

France's Intervention in Lebanon (1860)

“You are not, indeed, going to make war on any particular Power, but you are going to aid the Sultan to recall to their allegiance subjects blinded by an antiquated fanaticism.”

Napoléon III to French troops departing for Syria, August 7, 1860

What forms did French protection of Lebanon's Maronites take before 1860?

Through the **Capitulations**, French nationals and protégés enjoyed legal privileges that shielded **Catholic missions**. Missionary orders (notably **Jesuits**) built schools and churches. Mission schools and print networks gave Maronites access to Western learning and clerical-political patronage, deepening cultural affinity with France. French **merchants** and Maronite traders forged lucrative partnerships.

What triggered French intervention?

In mid-1860 a sectarian war in **Mount Lebanon** between **Maronites** and **Druze** spiraled into large-scale violence and spread to **Damascus**, where Christian quarters were sacked. Consuls reported Ottoman authorities **unable or unwilling** to stop the killing. The “*affreux massacres*” dominated the French press; France, long self-styled protector of Latin Christians under the **Capitulations**, faced strong pressure to act. The crisis became a test of France's credibility and of Europe's will to police order in Ottoman provinces.

What options did Paris consider, and why the hesitation?

Foreign Minister **Édouard Thouvenel** first sought a **Concert** response—international inquiry and tougher Ottoman measures, **no troops**. **Britain** opposed a landing, warning of imbalance and a **Russian** pretext; the **Sultan** promised order. **Napoléon III** hesitated: forces tied down in **Algeria**, tight budgets, a volatile **Eastern Question**, and a preference to preserve the Ottoman framework. Diplomacy came first—until renewed atrocities narrowed the choices.

How did public opinion shape the decision?

By **July 1860**, mass atrocity reports from **Damascus** united Catholic associations, bishops, and a broad press chorus demanding protection for Levantine Christians. (Notably, **'Abd al-Qādir**, the exiled Muslim leader who had led resistance to the French conquest of Algeria, sheltered thousands of Christians in Damascus.) For a regime reliant on plebiscitary legitimacy, inaction became costly. Intervention also let **Napoléon III** repair relations with Catholics angered by his role in **Italian unification** and the erosion of papal temporal power.

How were humanitarian aims balanced with national interest?

Thouvenel framed the mission as enforcing the “**rights of humanity**.” Paris also saw limited

gains: restore **prestige** as protector of Eastern Christians, **check British** influence, and retain leverage if the Ottoman center weakened. Design principles—**short mandate, narrow remit, Ottoman consent, multilateral cover, no annexation**—tied moral urgency to bounded realpolitik.

What was the intervention plan, and how were other powers reassured?

With **Ottoman consent**, the powers authorized up to **12,000 European troops** for a **time-limited** public-order mission. **France sent ~6,000**, took command under a **six-month** cap, and landed at **Beirut (Aug. 1860)**. To calm Britain, **Napoléon III** renounced territorial aims and let a conciliatory letter to run in *The Times*. Coordination with Vienna and St. Petersburg kept the Concert's façade intact.

What instructions guided General Beaufort d'Hautpoul?

He was to **halt bloodshed swiftly**, punish assaults on Christians, and **coordinate with the Ottoman emissary Fuad Pasha**, acting “**in the name of Europe**” while respecting Ottoman sovereignty. Tasks: secure routes and villages, **separate/disarm** irregulars, escort **refugee returns**, support tribunals—no civil administration or territorial claims; a **short police-style expedition** with discretion if Ottoman measures failed.

What were the results and long-term effects in Lebanon?

By late 1860 violence ceased; **Fuad Pasha's** courts punished ringleaders; an **international commission** documented the disaster. The **Règlement (9 June 1861)** created the **Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate**—a semi-autonomous, mainly Christian district under a **non-Lebanese Christian Ottoman** governor, with a sect-apportioned council, limited garrisons, and a **European guarantee**. **French troops withdrew by June 1861**. The system kept the mountain comparatively stable until World War I, while **institutionalizing confessional power-sharing**.

Why is this intervention historically significant?

It stands as an early, tightly **bounded humanitarian intervention**: multilateral authorization, **Ottoman consent**, a fixed timeline, and explicit **non-annexation**. The episode shows how **moral urgency, public opinion**, and **great-power calculation** can converge on a workable design—yet also how internationalization deepened **external tutelage** and **confessionalization**, shaping Lebanese politics into the twentieth century.

Timeline

- **Mid 1860:** Sectarian civil war erupts in Mount Lebanon; violence spreads to Damascus.
- **Late June–July 1860:** Massacres of Christians reported; **July 9–18:** Damascus massacre (up to 10,000); Ottoman inaction alleged.
- **June–July 1860:** France tries diplomacy; **July 6:** invokes Article 9 of the 1856 Treaty of Paris; public and clerical pressure mounts for action.

- **July 25–29, 1860:** Napoléon III's letter to his London ambassador Persigny, for publication in *The Times*, frames any move as humanitarian, not annexation.
- **July 26–August 3, 1860:** Ambassadors' Conference (Thouvenel); **August 3:** powers authorize up to 12,000 European troops for six months; France to send 6,000 and command.
- **August 7, 1860:** Napoléon III addresses embarking troops as a “humanitarian expedition.”
- **August 16, 1860:** First French troops land at Beirut; **August–September:** ~6,000 under Gen. d'Hautpoul stabilize districts, bury dead, distribute aid, deter attacks.
- **End of 1860:** Order largely restored in Lebanon and Syria.
- **Early 1861:** Paris presses for a durable settlement; **February 4:** Napoléon III tells the legislature France acted “only in the name of humanity” under an international mandate.
- **June 9, 1861: Protocol of June 9** creates the **Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate** (semi-autonomous), guaranteed by the powers.
- **June 1861:** French troops withdraw after a brief mandate extension once the new regime is in place.



