

Navigating the Greek Revolution before Navarino. Imperial Interventions in Aegean Waters, 1821–1827

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Abstract

Virtually every publication on the Greek Revolution signals the Battle of Navarino (20 October 1827) as a turning point in international involvement with events in Greece. What the historiography tends to ignore, however, is the significant degree of military intervention that preceded 1827, particularly at sea. Yet, the Greek Revolution was six years underway and had already taken to the sea by the time of Navarino. Several naval actors at Navarino had been involved in the maritime handling of the revolution since its very beginning, including the Royal Navy captain Gawen Hamilton, the French Vice-Admiral Henri de Rigny and the Algerine commander Mustapha Bachalî Raïs. What had they been doing before then in the seas around Greece? By looking at the first phases of the Greek Revolution, from 1821 to 1827, this article clarifies how different imperial powers tried to manage the uncertainties and threats that the rebellion brought to the waters of the Mediterranean. It draws from source material on the navies of Great Britain, France, Austria and the Ottoman Empire. The piece provides three insights that highlight the significance and contingencies of imperial involvement in the first phase of the revolution. These insights relate to: (a) belligerency at sea; (b) the security threats of piracy and privateering; and (3) naval interventionism.

Keywords

Greek Revolution, piracy, naval history, imperialism, diplomacy

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In early September 1827, the British merchants of Smyrna (Izmir) met in panic. Smyrna was usually one of the Aegean's busiest trade ports, but at the close of the 1820s, it was home to unusual sights. Merchant ships lay idle in the harbour, their holds stuffed with cargoes of fresh fruit that were steadily rotting away. They did not dare to take to sea because of the pirates that roamed there. 'Very few have any arms', the British traders wrote about their vessels, 'and (...) all are liable to imminent danger from the swarms of pirates in the Levant seas'. They urged the government in London to take action and send ships of war: 'on behalf of ourselves as mercantile men interested in the safe arrivals of the vessels and their cargoes, on behalf of the underwriters who will have to bear what loss occurs, but more urgently for the sake of the shipmasters and seamen who may be so unfortunate as to meet with these reckless marauders of pirates, and to be stripped to the very shirt off their backs'.¹ As their plea indicates, the Greek Revolution and ensuing war of independence that raged between 1821 and 1831 was a grave security concern. To these contemporaries, the uprising was not about national liberation or humanitarian ideals. In the first place, the Greek Revolution threatened to upend peace and tranquillity at sea. As such, it tore at the basis of the multinational efforts to ensure maritime security in the Mediterranean, which commenced in the immediate wake of the Napoleonic Wars and under the Congress System.

This article follows the contemporary understanding of the uprising as an outbreak of disorder. Even if anxieties about piracy and accusations thereof did not always match what was going on at sea, such concerns were instrumental in the changing international engagement with the Greek Revolution. From 1821, different historical actors tried to reinstate a sense of safety, security and tranquillity in the waters around Greece. The Greek Revolution can hence be approached as a moment of inter-imperial crisis that sparked contemporary concerns about security at sea.² In this article, I will show how the uprising's maritime aspects led to the immediate involvement of both the European Great Powers and different subsidiary polities of the Ottoman Empire. Representatives of all these states were drawn into the violent chaos as the Greek Revolution took to the sea. These actors then found that they had to work together to weather the many new uncertainties about maritime raiding, the laws of war and international recognition that marked the decade after 1821. My focus on maritime security thereby sheds new light on previously unstudied forms of inter-imperial cooperation between Europeans and Ottomans. It also shows how the Greek quest for autonomy, independence or statehood was shaped by the security concerns of more formidable powers from the outset. Attention to contact and negotiation between the revolutionaries and the different imperial powers is crucial if we are to understand the diplomatic history of the revolution, with its seemingly sudden changes between neutrality and alliance, or between mediation and military action. At sea, the progress of the revolution most clearly became an inter-imperial affair.

In the recent boom of publications, coinciding with the bicentennial of 1821, historians have highlighted the sea as one of the crucial places where the revolution was fought, negotiated and, ultimately, won. Particularly noteworthy is a recent edited volume by a group of Greek and international historians that emphasizes the important role of several Aegean islands during the revolution.³ This new literature centres on the maritime impact of the uprising and goes beyond the traditional overemphasis on the grandest naval clash of the Greek Revolution: the Battle of

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1. 'British Merchants at Smyrna to Werry', 06-09-1817 in: C. Pitcairn Jones (ed.), *Piracy in the Levant, 1827-8. Selected from the Papers of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington*, London 1934, 173.
 2. O. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts. Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864*, Oxford 2021, 116-117.
 3. G. Harlaftis / D. Dimitropoulos / D. Starkey (eds.), *Corsairs and Pirates in the Eastern Mediterranean, Fifteenth-nineteenth centuries*, Athens 2016.

