador, Count Phillip Ivanovich Brunnov, to London to submit a proposal for a joint resolution to the Eastern crisis.¹⁴⁹ Palmerston was interested in the Russian diplomat's offer.¹⁵⁰ In it, the Tsar committed not to renew the Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi, which was due to expire in 1841. During peacetime, the Straits were also to be closed to all warships of all Powers, with Russia the only one entitled to sail to the Sea of Marmara.¹⁵¹ An essential aspect of the proposal was that the Tsar was willing to proceed regardless of France's opinion: "If the English government can obtain cooperation from France on the agreed terms, the Emperor will be satisfied; otherwise, he will be simply forced to do without it."¹⁵² Despite initial agreement on the main issues, Palmerston hesitated to accept the proposal because he was unwilling to agree to its conditions. He saw Russian intervention in the Sea of Marmara as the greatest problem and asked that any intervention involve the British navy.¹⁵³

Another issue was the scepticism of the anti-Russian ministers, who viewed rapprochement with St Petersburg disparagingly and did not want to abandon a pro-French course.¹⁵⁴ Significant disputes erupted within Parliament, with some members refusing to endorse the foundational aspects of the agreement prematurely. Esterházy sided with Russia and did not give significant weight to the British arguments:

In this manner, we have only to deal with whims rather than a will, as it should be that of a Great Power like England. As it seems to me impossible that England remains in this state of vacillation and uncertainty, which, already humiliating, would necessarily become dishonourable over time, this Power seems to me to be thus far not compelled to an action corre-

147 RODKEY, Frederick Stanley, *The Turco-Egyptian Question in the Relations of England, France, and Russia, 1832–1841*, Urbana, 1923, p. 121.

148 SCHIEMANN, Theodor, *Geschichte Russlands unter Kaiser Nikolaus. Im Kampf mit Polen und im Gegensatz zu Frankreich und England 1830–1840*, Band III, Berlin, 1913, p. 394.

149 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 25 September 1839 (first dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

150 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 25 September 1839 (second dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

151 LINCOLN, p. 218.

152 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 25 September 1839 (second dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

153 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 4 October 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

154 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 15 November 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

sponding to its declarations. I do not abandon hope that it will find it easier to come to an understanding with Russia, proposing a similar action itself, than with France, which until now has only reluctantly agreed to principles.¹⁵⁵

In the end, Palmerston managed to get part of the cabinet on his side, and once Nicholas I accepted his concerns, he agreed to the amended Russian proposal.¹⁵⁶

Metternich was delighted with the cooperation between Great Britain and Russia. His initial disappointment at Nicholas I's rejection of his proposal subsided, even though St Petersburg agreed to hold the conference in London.¹⁵⁷ In this respect, Palmerston achieved a diplomatic victory. On the other hand, Metternich's primary interest was preserving the Ottoman Empire's integrity:

You know, my Prince, how long I have worked to establish clear explanations between the courts of Russia and Great Britain and how much care I have taken to prepare the way for the eventual agreement. This will prove, I have no doubt, that the enterprise offers fewer difficulties than expected from one side or the other.¹⁵⁸

Britain's Foreign Secretary, assured of Russian and Austrian support, criticised the French government's approach in a dispatch to Granville. At the same time, he realised that under the current circumstances, the threat from St Petersburg was unrealistic for Constantinople. To publicly oppose Paris, he needed an ally in the East; otherwise, Great Britain risked becoming isolated internationally – something London undoubtedly wanted to avoid.¹⁵⁹

Palmerston's faith in Russia's genuine intentions began to be satisfied. Nicholas I agreed to the presence of an Anglo-French fleet in the Straits should Russian ground troops be used to defend Constantinople.¹⁶⁰ The Russian Tsar was prepared to support Great Britain at the upcoming conference and hoped this would lead to the dissolution of the Anglo-French partnership.¹⁶¹ He recognised the clear disparity between the two Western governments and conveyed to Nesselrode: "Everything depends on Palmerston's resolve."¹⁶² Ultimately, discussions regard-

155 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 1 October 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

156 SCHIEMANN, Band III, p. 388.

157 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 10 October 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 225; MIDLETON, Charles R., p. 410.

158 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 30 September 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 225.

159 Palmerston to Granville, London, 2 December 1839, TNA, FO 27/578.

160 Palmerston to Granville, London, 29 October 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 224.

161 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 25 September 1839 (first dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 223.

162 INGLE, p. 128.

ing the Eastern dispute were concentrated in London.¹⁶³ Neumann travelled to the British capital, representing Austria alongside Prussian envoy Bülow.¹⁶⁴ Metternich was ultimately forced to acknowledge a subordinate position, with Palmerston emerging as the key figure.

Despite his dissatisfaction with France's policy, the Austrian Chancellor remained convinced he could persuade France to act jointly, relying on Louis Philippe's moderate position.¹⁶⁵ Palmerston had no such patience: "It appears that the French Government which began by declaring itself the protector of the Sultan, has now become in appearance, and for all practical purposes in the negotiation, the protector of the Pasha."¹⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Soult accused the British cabinet of trying to break up the joint alliance that had secured peace in Europe for a decade. He contended that France had initially thwarted Ibrahim Pasha's further advance in the first conflict, while Ponsonby's secret policy had emboldened the Sultan to launch the attack on Muhammad Ali, which ultimately resulted in the current crisis.¹⁶⁷ Sébastiani interpreted the French government's positions in London, refusing to make the slightest concession regarding Muhammad Ali's claims.¹⁶⁸ His criticism escalated to the point where, during a conversation with Palmerston, he condemned British attempts to spread constitutional forms – even in Asia – that had already caused so much damage in Greece and Spain. After the heated discussion ended, he turned to Hummelauer, who was waiting for Palmerston, and remarked: "France does not want constitutions elsewhere; there are already too many of them – but nothing can cure the people of this country."¹⁶⁹

During the Christmas holidays, preliminary negotiations among the three Powers began at Palmerston's estate in Broadlands and later moved to London. The representatives agreed that Russia, Great Britain, and Austria would coordinate their naval forces in the Sea of Marmara if Ibrahim Pasha advanced towards

163 MARTENS, p. 37.

164 Neumann was the representative in the absence of Esterházy.

165 Esterházy to Metternich, 29 November, London, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 224; Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 7 February 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230. Even in the later stages of the crisis, he did not dismiss the possibility of France joining the resolution of the issue: "*We are ready to move forward with Austria, Prussia, and Russia (without France) if their agreement can be obtained on reasonable terms, but we would prefer to include France, and we think that every appropriate effort should be made to ensure this.*" Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 21 February 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230.

166 Palmerston to Granville, London, 29 October 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 224.

167 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 29 November 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 224.

168 Palmerston to Granville, London, 1 December 1839, TNA, FO 27/598.

169 Hummelauer to Metternich, London, 29 November 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 224.

Constantinople, with Austria contributing a few ships merely for appearances. The Straits would be closed to foreign warships during peacetime, based on the Sultan's traditional rights, in line with Metternich's wishes. Muhammad Ali would be restricted to governing Egypt and granted hereditary rule over the territory.¹⁷⁰ At the same time, Palmerston emphasised that it was not feasible to impose conditions on the Egyptian Pasha that would be unacceptable to him and potentially lead to greater instability in the region. This concern also extended to British trade with Egypt, as any disruption would be highly unpopular with the British public.¹⁷¹ Metternich was reportedly satisfied with the ongoing negotiations in the British Isles: "Whether the object you have kept in mind since last summer, whether in Vienna, London, or elsewhere, what matters is the goal we have set, which is the salvation of the Empire."¹⁷² He subsequently authorised Neumann to sign a joint convention in which the courts of Austria, Russia, Prussia,¹⁷³ and Great Britain committed to collective cooperation in addressing the future conditions of the Ottoman-Egyptian settlement, as well as the question of the Straits.¹⁷⁴

The seemingly smooth negotiations between the three European Powers encountered resistance from the British cabinet, particularly from pro-French members: "The majority of the Cabinet declared that the Turco-Egyptian matter could not be addressed without France."¹⁷⁵ Neumann attributed the discord within the British Government partly to Palmerston. He feared that the negotiations would lead nowhere and that a powerful diplomatic faction from Paris was exerting control over British domestic policy. Metternich was disappointed with the progress, but nonetheless, he instructed Neumann to remain in London and monitor the ongoing British–Russian discussions.¹⁷⁶ Meanwhile, he informed London that Paris had initiated separate negotiations, offering significant concessions to Muhammad Ali. This French action undermined the collective approach of the remaining courts and, above all, discouraged the Egyptian Pasha from agreeing to the potential settlement.¹⁷⁷

170 ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 781.