French expeditionary corps led by General Beaufort d'Hautpoul, landing in Beirut, 16 August 1860 by Jean-Adolphe Beaucé.

TIE POLICY OF THE EMPEROR NAPOLEON TOWARDS ENGLAND

Times of London, August 1, 1860

We are requested to publish the following important letter from the Emperor Napoléon to the Ambassador of France, to which **Lord John Russell**¹ last night referred in the House of Commons:—

ST. CLOUD, 25TH JULY, 1860.²

My dear Persigny,—³

Affairs appear to me to be complicated—thanks to the mistrust excited everywhere since the war in Italy⁴—that I write to you in the hope that a conversation, in perfect frankness, with Lord Palmerston⁵ will remedy the existing evil. Lord Palmerston knows me, and when I affirm a thing he will believe me. Well, you can tell him from me, in the most explicit manner, that since the peace of Villafranca⁶ I have had but one thought, one object—to inaugurate a new era of peace, and to live on the best terms with all my neighbours, and especially with England. I had renounced Savoy and Nice;⁷ the extraordinary additions to Piedmont⁸ alone caused me to resume the desire to see reunited to France provinces essentially French. But it will be objected ‘You wish for peace, and you increase, immoderately, the military forces of France.’ I deny the fact in every sense. My army and my fleet have in them nothing of a threatening character. My steam navy is even far from being adequate to our requirements, and the number of steamers does not nearly equal that of sailing ships deemed necessary in the time of King Louis Philippe.⁹ I have 400,000 men under arms; but deduct from this amount 60,000 in Algeria, 6,000 at Rome, 8,000 in China, 20,000 gendarmes, the sick, and the new conscripts, and you will see—what is the truth—that my regiments are of smaller effective strength than during the preceding reign. The only addition to the Army List has been made by the creation of the Imperial Guard.¹⁰ Moreover, while wishing for peace, I desire also to organize the forces of the country on the best possible footing, for, if foreigners have only seen the bright side of the last war, I myself, close at hand, have witnessed the defects, and I wish to remedy them. Having said thus much, I have, since Villafranca, neither done, nor even thought, anything which could alarm any one. When Lavalette started for Constantinople,¹¹ the instructions which I gave him were confined to this—‘Use every effort to maintain the *status quo*; the interest of France is that Turkey should live as long as possible.’¹²

Now, then, occur the massacres in Syria,¹³ and it is asserted that I am very glad to find a new occasion of making a little war, or of playing a new part. Really, people give me credit for very little common sense. If I instantly proposed an expedition, it was because my feelings were those of the people which has put me at its head, and the intelligence from Syria transported me with

indignation. My first thought, nevertheless, was to come to an understanding with England. What other interest than that of humanity could induce me to send troops into that country? Could it be that the possession of it would increase my strength? Can I conceal from myself that Algeria, notwithstanding its future advantages, is a source of weakness to France, which for 30 years has devoted to it the purest of its blood and its gold?¹⁴ I said it in 1852 at Bordeaux, and my opinion is still the same—I have great conquests to make, but only in France.¹⁵ Her interior organization, her moral development, the increase of her resources, have still immense progress to make. There a field exists vast enough for my ambition and sufficient to satisfy it.

It was difficult for me to come to an understanding with England on the subject of Central Italy, because I was bound by the peace of Villafranca.¹⁶ As to Southern Italy, I am free from engagements, and I ask no better than a concert with England on this point, as on others; but, in heaven's name, let the eminent men who are placed at the head of the English Government lay aside petty jealousies and unjust mistrusts.

Let us understand one another in good faith, like honest men as we are, and not like thieves who desire to cheat each other.

To sum up, this is my innermost thought. I desire that Italy should obtain peace, no matter how, but without foreign intervention, and that my troops should be able to quit Rome without compromising the security of the Pope.¹⁷ I could very much wish not to be obliged to undertake the Syrian expedition, and, in any case, not to undertake it alone; firstly, because it will be a great expense, and secondly, because I fear that this intervention may involve the Eastern Question;¹⁸ but, on the other hand, I do not see how to resist public opinion in my country, which will never understand that we can leave unpunished, not only the massacre of Christians, but the burning of our consulates, the insult to our flag, and the pillage of the monasteries which were under our protection.¹⁹

I have told you all I think, without disguising or omitting anything. Make what use you may think advisable of my letter.

Believe in my sincere friendship.

NAPOLEON.²⁰

Notes

1. **Lord John Russell (1792–1878):** Foreign Secretary (1859–65) in Palmerston's second ministry; he read or referred to this letter in Commons, prompting *The Times* publication on Aug. 1, 1860.
2. **St Cloud:** Imperial residence west of Paris; Napoléon III frequently dated political letters from there.