Navarino (20 October 1827).⁴ Without a doubt, Navarino was an impactful event that tipped military fortunes in favour of the Greeks. At Navarino, the cooperating squadrons of Russia, France and Great Britain all but annihilated the Ottoman fleet. The battle also has been termed exceptional in the history of 19th-century Mediterranean, fitting awkwardly in a period of general peace and safety, devoid of large-scale naval battles.⁵ Yet the Greek Revolution was already six years underway by the time of Navarino and had a large impact at sea.

One important aspect of the Greek Revolution that has thus far received scant attention is the role of foreign navies in the first stages of the revolution, that is, before 1827. Various squadrons under numerous flags became involved in the international attempts to curtail the upheaval and reinstate order at sea. The study of these fleets has remained bound to national, unilateral frameworks, and it still takes the Battle of Navarino as the revolution's ultimate naval event.⁶ However, several key naval actors at Navarino had been operating in Greece since the very beginning of the uprising. Royal Navy captain Gawen Hamilton (1785–1835), the French Vice-Admiral Henri de Rigny (1782–1835) and the Algerine commander Mustapha Bachalî Raïs had all sailed the Aegean for years before that fated day in October 1827. What had they been doing in the seas around Greece prior to that moment?

The answer to this question lies in the earlier attempts to enforce security at sea. Much of the literature belies the fact that French, British, Ottoman and Austrian forces had been policing the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean before 20 October 1827. Historians have missed how they often cooperated to control privateers, fight pirates and constrain the destructive conflict. Focussing on the first phases of the Greek Revolution, from 1821 to 1827, I clarify how different imperial powers tried to manage the uncertainties and threats that the uprising brought to the Mediterranean. The article draws from archival material on the navies of Great Britain, France, Austria and the Ottoman Empire. This evidence highlights the significance of their involvement in the first phases of the revolution and points to the central importance of maritime concerns and naval actors in the progression of the conflict.

During the early phase of the Greek Revolution, imperial involvement (and sometimes cooperation) was shaped by three considerations that reflected specific maritime concerns: (a) belligerent rights at sea, touching upon the question of revolutionary Greek statehood; (b) piracy and privateering as shared security concerns; and (c) the rising tensions between diplomatic neutrality and naval interventionism. These interrelated issues varied in prominence from the onset to the end of the revolution. The question of revolutionary authority and belligerent rights came into play at the start of the uprising. Concerns over piracy increased as the conflict between the Greeks and Ottomans moved into its third year. Finally, the exact nature and extent of naval interventions in the war became a pressing matter in the months before Navarino. Maritime interactions between

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4. Y. Cartledge / A. Varnava (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Greek War of Independence. Myths, Realities, Legacies and Reflections*, Basingstoke 2022; entries on the Aegean islands and Crete in: P. Kitromilides / C. Tsoukalas, *The Greek Revolution. A Critical Dictionary*, Cambridge, MA 2021; P. Kitromilides (ed.), *The Greek Revolution in the Age of Revolutions (1776–1848). Reappraisals and Comparisons*, New York 2022; M. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution. 1821 and the Making of Modern Europe*, London 2021; L. Mylonakis, *Piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Maritime Marauders in the Greek and Ottoman Aegean*, London and New York 2021.
 5. D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea. A Human History of the Mediterranean*, London 2011, 557 and 561.
 6. For instance, J. Angster, *Erdbeeren und Piraten. Die Royal Navy und die Ordnung der Welt, 1770–1860*, Göttingen 2012; L. Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity, 1821–1844*, Oxford 2015; V. Puryear, *France and the Levant. From the Bourbon Restoration to the Peace of Kutiah*, Berkeley, Los Angeles 1941; L. Sondhaus, *The Habsburg Empire and the Sea. Austrian Naval Policy, 1797–1866*, West Lafayette, IN 1989; C.M. Woodhouse, *The Battle of Navarino*, London 1965. A notable exception is R.C. Anderson, *Naval Wars in the Levant, 1559–1853*, Liverpool 1952.

the revolutionaries, the European Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire had a decisive impact on questions that extended far beyond the Greek Revolution itself, touching upon international law, statehood and imperial dominion. As contemporaries sought to navigate the confusing situation that the revolution had created, they confronted these matters head-on. The ways in which they switched between moments of cooperation and conflict have still been poorly understood. Yet, those moments were vital, as they brought both revolutionaries and various imperial actors into uncharted waters as the 1820s progressed.