171 Neumann to Metternich, London, 31 December 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 224.

172 Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 1 January 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230.

173 At Metternich's urging, Prussia joined the convention, although it did not participate in the actual December negotiations. Beauvale to Palmerston, Vienna, 5 January 1840, TNA, FO 120/189.

174 Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 12 January 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230.

175 Neumann to Metternich, London, 17 January 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

176 Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 22 January 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230; ŠEDIVÝ, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, p. 789.

177 Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 7 February 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230.

France's intransigence escalated further in March 1840.¹⁷⁸ A new government was formed in Paris under Thiers, which sought to hold negotiations with Constantinople and Alexandria behind the other European Powers' backs. A dangerous paradox emerged between France and Great Britain. Thiers did not believe that the Powers would be willing to sign any agreement on Muhammad Ali's fate without Paris's consent. On the other hand, Palmerston considered France's objections as "big talk, [which] cannot make war for such a cause."¹⁷⁹ Another wave of criticism within the British government arose for taking action regarding the Eastern Question without the cooperation of France.¹⁸⁰ As a result, diplomatic negotiations at the conference stalled for a while.¹⁸¹ Nesselrode wrote to St Petersburg: "Since half the Cabinet, Melbourne foremost, do not want to move without France, they will have [to] give in to Palmerston. There was little to do but wait and watch and hope that Palmerston triumphed."¹⁸² Therefore, it was evident that the future approach would depend on the positions of the key figures of British and Austrian diplomacy.

Metternich hoped that the governments in Paris and London would find common ground, at least on the issue of the Straits. According to the Prince, the key to achieving this lay in the resignation of Thiers' government and the formation of a new cabinet.¹⁸³ He remarked on the change in circumstances in France by stating:

What has happened in France during the course of the last month is a revolution in the true sense of the word, and it is not one of those revolutions that bring bodies back to health, but rather one that is a necessary consequence of the July Revolution, which was only an accident in the restoration, an inevitable accident, but a real one.¹⁸⁴

The problem also lay on the British side. Neumann struggled to understand why Nicholas I agreed to London as the main venue for the negotiations instead of Vienna. In his view, the Russian court made a mistake, especially given that British–Russian relations were strained by conflicting positions on a global scale in places

178 VEIT-BRAUSE, Irmeline, *Die deutsch-französische Krise von 1840. Studien zur deutschen Einheitsbewegung*, unpublished dissertation, Köln 1967, p. 14.

179 SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 202.

180 In this context, the claim that Palmerston "*repeatedly advocated a diplomatic concert between the five Powers*" appears somewhat irrelevant. In this case, it was Metternich who swallowed his pride and, in the interest of maintaining general peace in Europe, was willing to make concessions. Palmerston's policy was strictly motivated by long-standing objectives in the Eastern Question. HOLBRAAD, p. 139.

181 ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 789.

182 INGLE, p. 130.

183 Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 17 March 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230.

184 Metternich to Kaisersfeld, Vienna, 6 April 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Russland III 120.

like Greece, the Ionian Islands, Persia, and China. He also pointed out that the government in London was overextending its forces with these activities, limiting its ability to respond flexibly to a potentially larger conflict, which in turn restricted its approach to the Eastern Question.¹⁸⁵ The tense relations between Russia and Great Britain were also evident at the London Conference, where disagreements began to arise due to delays in the British approval of the convention. One issue, for example, was the invitation of the Ottoman envoy without Palmerston informing the Powers. Brunnov considered that Russia might cease participating in the joint negotiations.¹⁸⁶

The disputes within the conference led Palmerston, in May 1840, to offer another compromise to Paris. Based on this proposal, Muhammad Ali was to be guaranteed hereditary rule over Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and a small part of Syria, with the right to nominate his successors. Adana, the rest of Syria, and Crete would be returned to the Sultan.¹⁸⁷ However, Palmerston expressed concern, saying:

After the promises of support that we have made to the Porte, the threatening language we have used towards Mehmet Ali on various occasions leaves us with nothing else to offer the Sultan but advice to retreat in the future. We would present to the whole world evidence of our impotence. Moreover, it is not certain that this future will present itself as one might expect.¹⁸⁸

Although the proposal was originally crafted by Metternich and conveyed to Palmerston by Neumann without prior consultation, the Foreign Secretary presented it to Thiers but gained nothing from the French side.¹⁸⁹ The new ambassador in London, François Pierre Guillaume Guizot, considered the concessions too minor and hoped that the Powers would eventually agree to grant hereditary rule over Syria to Muhammad Ali. This was unacceptable both to Vienna and St Petersburg. While Palmerston did not lose confidence in a favourable resolution of the situation, Neumann was not so sure. He particularly pointed out that, in the eyes of

¹⁸⁵ Neumann to Metternich, London, 25 March 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

¹⁸⁶ Neumann to Metternich, London, 24 March 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

¹⁸⁷ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 793.

¹⁸⁸ Metternich added a note in pencil on the margin of the dispatch: "It is indeed likely that we would see the emergence of a very different situation, one that would change the balance of power and create tensions we have not yet anticipated. The language used is a reflection of the gravity of the matter at hand, and we must remain vigilant as we consider our next steps in this delicate situation." Neumann to Metternich, London, 8 May 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

¹⁸⁹ Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 25 April 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230; ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 794.

some members of the government, the necessity of cooperating with France was seen as an insurmountable requirement. Additionally, he noted that the resolution of the Turco-Egyptian conflict would not be possible without the use of force, specifically a naval blockade of Alexandria and the Syrian coast.¹⁹⁰

Even though the French side presented a counterproposal, what surprised Palmerston was the complete exclusion of the Porte from the negotiations. As a result, he decided to rely more on Austrian assistance and accommodate the Sultan as much as possible: "My mission is to favour the plan that appears the most beneficial to the Sultan's interests and presents the greatest chance of success both in the present and in the future."¹⁹¹ Consequently, Palmerston intended to use the Austrian guarantee of providing a naval force in the event of a blockade to persuade the cabinet to agree to the convention: "Two small Austrian warships will suffice to confirm your involvement in the operation."¹⁹² Metternich tentatively agreed to the proposal but refused to provide a land army due to financial reasons. He was assured by the Foreign Secretary that this guarantee would be crucial for further negotiations within the government.¹⁹³ The proposal for the blockade sparked another wave of opposition within the British cabinet. Objections also came from Vienna, as a prolonged blockade of Alexandria would result in significant losses for Austrian trade.¹⁹⁴

Even in the course of June, both Vienna and London were still convinced that France could be won over to their side.¹⁹⁵ No new alternative solutions were coming from Paris, which led Neumann to fear that the situation had reached a stalemate. He once again attributed this to Palmerston's lack of initiative. As a result, he approached Prime Minister Melbourne to explain that he could not rely on positive guarantees from Thiers. Melbourne responded that the whole matter needed time to avoid premature conclusions.¹⁹⁶ This reply did not satisfy the Austrian ambassador, as he believed the Sultan was playing for time. The situation was further complicated by reports from Constantinople, indicating a worsening condition throughout the Empire, which were confirmed by various diplomatic sources. In June, the Ottoman envoy Chekib Effendi replaced the less active Nourri Effendi, and he launched a much more proactive policy aimed at securing the Powers'

¹⁹⁰ Neumann to Metternich, London, 12 May 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

¹⁹¹ Neumann to Metternich, London, 3 May 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

¹⁹² Neumann to Metternich, London, 9 May 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

¹⁹³ Neumann to Metternich, London, 19 May 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

¹⁹⁴ Neumann to Metternich, London, 22 May 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

¹⁹⁵ Neumann to Metternich, London, 10 June 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228; Metternich to Stürmer, Vienna, 2, 4 June 1840, HHStA, StA, Türkei VI, 16.