3. **Persigny**: Jean-Gilbert-Victor Fialin, **duc de Persigny** (1808–1872), French Ambassador in London (1858–59; 1860–63) and confidant of Napoléon III.
4. **War in Italy**: The **Second Italian War of Independence** (Apr–Jul 1859), France and Piedmont-Sardinia vs. Austria.
5. **Lord Palmerston**: Henry John Temple, **Prime Minister of the UK** (1859–65); long-time Foreign Secretary and Napoléon III's chief British interlocutor.
6. **Peace of Villafranca (July 11, 1859)**: Armistice between Napoléon III and Emperor Franz Joseph; Austria ceded **Lombardy** (via France) to **Piedmont-Sardinia**, while the central Italian duchies were to be restored—later overtaken by events.
7. **Savoy and Nice**: Ceded by the **Treaty of Turin** (Mar 24, 1860) from Piedmont to France after plebiscites (Apr 1860), compensation tied to Italian unification.
8. **Piedmont**: Shorthand for the **Kingdom of Sardinia** (Piedmont-Sardinia); in 1859–60 it annexed the central duchies (Parma, Modena, Tuscany, Romagna) after plebiscites.
9. **King Louis-Philippe (r. 1830–48)**: Napoléon contrasts his navy to the July Monarchy era; British alarm in 1859 also followed France's launch of **La Gloire**, the first seagoing ironclad.
10. **Imperial Guard**: Elite corps reconstituted by Napoléon III (formally 1854, expanded thereafter); the figures he cites also include overseas garrisons (**Algeria, Rome, China**) and **gendarmes** (paramilitary police).
11. **Lavalette / La Valette**: **Charles de La Valette** (1809–1881), newly sent as **French Ambassador to the Ottoman Porte**; Napoléon frames his brief as preserving the **status quo**.
12. **“Turkey should live as long as possible”**: Classic French (and British) Eastern-Question logic—preserve the Ottoman Empire's integrity to avoid a destabilizing vacuum or Russian gains.
13. **Massacres in Syria (1860)**: Sectarian violence in **Mount Lebanon** and **Damascus**; thousands of **Maronite** and other Christians killed by Druze and mob attacks; triggered an **international (French-led) expedition** to Syria (Aug 1860–Jun 1861).
14. **Algeria**: Conquered by France from 1830; costly pacification and large garrisons made it, in Napoléon's words, a “source of weakness” despite future colonial value.
15. **Bordeaux speech (Oct 9, 1852)**: Napoléon III's “**L'Empire, c'est la paix**” address—promising domestic “conquests” (infrastructure, prosperity) rather than territorial wars.
16. **Central vs. Southern Italy**: After Villafranca, France professed restraint in **Central Italy** (where annexations nonetheless proceeded); **Southern Italy** refers to **Naples & Sicily**, where **Garibaldi's Expedition of the Thousand** (from May 1860) toppled the Bourbon regime.
17. **French troops in Rome**: A garrison (since 1849) protecting the **Papal States** and the Pope; Napoléon seeks a way to withdraw “without compromising the security of the Pope”—the heart of the **Roman Question**.

18. **Eastern Question:** European-diplomatic shorthand for managing the decline of the **Ottoman Empire** and averting great-power conflict over its territories.
19. **Consulates/flag/monasteries:** The **Damascus** violence included attacks on consulates; France also claimed a historic **protectorate of Latin Catholics** in the Levant (capitulations/longstanding practice), making assaults on churches/monasteries a *casus for intervention*.
20. **Publication context:** Dated **July 25, 1860**; printed by *The Times* on **Aug. 1, 1860**, after Russell's reference in Parliament, to signal Napoléon III's professed desire for Anglo-French cooperation over Syria and Italy.



Napoleon III by Mayer & Pierson, c1860.

“La Syrie et la Question d’Orient” (excerpts)
by Xavier Raymond (journalist)
Revue des Deux Mondes, October 1860

The most authoritative English newspaper, *The Times*¹, recently put forward to Europe a solution which, in my view, is the most effective and least dangerous. Consistent neither with what it had said the previous day nor with what it would say the following one, it suggested placing in Syria a prince from one of Europe’s ruling families². This would be a momentous step, full of risks, and it could only be brought into reality after many obstacles. Yet, all things considered, it might still be the wisest and most cautious option, even though—let us not deny it—it is also the boldest.

Objections to this plan fall into two categories: some point to the established legal rights of the Sultan over Syria³; others cite the jealous rivalries among Europe’s governments, which would prevent them from making the sacrifices required to implement the scheme. As for Syria itself, the only resistance would be what Europe permitted. The country is still mired in such barbarism, ignorance, and discord that no one seriously considers asking its opinion—whether through its sheikhs, emirs, notables, or even through universal suffrage—on what form of government it ought to have.

I take very seriously the objection based on international law: Syria can only be legally separated from the Ottoman Empire either through a victorious war—which no one today could justly declare against Turkey—or by the free consent of the Sultan. The growing ease with which crowns are now handed out is not, in my view, a justification for new breaches of principle; on the contrary, it is a further reason to uphold those principles with greater vigilance than ever. Still, in this particular matter, the greatest danger would not lie in the breach of treaties themselves, but in the risk of creating a precedent that powers eager to seize the Ottoman inheritance might one day turn into a weapon against world peace.

That is the real difficulty. But the question is: are the drawbacks of this solution actually less than those of maintaining the status quo, installing Abd el-Kader⁴, uniting Syria administratively with Egypt⁵, or any of the other proposed schemes? I think I have shown that none of these alternatives offers real safeguards against a repetition of the events that have so recently shaken Europe. And what would happen next time, when all the plots aimed at dismantling the Ottoman Empire—plots much more real and more dangerous than the alleged conspiracies of the Turks, whose only true fault is their weakness—had had time to mature?