I. Raiders of the revolution

The unrest in Greece started far from the sea. It first began in the principality of Moldavia along the periphery of the Ottoman Empire. On 25 March 1821, a one-armed general on leave from the Tsar's service crossed the Pruth River from Russia into the Moldavian capital of Jassy (Iași) where he issued rebellious proclamations. These statements called on the people who considered themselves Greek to take up arms against their Ottoman overlords. They drew on the examples of other European nations and urged those who saw themselves as Greeks to 'Fight for faith and motherland'. More menacingly, his manifestoes also issued the threat that 'Those who disobey and turn a deaf ear to this present appeal will be declared bastards and Asiatic germs'.⁷ Their author, Alexandros Ypsilanti (1792–1828), and some 4,000 to 7,000 followers proceeded on a disastrous march to Bucharest. This bloody affair, with successive massacres of local elites and their bodyguards, quickly ended. By June, Ottoman forces made Ypsilanti flee to Habsburg Transylvania. Austrian authorities immediately imprisoned him there.⁸

Ypsilanti's call to arms and its seething, violent tone nevertheless resonated among Greek communities deep in the heartlands of the Peloponnese. The revolutionary (but not-so-secret) society of the Filiki Etaireia and supportive members of the Orthodox clergy did much to aid the spread of Ypsilanti's radicalism. In the second half of March 1821, 'a pattern of sporadic and episodic violence' across the Peloponnese started to turn into uprisings, as insurgents waved the flag of revolution (white with a blue cross).⁹ The insurgency then crossed over onto the Aegean islands of Hydra, Psara and Spetses, where it was met with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Still, by 1822, the ruling notables on these three key islands had declared for a revolution against the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839). From that moment onwards, maritime raiding became an integral part of the revolutionary conflict. This was a significant gain to the nascent bodies of revolutionary authority, who could proclaim the creation of a 'Greek fleet' that would use all the means compatible with 'legitimate warfare' to disrupt Ottoman trade and confront the imperial fleet. However, it was not that easy to control violence at sea, and soon Greek naval activity provoked serious international concerns over security. As Mark Mazower argues, the Greek Revolution became a 'lethal maritime cocktail' when insurgent violence and the chaos of conflict created ample opportunities for plunder, whether under the guise of privateering or through outright piracy.¹⁰

The Greek Revolution unleashed many military entrepreneurs onto the sea, who operated with varying degrees of legal mandates. Naval vessels sailed in the service of the Greek revolutionary

7. R. Stites, *The Four Horsemen. Revolution and Counter-revolution in Post-Napoleonic Europe*, Oxford, New York 2014, 187–188. Greek, in this sense, may be interpreted as of the Greek Orthodox faith.

8. *Ibid.*, 202–203.

9. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 68.

10. *Ibid.*, 140.

authorities. While privately owned ships (allegedly) carried privateering licenses by these same authorities, pirate crews acted with no official backing or allegiance whatsoever. Although these types of maritime raiding proliferated during the Greek Revolution, they can still be separated into two ideal types: licensed privateering and outright piracy. Insurgents branded themselves privateers from the revolution's beginning. They laid claim to the laws of war to keep provisions from enemy troops and confiscate richly-laden Ottoman vessels. The Greek Revolution immediately affected European shipping, which was deeply involved in the Ottoman carrying trade. Great Power attempts to defend their respective commercial interests were soon to follow.