¹⁹⁶ Neumann to Metternich, London, 12 June 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

agreement to the convention.¹⁹⁷ Neumann eventually reached an agreement with Brunnov, and they decided to put pressure on Palmerston: "We immediately informed him that the delays in the discussions were leading to an anxiety that needed to be addressed."¹⁹⁸ They presented him with a plan that involved Muhammad Ali temporarily withdrawing from Aleppo, and if he adhered to the negotiation conditions, he could be granted control of Syria for life under certain terms, specifying the circumstances under which he would have to relinquish it. Palmerston agreed to this plan.

Following their agreement, Neumann had another conversation with Melbourne on 22 June 1840, during which he asked whether the cabinet would support Palmerston or insist on seeking French consent. The Prime Minister's response revealed the true intentions of his government, rooted in deep-seated animosity towards Russia: "Russia will take over the matter for itself."¹⁹⁹ He was alluding to St Petersburg's influence not only over the Sultan but also Russia's expansion into Central Asia and the threat to India. For these reasons, they wanted France on their side, hoping to create a common counterbalance against Russia. That same evening, Neumann also met with Guizot and informed him of the plan agreed upon by the three Powers. A few days later, the French ambassador reported that Thiers responded positively. A debate then erupted at the conference session, during which Palmerston and Brunnov tried to push through a solution without the "Syrian concession." Neumann objected, arguing that this would not convince France to cooperate. Shortly after that, another message arrived from Paris, in which Thiers requested additional concessions for Muhammad Ali in a territorial agreement.²⁰⁰

During the subsequent session, Palmerston hesitated on whether to accept the French plan. Guizot had submitted a request that Aleppo be placed under hereditary administration by the Egyptian governor. The British Foreign Secretary, initially uncertain, eventually conceded, after pressure from other representatives (except Neumann), that the French demands had gone too far. He agreed to present a plan to the government that did not rely on French assistance: "If Lord Palmerston fails, he [Brunnov] hopes that the matter will fall into the hands of Russia. Still, he counts on the Secretary of State's ability to be satisfied with marching without France's involvement."²⁰¹ This decision was further supported by a critical

197 Neumann to Metternich, London, 15 June 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

198 Neumann to Metternich, London, 22 June 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

199 Neumann to Metternich, London, 23 June 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

200 Neumann to Metternich, London, 29 June 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

201 Neumann to Metternich, London, 30 June 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

development – Metternich had definitively committed to providing naval support in the event of a joint military intervention.²⁰²

On 5 July 1840, Palmerston appeared before the cabinet and cited a conversation between himself, Neumann, and Guizot from May 1840. He explained that Thiers would not pressure Muhammad Ali to accept the conditions proposed by the other courts.

indicating that France's designs were based on establishing a powerful Arab entity that could serve as an ally against England. On the other hand, developments in Turkey could force the Emperor of Russia to intervene, and Austria would also see itself involved materially or politically, and perhaps in a way that would disturb its balance, it was important for England to maintain the balance of power, that Anglo-Austrian interests coincided, and that despite having different positions, they could align in the same public forum. It was of utmost importance for England's interests to reconcile those of the Empire, to preserve an alliance that had always been so useful to Great Britain and to find equal sympathy in that country without, wanting to break with the French government.²⁰³

Unsurprisingly, the response was negative. Disappointed and humiliated by the rejection, Palmerston submitted his resignation to the Prime Minister.²⁰⁴ Melbourne could not afford to lose an experienced Foreign Secretary who enjoyed tremendous support from the party, something Palmerston had counted on.

Following the Prime Minister's intervention three days later, the cabinet agreed to proceed without French involvement. The next day, Palmerston sent instructions to Constantinople and Vienna regarding the deployment of forces and the joint diplomatic approach.²⁰⁵ The convention on the Straits between Great Britain, the Ottoman Empire, and the Eastern Powers was signed on 15 July 1840.²⁰⁶ Based on this agreement, Muhammad Ali was guaranteed the hereditary possession of Egypt and rule over the Syrian Sanjak of Acre, with the strategic military fortress left in place.²⁰⁷ If the Egyptians rejected this proposal, the signatory Powers would be forced to secure it by all available means, including military force.²⁰⁸ For

202 Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 24 June 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230.

203 Neumann to Metternich, London, 9 July 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

204 SOUTHGATE, p. 130.

205 Palmerston to Ponsonby, London, 10 July 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230, Palmerston to Beauvale, London, 10 July 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

206 The entire wording of the convention is in the dispatch: Neumann to Metternich, London, 16 July 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228; HOLLAND, p. 95.

207 Beauvale to Palmerston, Vienna, 16 July 1840, TNA, FO 120/190.

208 Memorandum from 15 July 1840, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. II, p. 1.

Metternich, the convention represented hope that the Near East conflict could be resolved, although he was also concerned about France's response.²⁰⁹

The French political circles discovered that the agreement had been signed on 25 July 1840.²¹⁰ Their answer was extremely hostile. The secret signing of the agreement without France's involvement was perceived as a deliberate humiliation. Guizot was surprised by the signing of the convention. Lieven, who arrived in London with him, said to Palmerston: "The disciple of Mr. Canning – had rebuilt the Holy Alliance that the latter had destroyed."²¹¹ Thiers spoke of Great Britain's betrayal and dramatic consequences, even though French diplomacy's official response was moderate.²¹² The French press, on the other hand, did not mince words. Newspapers like *Le National* and *Journal des Débats* called for war and suggested annexing territory on the left bank of the Rhine.²¹³

The French public, eager to challenge the Vienna arrangements of 1815, was driven by revisionist sentiment. Thiers' government immediately increased the army's budget and began an extensive arms build-up. Throughout August 1840, France's belligerence focused on the Italian Peninsula. While Metternich was shocked by this response, he did not believe that the government in Paris, and Louis Philippe in particular, would be willing to risk a war against all the Powers. For this reason, he did not let the threats intimidate him. In response to these reports, Palmerston wrote to Paris:

No Power has the slightest intention or thought of attacking France; but then France cannot expect that other Powers should see with indifference a wanton attack made by her upon a state which has given her no offence and which she would select as an object of attack, merely because she supposes it weak, and incapable of repelling or resenting an outrage.²¹⁴

This statement revealed that London was not afraid of acting against France, its greatest ally on the Continent (at least until then), to pursue its national interests.

Thiers' fiery international politics had mainly developed from public sentiment.²¹⁵ He had little room for diplomatic manoeuvre if he wanted to satisfy the French public and keep his government in place. As such, Metternich was con-

²⁰⁹ Metternich to Neumann, 25 July 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 230.

²¹⁰ ŠEDIVÝ, *Crisis Among the Great Powers*, p. 54.

²¹¹ Neumann to Metternich, London, 25 July 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 228.

²¹² Guizot's memorandum to Palmerston, Paris, 29 July 1840, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. II, p. 20.

²¹³ VEIT-BRAUSE, p. 16.

²¹⁴ Palmerston to Bulwer, London, 31 August 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 229.