If the Sultan could be persuaded to relinquish Syria—as he was persuaded to call for French military support (as the latest protocols record)⁶—most of the difficulty would disappear, leaving only the practical details of execution to be settled. But it is doubtful that Europe’s advice could be eloquent enough to inspire in the Porte such a generous renunciation. Should one then press ahead regardless? Would that be outright injustice? The Sultan’s rights over Syria are, I repeat,

perfectly legitimate in international law. But is there nothing to set against them? When, twenty years ago, Europe in coalition wrested Syria from the oppressive rule of the viceroy of Egypt and handed it to the Sultan⁷, was this only a gratuitous gift—an act of generosity for which Europe itself bore the risks of a general war?

Is it disingenuous to argue in 1860 that what took place in 1840 was in reality a binding bargain: on one side, Europe took on great costs and grave risks; on the other, the Sultan accepted a moral obligation to govern Syria responsibly in return for that protection—an obligation he has failed to meet, leaving Europe to shoulder the entire burden? After twenty years of disorder and anarchy, after twenty years of an inept administration—culminating now in an interregnum of looting and massacres, tolerated perhaps by some Turkish officials and certainly abetted by the weakness and impotence of all the Porte’s representatives in Syria—does Europe not have the right to say that the moral terms of the bargain it had made have not been honored?

Is Europe not justified, at least to some degree, in reclaiming what it could easily have withheld in the first place—what the Sultan could never have conquered by his own resources, and what he now appears unable to retain? The sovereign’s legal rights are as respectable as rights of private property, with which they are closely tied. But what about property that is not truly in one’s possession, and for which one has not even fairly paid the purchase price—isn’t that in a special legal situation? Think of the owner whose house collapses into the street, endangering neighbors and passersby; or the owner so bankrupt that no one will lend him the money needed to repair his ruins—are they not, too, in a special legal position? And finally, what of the owner who has never been more than a nominal landlord, and who turns—or allows to be turned—his house into a storehouse of explosives or a hideout for criminals? Would he not also be answerable before the law? Such questions may be asked in regard to Syria, and the title under which the Sultan now holds it.

It is indeed cruel for any sovereign to give up a province, but—like ordinary men—they must sometimes accept necessities voluntarily rather than wait to have them forced upon them. Every treaty guaranteeing the Sultan the integrity of his empire ultimately rests on his own ability to govern it. Europe has not, and cannot, take on the role of governing in his place. But where the Sultan’s authority collapses, Europe is inevitably forced, whether it likes it or not, to step in and fill the vacuum. Hounded as he is by the rival ambitions that erode the ground beneath him, the Sultan might show wisdom in relinquishing what he can no longer control in fact or in practice.

For it is in such places that he will be attacked, where disturbances will inevitably be stirred up to justify encroachments upon the rest of his domains. And if there are regions he no longer truly holds, where his weakened arm cannot extend, they are certainly Syria and Arabia. He is no more a real master there than those princes who still parade the empty titles of King of Cyprus or King of Jerusalem. Syria is more a drain than a resource for his depleted treasury. It sends him no useful men—and of those it does, he might be better off without them.

The so-called Arabistan corps⁸—the military levies drawn from Syria—barely exists except on paper; it is nothing more than a source of profit for corrupt officials. And the events at Damascus⁹ have shown what can be expected from the morality of the few men actually kept under arms. From every angle, Syria is for the Sultan only a liability—a source of weakness and scandal.

If, then, the European powers could succeed in convincing the Sultan of the wisdom of these counsels, they would be rendering a real service—both to the general cause and to the Sultan himself. But if Constantinople refused, should Europe push ahead anyway? Yes, certainly—it could and it should. Diplomatic tradition and international law offer precedents enough. In 1827, did not Europe intervene between the Sultan and a rebellious province to establish the modern kingdom of Greece?¹⁰ In 1830 and afterward, though Europe at first hesitated to recognize France's claim over Algeria and to sanction the regime it wished to impose in Tunis, did it not eventually accept the accomplished fact?¹¹ And in 1840, despite the Sultan's protests, did it not create in Egypt a hereditary vice-royalty?¹²

These are all telling examples, which can be cited in today's circumstances with even greater force, since in Greece, Algeria, Tunis, and Egypt—just as now in Syria—the issue was of territories the Sultan could no longer govern, and of the need to build something where his impotence left only emptiness and anarchy....

And what reasonable cause could stop the five powers, already signatories of the first protocols, from forming a conference as they once did in London, and from taking Syria's affairs before their tribunal...?¹³ Let them examine every proposal that has been advanced. And when, in the heat of discussion, all the plans that look to the Orient or Syria itself for a solution have evaporated, then let them meet the challenge with courage, and place upon the throne of Syria a Christian prince....

The hardest part, most likely, would be overcoming the jealousies and rivalries surrounding the choice of candidate. But this could surely be managed by a rule of exclusion—making it a principle that the throne could not go to any prince from the royal or imperial houses of the five great powers themselves. Once that principle were settled, much else would fall into place on its own. It is not likely, for example, that powers which between them maintain nearly two million soldiers would hesitate very long to supply, for five or six years, an occupation force of 20–25,000 men—indispensable for the new government to take root. Nor is it likely they would refuse to provide an advance of fifty million, from combined budgets of six to seven billion, equally indispensable.¹⁴

As a safeguard, the troops used for this European peacekeeping mission could also be neutralized.¹⁵

Even if all this worked, one question would still need to be settled in advance. Arabia—legally

subject to the Sultan, like Syria, but in fact no more under his rule, as the events at Jeddah last year showed all too well—would, under such an arrangement, become even further removed from him than it already is. Its anarchy would no longer be only its *de facto* condition, but—if one may so put it—its constitutional one. And this Europeans could hardly tolerate, since they need security in the Red Sea. It would be prudent to decide this question beforehand. Indeed, should it not already be considered today? Can Europe continue to live on illusions? Can it accept, as a real safeguard of its interests in the Red Sea, merely the legal right to appeal, in case of disaster, to Constantinople—now neither rich nor powerful enough even to repair crimes already committed, let alone prevent them?¹⁶

In probing these questions, new and serious difficulties always arise. But should a solution be rejected just because it is not perfect—especially in politics, and especially when the issue is to fill the voids left by a state in visible decline? If so, then only paralysis would remain as justice and truth in the world. And instead of helping the situation unravel in the least damaging way for everyone's interests, one would only heighten the dangers, bringing down the gravest disasters upon precisely those one had meant to respect.