²¹⁵ Thiers controlled a large part of the French newspapers, which made it easier for him to influence public opinion.

vinced that France was bluffing, attempting to intimidate Austria and Prussia into making concessions.²¹⁶ It is likely that the compromising materials, which the Chancellor had carefully kept on the French king, also played a role in this regard.²¹⁷ He instructed Apponyi to maintain a balanced and moderate tone in his statements about the government in Paris:

It is especially dangerous to see the government constrained in order to escape these embarrassments, to call upon, or to seek aid from the revolutionary element armed and without doubt in rather troubling circumstances, but the governments, such as those of individuals, as long as their ministers are chiefly concerned, will always resist the use of arms under these conditions.²¹⁸

The key to resolving the crisis, in Metternich's view, was to remove Thiers and bolster Louis Philippe's authority.

It was surprisingly Prussia that represented a particular threat to the Austrian Chancellor. In early June 1840, Frederick William IV ascended to the throne and was reluctant to be drawn into a war on the Rhine over issues in the Near East. At the conference, Bülow presented Prussia's reservations about ratifying the protocol and declared: "That if the Eastern Question were to lead to a conflict between the Powers more directly involved in this matter than Prussia herself, Prussia would adopt the position of the strictest neutrality."²¹⁹ Metternich believed that Bülow was being influenced by Russell, who claimed that by signing, Prussia would commit to deploying military forces. For Frederick William IV, this posed a threat, as he wanted to concentrate his military capacities primarily on the Rhine, not outside Europe. The Austrian Chancellor instructed Neumann: "To confer with Lord Palmerston on the best way to at least neutralize what, in form, the Prussian declarations may have that is compromising and harmful."²²⁰ At the planned meeting at Pilnitz on 13 August 1840, he wanted to personally explain to the Prussian monarch the consequences that the acceptance of Prussia's request would entail. Yet, a situation arose that could be called the "fog of diplomacy." While Metternich managed to secure Frederick William IV's promise, in the meantime, the protocol was concluded two days after the meeting, leaving Prussia the freedom to decide when to deploy military troops.²²¹ From a broader political perspective, it was not a defeat in the true sense of the word. At the meeting

²¹⁶ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 803.

²¹⁷ See Chapter 1 for more details.

²¹⁸ Metternich to Neumann, Königswart, 22 August 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²¹⁹ Metternich to Neumann, Königswart, 10 August 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²²⁰ Metternich to Neumann, Königswart, 10 August 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²²¹ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 805.

in Pilnitz, mutual cooperation and friendship between Berlin and Vienna were confirmed.²²²

Palmerston himself faced difficulties. Almost immediately after the convention was issued in July, pro-French members within the cabinet began to mobilise. The main agitators were Holland and Russell. The former acted mainly through behind-the-scenes diplomacy, frequently hosting banquets and other social events at his home, where he invited influential foreign diplomats, trying to either extract information or offer friendly advice. His guests included figures such as Guizot and even Neumann.²²³ On the other hand, Russell engaged in direct political combat, leaving Melbourne in the problematic position of mediator. One of his allegations accused Palmerston of allegedly forcing the Ottoman Sultan, through Ponsonby, to attack the Egyptian governor, making him the architect of every crisis. This political struggle also evolved into an information war, with the British press divided into two irreconcilable camps.²²⁴ Granville also caused Palmerston difficulties, being too soft in his approach towards Thiers, easily manipulated, and often bypassing his instructions. This all played into Paris's hands, allowing it to escalate its pressure, especially as the situation became more complicated in the Near East.²²⁵

After Muhammad Ali rejected the terms set by the London Conference, Palmerston decided to address the crisis through military action.²²⁶ The campaign began after signing the treaty and lasted until November.²²⁷ He ordered Vice-Admiral Robert Stopford to cut off communications between Egypt and Syria and seize all weapons destined for Ibrahim Pasha. Palmerston was dissatisfied with Stopford's progress and lack of initiative. In the initial phase, the Vice-Admiral failed to take advantage of the uprising in Syria, which could have significantly influenced the course of military operations. Consequently, in August 1840, Commodore Napier was dispatched to Beirut to patrol the Syrian coast, cut off supplies to the Egyptian troops by sea, and begin a naval operation involving the

222 Metternich to Neumann, Königswart, 22 August 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

223 Neumann to Metternich, London, 31 December 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 224.

224 ANDERSON, *The Eastern Question*, p. 99.

225 Granville to Palmerston, Paris, 8 August 1840, TNA, FO 27/604; Neumann to Metternich, London, 2 September 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231; Neumann to Metternich, London, 30 September 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

226 SHAW, p. 57.

227 Palmerston unusually demanded that military preparations begin even before the treaty was officially ratified. ŠEDIVÝ, Miroslav, *Metternich and the Syrian Question: 1840–1841*. In: *Austrian History Yearbook* 41, 2010, p. 88.

bombardment of Beirut.²²⁸ Austrian and Ottoman ships were operating here alongside British ships.²²⁹

Reports of British victories in Syria and news of the ratification of the 15 July Treaty on 15 September heightened pro-war sentiments in France.²³⁰ Palmerston delivered only the notification of the convention's ratification to Guizot, stating that: "They seek no exclusive advantage for themselves in these arrangements. The goal is to preserve the balance of power in Europe and to prevent events that might disturb the general peace."²³¹ Threats from Paris escalated, with Thiers declaring that war would be inevitable if acceptable conditions for Muhammad Ali were not presented at the London Conference.²³² In response to his speech, Palmerston wrote to the chargé d'affaires in Paris, Henry Lytton Bulwer:

If France throws down the gauntlet, we shall not refuse to pick it up; . . . if she begins a war, she will to a certainty lose her ships, colonies, and commerce before she sees the end of it; . . . her army of Algiers will cease to give her anxiety, and Mehemet Ali will just be chucked into the Nile.²³³

France's Prime Minister did not stop applying pressure, and he demanded that the Egyptian governor receive hereditary rights to Syria, or else he might invade the Rhineland. There was an immediate response from the German states to any French invasion. The press called for the defence of the German Confederation, and the public was now in a fighting mood.²³⁴

Metternich was not so concerned about Central Europe as he was about a possible French invasion of the Italian Peninsula. Still, he guaranteed Austria would be ready to meet its military obligations.²³⁵ Neither Palmerston nor Nicho-

²²⁸ Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 21 November 1840, TNA, FO 78/398; Metternich to Meysenburg, Vienna, 11 October 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Russland III, 120; SCHOLL, Heinrich Freiherrn von, *Geschichte des Krieges 1840–41*, Wien, 1866, p. 21.

²²⁹ For more on the Austrian navy's operations during the Syrian campaign, see: BAYER, Heinrich, KHUEPACH, Artur, *Geschichte der k. u. k. Kriegsmarine*, II. Teil: Die K. K. Österreichische Kriegsmarine in dem Zeitraum von 1797 bis 1848, III. Band. *Geschichte der k. k. Kriegsmarine während der Jahre 1814–1847. Die österreichisch-venezianische Kriegsmarine*, Graz, Köln, 1966, pp. 244–253.

²³⁰ Neumann to Metternich, London, 17 September 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²³¹ Palmerston to Guizot, London, 18 September 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²³² Bulwer to Palmerston, Paris, 20 September 1840, FO 27/605.

²³³ SOUTHGATE, p. 134.

²³⁴ FAHRMEIR, Andreas, *Europa zwischen Restauration, Reform und Revolution 1815–1850*, München, 2012, p. 74.

²³⁵ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 821.

las I agreed to concessions for the Egyptian governor, and the Foreign Secretary was prepared to use decisive force if required to resolve the situation.²³⁶

During the upcoming government meeting, the discussion aimed to focus on domestic issues and the session of Parliament. Even so, Palmerston anticipated the debate would inevitably shift towards foreign affairs. Russell, backed by his brother Francis Russell, Duke of Bedford, and Lord Spencer, launched a sharp attack on the Foreign Secretary. This growing opposition also surfaced in Parliament, where Guizot adopted a diplomatic yet intimidating tone while waiting for the outcome of the 28th September cabinet meeting. During the session, critics accused Palmerston of jeopardising Europe's balance of power with his hardline stance on France, potentially sparking a general war.²³⁷

Prime Minister Melbourne intervened, seeking Queen Victoria's help to calm the tensions and find a compromise. She opposed a confrontational course with France and called for the consolidation of relations with Louis Philippe. Since the Queen was expecting her first child, any further strain on the British government seemed undesirable. Palmerston's political position benefited from military victories, but tensions remained high. Russell threatened to resign, throwing the cabinet's stability into question. As disputes escalated, Palmerston secured support from several Tories, including Aberdeen. Public opinion also shifted in his favour, with many anti-Whig media magnates openly supporting him. In the end, Melbourne, concerned about the Queen's well-being, directed the Foreign Office to soften its pressure on Paris.²³⁸

Guizot, meanwhile, adopted a wait-and-see tactic, withholding any official statement until he knew the outcome of the British government's deliberations. During the conference at the beginning of October, Palmerston informed Neumann of the cabinet's position and emphasised that the four Powers would need to maintain a united front in their actions against France. At the same time, he hinted that if Thiers followed through on his promises and Paris was forced into military intervention, it would endanger the stability of Europe. Therefore, it was necessary to resume talks with France and possibly invite it to join the negotiations. The Austrian ambassador responded by paraphrasing from Metternich's letter:

The French government is in a state of unease, from which it wishes to extricate itself. Should it refuse to aid in this endeavour, I hesitate to declare that affirmatively while limiting it to observing that it is fitting to lend support within the bounds of a neighbouring polit-

236 Neumann to Metternich, London, 30 September 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

237 Neumann to Metternich, London, 6 October 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

238 Palmerston to Beauvale, London, 4 October 1840, TNA, FO 120/187.

ical line. We would obtain better conditions from France in favour of the matter if we handled it with more care, since it was generally agreed that the ineffectiveness of our coercive measures would provoke France.²³⁹

However, he added that if representatives from Russia or Prussia opposed it, he would be obliged to support them.

The government in Paris, led by Thiers, began to escalate tensions once again with the remaining European Powers.²⁴⁰ After a letter written in a moderate tone, it was followed by a barrage of accusations and aggressive dispatches. French chargé d'affaires Count François Adolphe Bourqueney accused Austria of detaining over 7,500 soldiers during the intervention in Beirut, thereby violating the convention under which Vienna had agreed that no ground forces would be used. Neumann responded that if such an event occurred, it must have involved the navy, not ground troops, adding that this was standard procedure in the British case, as seen previously in Bilbao and San Sebastián. To this, the French diplomat replied: "If the Austrian troops have not disembarked, then the British sailors have." Neumann answered:

You knew that coercive measures would be used to wrest Syria from Mehemet Ali – you were only told that you would not take part in them, and since the convention was signed, you have said so both here and in Paris. Act quickly, because if this drags on too long, public sentiment will rise more and more in France.²⁴¹

Thiers, in turn, told Granville regarding the bombing of Beirut: "Violence against the Pasha was essentially an act of moral violence against France."²⁴² Such exchanges became a daily occurrence by early October 1840.

Metternich was concerned that the crisis could indeed escalate into a state of war and attempted to organise another conference, namely in Wiesbaden, where France would also be invited. His proposal was rejected by both Russia and Great Britain. The former refused to yield to Thiers' threats, and Palmerston remained firm in his position despite internal government compromises. Metternich, for the umpteenth time, tried to push forward his vision of the "Acre Option," which he had already proposed at the beginning of July, prior to the signing of the final version of the convention.²⁴³ His conciliatory tone was influenced by the argu-

²³⁹ Neumann to Metternich, London, 5 October (first dispatch) 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²⁴⁰ Metternich to Meysenbug, Vienna, 11 October, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Russland 120.

²⁴¹ Neumann to Metternich, London, 5 October (second dispatch) 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²⁴² Granville to Palmerston, Paris, 5 October 1840, TNA, FO 27/606.

²⁴³ Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 15 October 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

ment that, in the event of war, Austria, due to its geographical position, would be exposed to much greater danger than Russia or Great Britain.²⁴⁴

The more pressure France applied on the international stage, the more radicalised the situation became on the domestic front. The government initiated a massive military programme. Granville sent exaggerated reports about the “inevitability of war in Europe,”²⁴⁵ and the French press continued its warlike rhetoric. In mid-October 1840, a Parisian worker even made an attempt on the life of Louis Philippe. Concerns over a revolution breaking out and the fall of the Orléans regime forced him to reassess his position regarding his government. He refused to continue to support his Prime Minister’s policy of making threats, leading France to the edge of a Europe-wide war. He, therefore, rejected Thiers’ proposal for an aggressive parliamentary speech, instead accepting his resignation.²⁴⁶ Marshall Soult established a new government, although Foreign Minister François Guizot led it. Upon his return to continental Europe, he stated: “[I] will certainly defend the cause of peace and, since the conservative party holds this immense stake, it is necessary to maintain the current state of things.”²⁴⁷ The changed government in Paris also represented a significant event in the so-called Rhine crisis and a crucial factor in calming the situation down internationally. Nevertheless, the arrival of the new government did not yet mean the immediate end to mutual conflicts, with neither Louis Philippe nor Guizot ready to abandon France’s extensive arms proliferation. The issue was not that the new Foreign Minister personally wished to continue the warlike rhetoric of his predecessor, but rather that the French Parliament and the public were in a position where an immediate change in political direction was not feasible. This meant that preparations for war progressed.²⁴⁸

While these domestic political changes took place in Paris, military operations on the Syrian coast continued. In October 1840, the joint Austrian, British, and Ottoman forces managed to drive Ibrahim Pasha out of Beirut and the surrounding area, with the Egyptian army’s only refuge left in the Acre fortress. Palmerston ordered that Ottoman soldiers be supplied with British muskets, and he urged the Sultan to deploy another 10,000 men to Syria.²⁴⁹ British officers were

²⁴⁴ Neumann to Metternich, London, 17 September 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²⁴⁵ Granville to Palmerston, Paris, 15 October 1840, TNA, FO 27/606.

²⁴⁶ Apponyi to Metternich, Paris, 6 November, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Frankreich 318; RODKEY, Frederick Stanley, *Anglo-Russian Negotiations about a “Permanent” Quadruple Alliance 1840–1841*. In: *The American Historical Review* 36, 1931, 2, p. 344.

²⁴⁷ Apponyi to Metternich, Paris, 8 November, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Frankreich 318.

²⁴⁸ ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 822.