Europe here is confronted with a situation ruled, so to speak, by fatal laws. No one on earth—neither pope nor statesman—has the power to rescue the Ottoman Empire from the collapse that has caused the present turmoil and that will tomorrow be the source of even greater and more dangerous complications. Wisdom here does not lie in chasing after a panacea—which does not exist—but in choosing, while there is still time, the course with the fewest drawbacks....

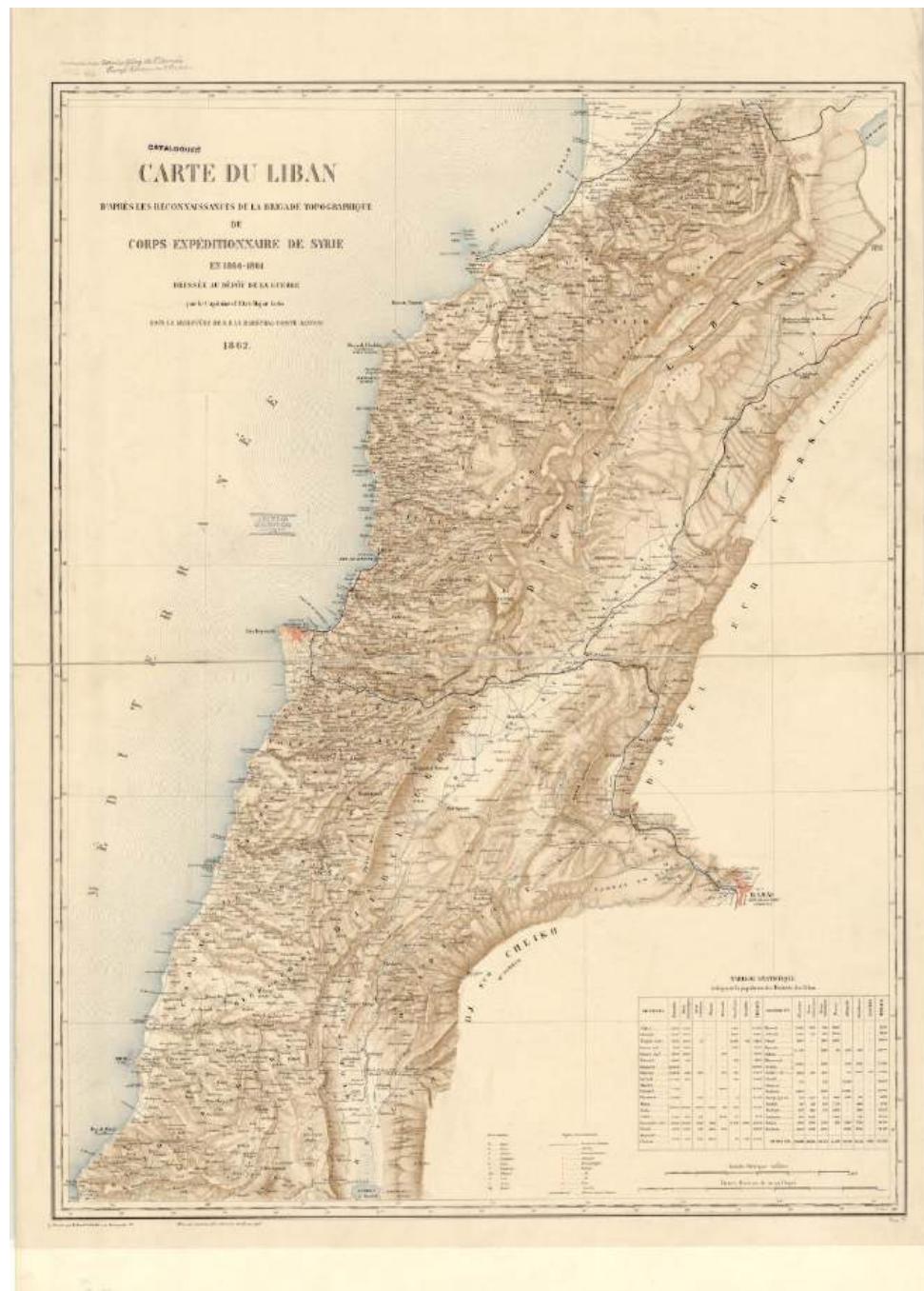
In truth, the issue is to rescue a land fallen into neglect—from abandonment, disorder, and barbarism—and only Europe can accomplish this. Will it dare act? Or will its councils yield nothing more than a patchwork repair of the status quo, lasting only as long as Providence allows, without any effort of men or nations to sustain it? And if that fragile arrangement were to collapse—if, a year from now, perhaps sooner, reports from the East brought news of fresh horrors—would Europe still be able to do then what it could do so effectively today? Would it be guiltless of the blood that would have been shed?

Notes

1. ***The Times (London)***: Britain's leading newspaper; in mid-1860 it ran editorials debating remedies for the Levant after the Mount Lebanon/Damascus massacres.
2. **European “prince for Syria”**: A protectorate/monarchical scheme on the model of earlier great-power settlements (e.g., non-great-power princes chosen for Greece in 1832 and Belgium in 1831) to ensure neutrality and external guarantees.
3. **Ottoman sovereignty over Syria**: Under international law and existing treaties, Syria was an integral Ottoman province; separation would require war or the Sultan's consent (hence the legal scruple Raymond acknowledges).

4. **Abd el-Kader** ('Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'īrī, 1808–1883): Exiled Algerian emir residing in Damascus; famed in 1860 for protecting thousands of Christians during the pogrom—leading some to suggest him for an administrative role in Syria.
5. **“Uniting Syria with Egypt”**: A revival of the 1831–1840 arrangement when Muḥammad ‘Alī’s Egypt ruled Syria; some 1860 proposals floated re-attachment as a stabilizing fix.
6. **“Latest protocols” (1860)**: The **Paris Conference protocols** (July–Aug 1860) by the five great powers, followed by the **Franco-Ottoman Convention** (Sept 5, 1860), authorized a temporary French expeditionary corps to Lebanon with the Sultan’s consent.
7. **“Bargain” of 1840**: The **London Convention (15 July 1840)** by Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia (France excluded) compelled Muḥammad ‘Alī to relinquish Syria; European naval action (e.g., bombardment of Acre, 1840) restored Ottoman rule.
8. **“Arabistan corps”**: Contemporary nickname for the Ottoman army formations in Syria (often styled the *Arabistan/Arabistan Ordusu*); critics alleged inflated rolls and corruption versus real fighting strength.
9. **“Events at Damascus” (1860)**: Massacres of Christians in July 1860; European outrage and Abd el-Kader’s celebrated rescues shaped calls for intervention and reform.
10. **Intervention for Greece (1827–1832)**: The **Treaty of London (1827)** and the **Battle of Navarino** precipitated Greek autonomy; the **London Protocols (1830)** recognized independence, and the powers installed **Prince Otto of Bavaria** as king (1832).
11. **Algeria & Tunis**: France conquered **Algeria** in 1830; European chancelleries gradually accepted the fait accompli. **Tunis** remained under its Bey; formal French protectorate came only in **1881**, but mid-century diplomacy increasingly tolerated French predominance in the central Maghreb—Raymond telescopes this trend.
12. **Hereditary Egypt (1840–1841)**: After the 1840 crisis, **Ottoman firmans (1841)** confirmed Egypt to **Muḥammad ‘Alī** and his male heirs as a hereditary viceroyalty under the Sultan, with tribute and military obligations.
13. **“Five powers...conference...in London”**: The five great powers (Britain, France, Austria, Prussia, Russia) often convened such conferences—e.g., London (1830–31) on Belgium; London (1840) on the Eastern Question (France not a signatory to the 1840 convention). Raymond urges a similar great-power forum for Syria.
14. **Force & finance estimates**: Raymond’s figures (2 million troops; a 20–25k occupation for 5–6 years; “fifty million” in funds; budgets of 6–7 billion) are rhetorical benchmarks. In reality, the **French expedition to Syria/Lebanon (1860–61)** numbered roughly 6–12k and was time-limited (initially six months, then extended to one year).
15. **“Neutralized” troops**: A proposal to place the occupation under a neutral/collective mandate—akin to later 19th-century “neutralization” devices—rather than unilateral French control.
16. **Jeddah massacre (1858) & Red Sea route**: Mob killings at **Jeddah** included attacks on European

consulates, sharpening concern for Red Sea security. Britain had seized **Aden (1839)** and prized the Suez route to India, making order in the Hijaz strategically salient.



Map of Lebanon According to Reconnaissance Information Collected by the Topographical Group from the Syria Expedition of 1860-1861.

Charles Ignace Plichon, speech in the Corps législatif (excerpts)

Le Monde, 11 August 1861¹

I must acknowledge—and I am eager to state—that the French government did not fail in its duty during this grave crisis. At the very first reports, even before the massacres reached Damascus², it sent ships to Beirut³ and pressed the Ottoman Porte⁴ to halt the bloodshed and punish those responsible. At the same time, it alerted the powers who had signed the agreements of 1842 and 1845 concerning Lebanon's governance⁵, pointing out their defects and the urgent need to revise them. As soon as the Damascus massacres became known, it was clear that this example endangered the Christians of Aleppo and all the East, making immediate European intervention essential.⁶

The question then arose: Should France act alone—under its centuries-old protectorate⁷, or even in defense of its own flag insulted amid the bloody violence of Druzes and Turks?⁸ Or should it call upon Europe's cooperation and the consent of the Ottoman Porte? That was, gentlemen, a grave question under the circumstances, and I can understand why hesitation and doubt may have arisen. The Government chose a collective intervention.⁹ I see its reasoning; it can be justified, and I do not contest it—though it would not have been my choice.

I do regret, however, that the length of the occupation was not made contingent on fully achieving its goals, and that our army was not given greater independence and freedom of action. I realize that the Government's leniency on conditions came from a desire to speed deployment, to aid as quickly as possible the victims of Druze cruelty. But in doing so, it created serious difficulties for itself, for our army, and for the nation.....