²⁴⁹ Ponsonby to Palmerston, Constantinople, 5 August 1840, TNA, FO 78/395; Neumann to Metternich, London, 30 September 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

sent to Constantinople to oversee the army's operation.²⁵⁰ He also asked Metternich for Austria to provide similar assistance. In instructions of 5 October 1840, Palmerston ordered Stopford to begin an offensive operation before winter began, which might complicate any military action.²⁵¹ Following this, he dispatched instructions to Constantinople outlining the future political strategy:

Having taken into consideration the fact by which the Sultan deprived Mehemet Ali of the Pashalik of Egypt, the bearings of that act upon the present state of pending questions, and the course which it may be expedient to take thereupon, have invited the representatives of Austria, Prussia, and Russia at this Court to submit to their respective governments that undoubtedly there is much force in the reasons which, according to His Excellency's reports, induced the Sultan to take this step, and that while on the one hand, this measure in no degree prevents the Sultan from reinstating Mehemet Ali, if he should publicly make his submission to his sovereign, on the other hand it may operate as a powerful instrument of moral coercion upon Mehemet Ali, by making him aware that if the contest between him & his sovereign should be prolonged, and if the issue of that contest should be unfavourable to him, he might lose all, by his too obstinate resistance.²⁵²

The attack on the Acre fortress began on 2 November, 1840. Once their gunpowder store was hit, the Egyptian soldiers surrendered in just a single day. Ibrahim Pasha had no option but to withdraw his army back to Egypt.²⁵³

Reports of Acre's capture arrived in Paris on 28 November 1840. It was evident to Guizot and the rest of the French government that Syria was definitively lost for Muhammad Ali, and the only option for France was to reconcile itself to this fact.²⁵⁴ On this occasion, Metternich stated: "All this, of course, is now no more than ancient history. Our new journey has begun with the capture of St. Jean d'Acre."²⁵⁵ France's main task was to limit as far as possible the consequences of the diplomatic defeat it had suffered.²⁵⁶ Metternich welcomed the end of Thiers' government and felt satisfied with the new cabinet, but he still viewed the strengthening of the French army as a threat to the German Confederation and the Italian Peninsula. Following a meeting of representatives of Austria and Prussia in Vienna, an agreement was signed on 28 November 1840, regarding the defence of the German states against France. In the event of war, Metternich con-

²⁵⁰ Beauvale to Palmerston, Vienna, 28 October 1840, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. III, p. 15.

²⁵¹ Ponsonby to Palmerston, London, 21 October 1841, TNA, FO 78/398.

²⁵² Palmerston to Ponsonby, London, 15 October 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²⁵³ Neumann to Metternich, London, 21 November 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 229.

²⁵⁴ Neumann to Metternich, London, 29 November 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 229.

²⁵⁵ Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 29 November 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²⁵⁶ BULLEN, *Palmerston, Guizot*, p. 23.

firmed he would send the Austrian army to the Rhine. In return, Frederick William IV promised military participation if the Italian Peninsula were to be attacked and called on the other federal states to participate, too. This agreement represented a diplomatic victory for Metternich. It guaranteed Austria that the whole of the German Confederation would defend Italian states.²⁵⁷

In early November, Guizot sent London a message regarding its peaceful intentions:

For the sake of excluding the Pasha of Egypt from the government of Candia during the few years of life that now remain to him, to risk the dangerous consequences that may result to all the world, from France not concurring in settlement of the peace in the East; for it cannot be doubted, that the want of such concurrence will render precarious such settlement, as well as expose to hazard the peace of the West of Europe.²⁵⁸

He also hoped that the 15 July convention, the main thorn in the French government's side, would be withdrawn. Palmerston did not trust his statement. In response, he wrote:

But as to the notion that Her Majesty's Government could, out of deference to the wishes of France, suspend operations which Great Britain is carrying on upon the coast of Syria in fulfilment of the engagements of a Treaty concluded with Four other Powers, you [the other three Powers] acted very properly in not giving any encouragement to such a suggestion. M. Guizot seems, indeed, throughout the whole conversation to have operated under the assumption that the Treaty of July last is not to be executed.²⁵⁹

Paris continued to reject the idea of disarming, and the French Prime Minister, driven by public opinion, could not concede any sign of defeat to the outside world, as this would inevitably lead to another government collapse. On the other hand, Metternich took a cautious approach to France and wanted it to be reintegrated into the Concert of Europe.²⁶⁰ He believed that this was the way to secure peace in Europe. As a result, he proposed the official recognition of France's occupation of Algeria and Muhammad Ali's guaranteed possession of Egypt. Palmerston opposed the Austrian Chancellor's proposal. A concession to Paris like this would transform its diplomatic defeat into a triumph, he wrote to Beauvale in Vienna.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Bavaria, Hanover, Baden, and Württemberg added their signatures to the agreement.

²⁵⁸ Granville to Palmerston, Paris, 6 November 1840, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. III, p. 2.

²⁵⁹ Palmerston to Granville, London, 12 November 1840, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. III, p. 4.

²⁶⁰ VEIT-BRAUSE, p. 38.

²⁶¹ Palmerston to Beauvale, London, 19 December 1840, TNA, FO 120/189.

Napier began unofficial discussions with Muhammad Ali in Alexandria on surrender terms. The British commodore went far beyond the instructions he had been given in the discussions. Without consulting Constantinople or London, he submitted on 27 November 1840 a proposal to the Egyptian governor, which granted him hereditary rule over Egypt and offered safe passage to Ibrahim's soldiers as they withdrew. The news of Napier's conclusion of the treaty provoked significant resentment in the European courts. In this case, it was not the terms of acceptance that were at issue, but rather the manner of negotiation, from which the Sultan was completely excluded. Napier also bypassed Palmerston, as he had not received any binding instructions from him. Logically, neither Metternich nor the Sultan agreed with Napier's convention. According to Vienna, a peace agreement could only be signed between representatives of Abdulmejid I and Muhammad Ali. The Austrian Chancellor declared the British naval officer's action as an "act of insanity."²⁶²

Palmerston sent him official instructions through Stopford in a series of memoranda dated 14 and 15 November, outlining the procedure and stating that a special envoy would be sent to Alexandria to conduct official negotiations on behalf of Her Majesty:

When admitted, he will state to Mehemet Ali that he is ordered by the British government to inform him that if he makes an immediate submission to the Sultan, and delivers into the hands of the officer to be sent a written engagement to restore without further delay the Turkish fleet, and causes his troops immediately to evacuate the whole of Syria, the District of Adana, the Island of Candia, Arabia, and the Holy Cities, the four Powers will recommend to the Sultan to reinstate Mehemet Ali in the Pashalic of Egypt. But the officer will state that this recommendation will be given by the four Powers only in the event of the prompt submission of Mehemet Ali and that the officer is directed to remain three days at Alexandria to learn the decision. If at the end of the three days Mehemet Ali has not determined to make his submission to the Sultan, the officer should reembark and proceed to Constantinople to report to H. M.'s ambassador.²⁶³

In his instructions to Stopford, Palmerston urged him to continue military operations and expel the Egyptian army from Syria until "he received word from Constantinople that a new arrangement had been reached with Mehemet Ali."²⁶⁴

The terms set during the negotiations in London were almost identical to those proposed by Napier.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, this did not change the fact that when

²⁶² ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 856.

²⁶³ Palmerston to Stopford, London, 14 November 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 229.

²⁶⁴ Palmerston to Stopford, London, 15 November 1840, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 229.

²⁶⁵ Napier subsequently issued an apology for his actions: "I never had the least idea that the convention would be carried into execution without the authority of the Porte and the com-

Edward Fanshawe arrived as the official representative of the British government, he declared the convention null and void and presented his own treaty. Metternich was satisfied with this solution, as it adhered to proper diplomatic practice, and significant effort from Neumann had contributed to its final wording. Muhammad Ali agreed to the terms and signed the new agreement on 8 December 1840. Three days later, the Pasha sent a letter to the Grand Vizier in which he assured the Porte of his loyalty, Ibrahim Pasha's withdrawal from Syria, and the actual preparations in the Alexandrian port for the departure of the Turkish fleet.²⁶⁶

The resolution in the East also brought a solution in the West. After Guizot learned about the proposed agreement from 14 November, he expressed "great satisfaction with this initiative." He further added that he was surprised, particularly that Great Britain and Austria were providing such aid and provisions to the new French administration in order to deliver "proof of their support." Guizot concluded, "that is enough about the inheritance of Egypt."²⁶⁷ Yet, within his cabinet, different sentiments prevailed, and even in early December, Palmerston was still dealing with a series of French threats. Metternich was similarly informed of this.²⁶⁸ After Muhammad Ali accepted the agreement with the Sultan and reaffirmed his loyalty, the French pressures began to lose clear justification. Another factor was Palmerston's staunch inflexibility towards Soult's government. In the end, a relative compromise was reached, in which Paris pledged to maintain peace in Europe but continue its armament until the Eastern Question was fully resolved.²⁶⁹ The agreement from the Pasha's side did not mark the end of this conflict.²⁷⁰

When reports arrived at Constantinople of Egypt's agreement, the Porte began discussing a plan to depose the governor and expel him from the country.²⁷¹ These forceful remarks drew the attention of the Powers' diplomatic representatives.

mander in chief to whom the whole correspondence was addressed." Napier to Ponsonby, Marmaris Bay, 14 December 1840; Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 7 January 1841, OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 236.