Europe had set three clear objectives for intervention: punish the perpetrators, compensate the Christians, and prevent further bloodshed by setting up a new government in Lebanon. Yet the period set for the intervention is ending without these goals being met: the guilty remain unpunished, the Christians uncompensated, Lebanon still without a government. Most serious of all, Syria's political situation is as perilous as ever. Christians, feeling unsafe, cannot return to their homes, and their enemies' hatred still festers, ready to explode the moment our troops depart.... None of the issues meant to be resolved by intervention have been settled. Syria's political situation is unchanged, and Christians remain in grave danger.¹⁰

So what is France to do? Must it leave Syria, as required by the supplementary convention to the treaty of 5 September 1860?¹¹ Or should it remain, invoking a higher duty to humanity, even if that means breaking the convention? Well, gentlemen, I say without hesitation: no. France must not, and cannot, remain. I fully approve the Government's decision to order our troops home.

Nothing is more important for a nation than strictly honoring its international commitments. Once France had agreed not to intervene in her own right, and it had been settled that her army would act only in Europe's name and as executor of its decisions, she could not change that status without breaking faith. So, although France grieves to see her army leave Syria without completing its humanitarian mission, I must repeat: the Government was right to recall it. Thank God, France has not failed in her duty. As the Government's spokesman in the Senate rightly said, if new massacres occur in Syria, the blood will not be on France's hands. She warned the Porte, England, and Europe of the dangers. Her responsibility is now fully discharged.

With the return of her troops, France will regain freedom of action. Our ships have already been ordered to the Syrian coast, so that even after our army departs, our flag may continue—at least from afar—to protect the suffering populations. May the sight of our squadron be enough to hold back the violent passions that menace them!

In a 3 May dispatch to the French ambassador in Constantinople, the Government outlined the policy it intends to pursue.¹² It also informed the Porte that if new troubles arise in Syria, France's centuries-old traditions would oblige her to provide the Christians of Lebanon with real protection against further persecutions.

This, gentlemen, is a policy worthy of France, reflecting the nation's deepest feelings. Yet it raises an objection—currently discussed in the English press, and already noted in the Senate report of the honorable M. Royer on petitions for the Christians of Syria.¹³ The objection is this: Can France, under the Treaty of Paris (1856), still invoke her old protectorate and claim a right of intervention, without violating the treaty?¹⁴

My answer is: Yes. To clear away all doubt, gentlemen, one need only look closely at the nature of the act concluded between the Ottoman Empire and Europe after the Crimean War.

What happened was this: the Porte granted Europe a charter of emancipation for its Christian subjects; and in return, the European powers agreed to abandon their protectorates.¹⁵ The protectorates had come into being because of the miserable subjugation of Turkey's Christian subjects. They ceased to have any justification once common law was extended to them, granting them equality with the Turks.¹⁶

Thus the provisions of the Treaty of Paris are reciprocal and conditional. Clearly, France only gave up her protectorate on the basis of the Porte's promise to protect its Christian subjects—and on the guarantee that this promise would be carried out. France had made the Porte accept that protectorate over centuries, and her position as the leading Christian power made it a duty.

Therefore, if the Ottoman government fails in its duty—if it cannot protect Christians from

recurring violence—then France’s renunciation, and the relevant clauses of the Treaty of Paris, are void. Neither the Porte, which has broken its word, nor the other powers, since the renunciation was not made in their favor, can invoke them.

And what has happened since then, gentlemen? Diplomacy’s hopes have led only to bitter disappointments. The measures it adopted, instead of regenerating the Ottoman Empire or improving the Christians’ fate, have only made everything worse. Useless in the present, they will be just as unworkable in the future.....

Equality before the law is a Christian principle. It contradicts the very foundation of Muslim society, which rests on the unshakable superiority of the believer and the perpetual inferiority of the infidel.... In the eyes of all Turks—whether officials or ordinary people—Christians are now regarded as rebels, and the charter they claim as their protection is nothing but a falsehood and a betrayal of Islam. This, gentlemen, explains why the condition of Christians in Turkey grows daily more wretched and dangerous, and why Europe must step in with more active protection on their behalf.¹⁷

Faced with such a reality, I ask: what value does France’s renunciation of her protectorate really have? I say: none. That renunciation is void, and France’s old right has come back into force. And indeed, this is not just about Syria. All of the Orient requires France’s and Europe’s concern, for—as I have said—Christians’ safety is in jeopardy everywhere.

I must now call your attention, and that of the Government, to the condition of the Ottoman Empire. The empire is visibly disintegrating, despite Europe’s attempts to preserve it. No human power can halt this decline, for it arises both from fatal flaws in the very foundations of the Islamic system, and from a pervasive corruption that has sapped all vitality from the state.

The only way to prolong its existence would be to hand the Turks new territories to pillage and new Christian populations to trample—for they have never known another way to survive. Exploiting and oppressing the *raïa* (Christian subjects) has been the only real basis of their state.¹⁸

Europe cannot indefinitely prop up a government built on such foundations. And soon, in any case, its efforts will fail. The crisis may be delayed in Asia, but all signs show it will soon erupt in Europe. Europe must prepare. I wish I could calm the fears this prospect raises, for I understand how it weighs on European policy and on the fate of Turkey’s oppressed Christians.

In my view, the Turks could vanish from Europe without disturbing peace—if only statesmen have the wisdom to arrange the succession of their lands to their rightful heirs. I will not dwell on the many solutions proposed for the so-called Eastern Question. It is enough to say that dividing the Ottoman Empire among the great powers is both impractical and immoral.

The East must belong to the peoples of the East. And who are the natural heirs of the Turks, if not the Christians who lived there before the Osmanlis took the land? Are not the Christians the rightful owners, destined to regain mastery once Turkish rule ends? Their right, gentlemen, is indisputable, and Europe must acknowledge it.