²⁶⁶ Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 21 December 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231

²⁶⁷ Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 5 December 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²⁶⁸ Palmerston to Granville, London, 8 December 1840, FO 27/600B; Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 23 December 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

²⁶⁹ Beuvalé commented on the "*Armed Peace*." Beauvalé to Palmerston, Vienna, 19 January 1841, TNA, FO 120/197.

²⁷⁰ Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 20 December 1840, TNA, FO 78/399.

²⁷¹ Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 26 December 1840, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 231.

Stürmer warned the Divan²⁷² and counselled against hasty actions, and representatives of Russia and Prussia took his side. This disagreement became fully evident at the meeting of diplomatic representatives on 20 December in Constantinople. The British embassy argued that it was solely the Sultan's decision how he chose to deal with his vassal and that it was not within the competence of the other Powers to interfere with this right:

If the Sublime Porte informs us that the Sultan has agreed to the submission of Mehemet Ali and is satisfied with it, the role of my government is merely to provide counsel, in this case, to the Sublime Porte, agreeing that Mehemet Ali be granted the hereditary government of Egypt. Until then, until the Porte communicates the Sultan's decision to us, I must refrain from offering any advice or opinion.²⁷³

Ponsonby did not respond publicly to the Ottoman statements, preferring to scheme behind the scenes against Alexandria.²⁷⁴ The Sultan's reply came on 27 December 1840, and based on the British ambassador's advice, he refused to guarantee Muhammad Ali's hereditary rights to Egypt.

In fact, the Porte wanted to gain time and the opportunity to prepare for an eventual military intervention against its vassal. Reports of Abdulmejid's intransigence concerned Metternich.²⁷⁵ He wrote to Stürmer in Constantinople: "Austria condemns any military action which the Turkish army's units undertake against the Egyptian army."²⁷⁶ He rightly blamed Ponsonby for encouraging the Sultan. During January 1841, the Chancellor's suspicion shifted to Palmerston, whom he believed was endeavouring to overthrow the Egyptian governor's government:

Lord Ponsonby, who has taken it upon himself to make this matter understood, has the idea that, if instead of saving Mehemet Ali, we manage to swallow him up, Lord Palmerston will have nothing against it. You understand that for Mr Ponsonby, nothing more is needed!²⁷⁷

Metternich continued to criticise London, and he even considered withdrawing from the conference and beginning direct discussions with France: "The incident, which they have led into confusion, stems from Palmerston, who never hesitates to act independently and rashly."²⁷⁸ Ponsonby warned Palmerston that a large

272 The Divan (or The Divan-ı Hümayun) was a vital administrative and executive council within the Ottoman Empire, acting as one of the principal organs of governance.

273 Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 20 December 1840, TNA, FO 78/399.

274 ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 954.

275 Beauvale to Palmerston, Vienna, 3 January 1841, TNA, FO 120/197; Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 14 January 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 236.

276 Metternich to Stürmer, Vienna, 17 January 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Türkei VI, 83.

277 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 7 January 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 236.

278 Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 2 February 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 235.

portion of Egypt's budget, as planned by Muhammad Ali, would be allocated for further military armament, and that in the future, it would be in his interest to again test his strength against the Sultan.²⁷⁹ The Foreign Secretary must have heeded this information, as in his correspondence to Constantinople, he instructed Ponsonby "to obtain security for the Sultan against the potential threat that Mehemet Ali may entertain."²⁸⁰ Relations between Great Britain and Austria at the beginning of 1841 were on a similar level as before the outbreak of the Second Eastern Crisis.

Beauvaleur, influenced by Metternich, wrote to his brother in London, asking him to recall Ponsonby from Constantinople.²⁸¹ Melbourne accepted the British ambassador in Vienna's position and told Palmerston that if Constantinople's representative ignored his government's instructions, he should immediately be dismissed from his role. Of course, the British Foreign Secretary did not concur, as Ponsonby was sufficiently meeting his task and had great influence over the Sultan.²⁸² In January 1841, unequivocal instructions arrived in the Ottoman Empire to urge the Divan to agree to the granting of the hereditary statute.²⁸³ Abdulmejid I found that he no longer had any support from the Powers, and all he could do was guarantee Muhammad Ali the hereditary possession of Egypt in a decree of 13 February 1841.²⁸⁴ In return, he demanded a hefty tribute of a quarter of Egypt's gross income, plus control over his army.²⁸⁵ Alexandria could not accept such unfavourable terms.²⁸⁶

Metternich disagreed with the Sultan's proposal and required that it be changed immediately. Austria was prepared to withdraw its signature from the 15 July 1840 agreement if the demands were not met.²⁸⁷ He even approved the option of rejecting the Egyptian governor's proposal and wrote the following to Stürmer: "In any case, if the Sultan refuses to listen to the wishes of his allies, tell the Porte that it will be the master of its own decisions."²⁸⁸ Palmerston needed to respond quickly, and so in March and April 1841, he sent dispatches to Constantinople on the following steps:

279 Beauvaleur to Palmerston, Vienna, 17 January 1841, FO 120/197.

280 Ponsonby to Palmerston, Therapia, 1 February 1840, TNA, FO 78/430.

281 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 5 May 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 235.

282 Palmerston to Beauvaleur, London, 26 January 1841, TNA, FO 7/296.

283 Neumann to Metternich, London, 1 February 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 235.

284 Beauvaleur to Palmerston, Vienna, 15 February 1841, TNA, FO 120/197.

285 He reserved the right to appoint Egyptian officers and select his successor from among Muhammad Ali's descendants.

286 LINCOLN, p. 219.

287 Beauvaleur to Palmerston, Vienna, 2 April 1841, TNA, FO 120/197.

288 Metternich to Stürmer, Vienna, 2 April 1841, AT-OEST/HHSTA, StAbt, Türkei VI, 83.

It is extremely important that the matters in dispute between the Sultan and Mehemet Ali should be settled as soon as possible; . . . and it is obvious that no such final settlement can be reached to without such direct communication. Mehemet Ali will since that time have learnt, that the Conference has not separated and that the Alliance has not been dissolved; but that, on the contrary, the four Powers remain steady to their purpose, and true to their engagements.²⁸⁹

In the subsequent report, he wrote:

I [am] inclosing a copy of an instruction given by Prince Metternich to the Internuncio on 2 April, directing him, if necessary, to declare to the Porte that if the Divan will not adopt the modifications in the firman of 13 February [. . .] His Imperial Majesty will consider himself released from the obligations he contracted by the Treaty of July. I have to acquaint that Her Majesty's Government entirely concur in the view of this matter taken by the Austrian government and are prepared to take the same course.²⁹⁰

Britain's Foreign Secretary urged the Sultan to fulfil his commitment and change the terms issued in the February firman.²⁹¹ Meanwhile, in Alexandria, Napier announced that, should Muhammad Ali refuse the Sultan's proposal, Great Britain would not oppose it. The Porte, on the other hand, did not want to reduce its claims and demanded the unconditional approval of its exact wording.²⁹²

Metternich's attention turned again to Ponsonby. He saw him as the leading cause of the Sultan's intransigence.²⁹³ The British diplomat had many advocates at the Divan, one of whom was Reshid Pasha, the organiser of the February firman.²⁹⁴ He lost his role in March 1841 as a result of plots at the Ottoman court, and there were changes at the Divan.²⁹⁵ A conservative camarilla came to power and significantly impacted Abdulmejid's policies. This was naturally also reflected in his position on Muhammad Ali, with a new modified firman finally issued on 19 April, its ratification being conditional on the approval of the London Conference. Reports on the new agreement met Metternich's expectations. Now, he believed nothing

289 Palmerston to Ponsonby, London, 10 April 1841, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. III, p. 364.

290 Palmerston to Ponsonby, London, 21 April 1841, *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of the Levant*, vol. III, p. 385.

291 Ferman or firman is an official Ottoman document mainly used for decrees or regulations.

292 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 18 March 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 236.

293 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 14 January, 9 April 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 237.

294 Relations between Ponsonby and Reshid Pasha had been at an all-time low since the issuance of the February firman, and the British diplomat expected he would be recalled shortly. Palmerston to Ponsonby, London, 21 April 1841, TNA, FO 120/194.

295 Stürmer to Metternich, Constantinople, 11 March 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, Türkei VIII, 15; KARPEYEV, p. 438.

was standing in the way of France joining the Concert of Europe in full and Europe returning to peaceful international coexistence. In contrast, the situation in London was different. Palmerston was not prepared to approve a convention if Muhammad Ali did not accept the conditions.²⁹⁶ Metternich considered this foolish and called for its signature as soon as possible.²⁹⁷ Esterházy tried fruitlessly to urge the British Foreign Secretary to reassess his intransigence. The Austrian Chancellor was not wrong, however, in believing that the end of the conflict would also calm the situation in Europe. Guizot issued a declaration in which he agreed with the conditions for Muhammad Ali and stated that France would no longer build up its arms.

The domestic political situation in Britain was not developing positively for the current cabinet. The government was facing a difficult economic situation and was being threatened with a vote of no confidence. The Tories were in line to win the next election. There was growing opposition to Palmerston's actions in the Eastern Question and the favouring of Ponsonby, hated by Francophile representatives.²⁹⁸ On 1 June, new terms were sent from Constantinople, guaranteeing the Pasha the hereditary possession of Egypt and the right to appoint his successors and nominate army officers. The North African army could number 18,000 men. The Egyptian governor's navy could only be built with the Sultan's consent. The only question remaining was the level of tribute to be paid, which was to be resolved later. Muhammad Ali agreed to these terms, and the general crisis ended.²⁹⁹

Regarding resolving the conflict and the approaching end of the 1833 Russo-Ottoman treaty, Palmerston proposed during the London conference that the future of this strategically important point be discussed. On 13 July 1841, three days after Melbourne's government had lost a vote of no-confidence, all five Powers and the Ottoman Empire signed a new Straits Treaty.³⁰⁰ This convention reaffirmed the principle of closing the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to all warships during peacetime.³⁰¹ Mistrust towards Paris persisted on the part of Palmerston even after the resolution of the crisis. This was partly due to French hesitancy in signing the convention on the abolition of the slave trade, as well as the Straits Treaty. According to diplomats in London, Guizot was in no hurry to sign, as he antici-

²⁹⁶ Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 5 May 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 235.

²⁹⁷ Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 7 May 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 236.

²⁹⁸ Esterházy to Metternich, London, 29 May 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 234.

²⁹⁹ The entire wording of the treaty at: Palmerston to Beauvale, London, 13 July 1841, TNA, FO 120/195.

³⁰⁰ Esterházy to Metternich, London, 13 July 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 234.

³⁰¹ ANDERSON, *The Eastern Question*, p. 52.

pated the imminent fall of the Whigs' government and the rise of a new Tory one, with which he sought to negotiate common terms.³⁰²

Metternich wrote a letter two days after the signing of the convention, in which he insightfully summarised the state of British politics and the situation in which it found itself. He alluded to the fact that British policy had changed after the long war with France, and following a period of internal consolidation, the first signs of its new direction began to appear, particularly regarding the Eastern Question:

My first reproaches date from the period between 1820 and 1823, when Great Britain, particularly in matters of the Levant, did not know how to play the role that its most evident interest should have made it play. As there is no effect without a cause, it is necessary first to identify the cause here, and it was not difficult for me to discover it in the following elements.

He further alluded to the specific and insincere relationship between London and Paris:

The two neighbouring countries, after having passed from a long state of war to one of peace, established relations between them, whose reciprocal influence quickly manifested itself in a visible way. The first consequence of these relations for England was to lend strength to the Whig party, a party that followed the impulses of liberalism before the proper balance between the precepts of reason based on sound politics and theories devoid of practical application had invaded the Continent. The truth that is demonstrated to me is that the contact between France and Great Britain, since the time of the restoration, can be considered as an uninterrupted exchange of moral poison between the two countries.

According to Metternich, this had to have an impact on domestic politics:

This, therefore, has been the task imposed on England by circumstances [. . .] I find in the existence of two parties separated by denominations that for a long time now no longer represent realities. Today, the Tories and the Whigs have lost all distinctive character and purpose. In Great Britain, as in all other states, there are now only two definable parties: those men devoted to the preservation of the institutions on which the ancient social order rests, and the party of men who work for the fall of these institutions, whether led astray by vain theories or driven by ambitious views or the lure of gain toward wrongdoing.

Finally, he referenced the key turning point in international politics that occurred during Canning's time:

A period marked the end of old England; it is that of Mr Canning's ministry. Thus, my Prince, you will do justice to my foresight, as it was not in hindsight that I pointed out the transition from old to new England; whether it was instinct on Mr Canning's part or sheer circumstance, it remains a fact that between him and me, a man of the old school, the split

302 Esterházy, Neumann to Metternich, London, 8 July 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 234.

was immediate, and it was demonstrated throughout the course of his brief and disastrous administration that any rapprochement between us was impossible.³⁰³

For Palmerston, the July convention represented the notional completion of his second term as Great Britain's Foreign Secretary. He had managed to correct what might be perceived as his failure during the first Eastern Crisis. The issue of revising the Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi was one of the central points of his foreign policy. On the other hand, the deteriorating relationship between Britain and France culminated during the Rhine Crisis, and relations between the two countries never returned to what they had been in the 1830s, lasting until the end of Palmerston's time in office. The Quadruple Alliance was not a functional entity, and Anglo-French tensions were evident not only concerning the Ottoman Empire but also in the Mediterranean, with competition over influence on the Italian Peninsula. Palmerston's diplomacy cast a shadow of isolation over British politics. The Second Eastern Crisis was a textbook example of British policy being governed by the Foreign Secretary's opportunistic intentions: Palmerston was able to unite with "hostile" Eastern Powers against Paris for Britain's self-interest. Relations between London and Vienna deteriorated following their apparent cooperation on the Eastern Question. Palmerston considered Metternich's diplomacy so unstable that he could not be trusted. Likewise, the Chancellor was equally sceptical in his dealings with the British Foreign Secretary. He thought that nationalist motives governed foreign policy in London and did not seek cooperation between the Powers. The Foreign Office's priorities were to pursue its interests, hidden beneath the cloak of liberalism, even at the cost of breaching international law or causing detriment to preserving the balance of power in Europe. Even so, he had great expectations about the convention's signature and boasted that "he had not enjoyed such feelings of tranquillity and peace of mind" for a long time.³⁰⁴

Suspicion from the British side towards Russia diminished after the signing of the July Treaty, but it did not disappear entirely. The interests of the two states clashed on an almost global scale, and whenever one issue was temporarily settled, another arose on the horizon. This polarity persisted until the Crimean War. Palmerston officially left his ministerial role on 2 September 1841. This closed the first chapter of his role in high politics, which defined his positions for the rest of his long diplomatic career. For Metternich, this marked a chance to consolidate relations with London and restore cooperation based on traditional friendship.

303 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 15 July 1841, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 236.

304 ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question, p. 970.