But, one asks, what of the Turks? My answer is straightforward. Under the Ottoman system, Muslims and Christians cannot coexist as equals, either politically or legally. But under a Christian government, such coexistence becomes possible. Thus, one of two outcomes awaits: either the Turks accept living as equals with the Christians, in which case nothing prevents them from remaining; or they refuse—and then, as in Greece, they will vanish.....

Europe owes the Turks nothing beyond ordinary justice. Once that is assured, her duty is complete; if the Turks are dissatisfied, Europe bears no further responsibility for their fate. I wish diplomacy would support the policy I have set forth, for it offers a solution to the Eastern Question that safeguards both justice and Europe's balance of power. It is the peaceful, moral solution.

This policy is not motivated by France's self-interest. Its aim is higher: to liberate peoples from a brutal yoke, to restore lands to civilization, and to bring justice and Christian charity to peoples who now know nothing of them. In the face of such great moral interests, petty rivalries must disappear.

Sadly, these are not the principles that guide English policy. When I see it, throughout the Orient, sacrifice Christian interests to Turkish ones—when I see it, above all, taking the Druzes' side in Syria in order to undermine France's historic influence—I wish I could appeal directly to the noble feelings of the English people, to expose this anti-Christian policy. More importantly, I wish to warn them of the dangers the present British cabinet's jealous and aggressive stance toward France poses—both to the Franco-British alliance and perhaps to world peace.....

France's position in the Orient is one of high authority—the only truly protective authority that has, through the centuries, defended the Christians. She knows her name is, for the oppressed, the very symbol of hope, and she does not want them to lose that hope. Above all, she will not abandon in Syria the protective mission entrusted to her by the traditions of her policy, for to do so would be to betray the honor of her name.

Notes

1. **Charles Ignace Plichon (1814–1888)**: Deputy for the Nord and influential Catholic conservative in the Second Empire's **Corps législatif**; *Le Monde* here is the Catholic conservative daily of the 1860s (not the post-1944 paper).
2. **1860 Mount Lebanon–Damascus massacres**: Sectarian violence (June–July 1860) in Mount Lebanon spread to Damascus (July), where large Christian quarters were destroyed and thousands

killed; Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī famously sheltered many refugees.

3. **Beirut**: Principal Levant port and base for the French squadron/landing during the 1860 intervention.
4. **Ottoman Porte**: The Ottoman central government (from the “Sublime Porte” in Constantinople).
5. **Lebanon 1842/1845 “arrangements”**: The **Double-Kaymakamate** system imposed by the powers after the 1840 crisis—Mount Lebanon split into two districts under Ottoman kaymakams (north = Maronite majority; south = Druze majority), supervised by a mixed council; widely judged unstable and a cause of 1860 tensions.
6. **European intervention (1860–61)**: The five powers (France, Britain, Austria, Prussia, Russia) met in Paris and authorized a time-limited French expedition to restore order in Syria/Lebanon.
7. **French “protectorate” tradition**: Since early **Capitulations** (notably 1536; reaffirmed 1740), France claimed a special right to protect Latin Catholics and certain holy sites within the Ottoman Empire; status became contested after 1856.
8. **Druzes**: An Arabic-speaking Levantine religious community concentrated in southern Mount Lebanon and the Ḥawrān; in 1860, Druze–Maronite clashes escalated into civil war; “flag insulted” alludes to attacks on consulates and missions during the unrest.
9. **Collective intervention choice**: Rather than a unilateral crusade-style action, Napoléon III accepted a multilateral, Ottoman-consented expedition, trading autonomy of action for European legitimacy.
10. **“New government in Lebanon”**: The **Règlement Organique (June 1861)** created the **Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon**—an autonomous district under a non-local Christian governor approved by the powers (first: **Daud Pasha**). Implementation lagged through mid-1861, hence Plichon’s complaint.
11. **Convention of 5 Sept. 1860 & supplements**: The **Franco-Ottoman Convention** authorized a French corps (initially six months, later extended) limited to Lebanon; by summer 1861 withdrawal loomed as the term expired.
12. **3 May 1861 dispatch**: French instructions to Constantinople outlining post-withdrawal policy and warning that renewed atrocities could trigger renewed French protection claims.
13. **M. Royer**: The Senate’s rapporteur on petitions for Syrian Christians (a contemporary legislative report); “English press” refers mainly to *The Times* and other London papers debating Syria policy.
14. **Treaty of Paris (1856)**: Ended the Crimean War; admitted the Ottoman Empire to the European “Concert,” abrogated Russia’s special protectorate claims, and referenced the **Hatt-ı Hümayun (1856)**—an Ottoman reform edict promising equality for non-Muslims. Whether Paris extinguished France’s unilateral “protectorate” was (and is) debated.
15. **“Charter of emancipation”**: Plichon’s term for the **Hatt-ı Hümayun**—the reform decree promulgated by the Sultan, cited by the powers as a basis for improved status of Christians.

16. **“Common law / equality” claim:** The edict promised civil equality (tax, testimony, office-holding) but uneven enforcement and local resistance left Christians vulnerable—central to Plichon’s argument that France’s earlier renunciation was conditional.
17. **“Active protection”:** Code for reviving France’s special role as protector of Eastern Catholics/Maronites and for potential naval or military demonstrations if massacres recurred.
18. **raïa / re’āyā:** Ottoman term for tax-paying subjects, often used (especially polemically) to denote non-Muslim communities under the millet system.



Massacre des chrétiens en Syrie. Les maronites et les druses.