Robbery was no novelty in the Aegean Sea. Greek sailors had experience in maritime raiding, and they were well versed in navigating the complexities of state conflict at sea. The Eastern Mediterranean had been home to intermittent warfare between Russians and Ottomans since the second half of the 18th century. The Napoleonic Wars, bringing in the French and British as warring parties, only exacerbated the situation. Greek sailors emerged during this time as the main commercial sailors on long journeys between both halves of the Mediterranean. It was a lucrative but risky venture. Most merchant vessels had been outfitted with cannons, rifles and swords in order to fight off the bewildering constellations of warring parties. The initial capital for such martial investments came from privateering expeditions financed by local merchants or even from piracy.¹¹ Over the course of the 18th century, several Aegean islands, particularly Milos, Mykonos and Paros, developed into prize markets where confiscated goods could be sold. Other islands came to depend heavily on the legal carrying trade, most notably Hydra and Spetses.¹²

New peace treaties cut these lucrative endeavours short at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, regardless of whether they involved raiding or trading with belligerents. The outbreak of the insurrection against Ottoman rule in 1821 hence came at a time of economic downturn. The revolution held great appeal for the unemployed and downtrodden seafarers of the islands. It provided them with very welcome opportunities for new income, which meant a huge loss for the Sultan's navy. The imperial fleet had long employed Greek sailors (particularly from Hydra) who possessed remarkable skill and were deeply familiar with the waters of the Aegean.¹³ Now, these experienced seamen joined the revolutionary navy, acquired licenses to privateer against Ottoman ships or used the chaos of war to engage in piracy.¹⁴ Decisions to become involved in one option or the other differed from island to island. Whether a place developed into a hub of piracy or not often depended on local seafaring traditions, the geographical situation and the social make-up of the island community. The latter, however, could change dramatically with the influx of refugees. Some raiders hailed from Albania or spoke Albanian, and in some cases would hardly identify as 'Greek'. Others fled regions where the uprising failed and came to prey upon Greek ships and island communities. This happened on Syros, where the original population of Catholics remained loyal to the Sultan (and continued to trade directly with his subjects), while thousands of Orthodox Greeks, who fled from Chios, Psara and Asia Minor, arrived on the island with the intent of continuing the conflict – particularly at sea.¹⁵

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11. E. Frangakis-Syrett, 'Greek Mercantile Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1780–1820', in: *Balkan Studies* 28 (1987) 1, 73–86; G. Harlaftis, 'Introduction. Pirates and Corsairs in the Eastern Mediterranean', in: idem / Dimitropoulos / Starkey, *Corsairs and Pirates*, 13–28.
 12. A. Delis, 'A Hub of Piracy in the Aegean. Syros during the Greek War of Independence', in: Harlaftis / Dimitropoulos / Starkey, *Corsairs and Pirates*, 41–54.
 13. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 137.
 14. Delis, 'A Hub of Piracy', 41–54.
 15. D. Dimitropoulos, 'Pirates during a Revolution. The many Faces of Piracy and the Reaction of Local Communities', in: Harlaftis / Dimitropoulos / Starkey, *Corsairs and Pirates*, 29–40.

Although the precise nature and trajectory of the revolution's boom in maritime opportunity varied between places, it had a significant and immediate impact on international trade. Foreign sailors cared little about the local particularities of the maritime violence they encountered. European merchant captains decried the conducting of stop-and-search on their vessels as piracy, plunder and brigandage. The first reports of this kind arrived in London, Marseille and various other consular posts around the Mediterranean during the spring of 1821. One French merchant complained about how the commander of a small fleet under the insurgent flag had first halted him in the Gulf of Salonika to ask whether he had any 'Turkish or Jewish passengers' that they could arrest. Another group of Greek vessels opened fire on his ship a few days later.¹⁶ The Royal Navy captain Gawen Hamilton, who would later become a noted supporter of the Greek cause, had his first clash with the revolutionary raiders in February 1822. He encountered Greek privateers near Alexandria who were threatening to kill the crew on board a Sardinian prize. Hamilton managed to rescue them from the Greeks, who were 'evidently at sea with no higher object than plunder'.¹⁷

Piracy and privateering could be difficult to discern for those in the midst of a revolution. Above all, sailors could scarcely know who held sovereign authority. Was the Ottoman Sultan still the legitimate ruler of the insurgent territories? Or could the governing bodies that sprang up across the Morea and islands be considered parts of a state with belligerent rights? Deciding who was a privateer and who was a pirate directly touched upon the question of who had a right to wage warfare. If the Greeks could issue privateering licenses, it meant that they were a belligerent party – and thus resembled other sovereign states – instead of lawless rebels. However, such particularities were sometimes lost on agitated merchants who deplored their losses. Not all of their concerns about rampant chaos, indiscriminate plunder and the demise of all commerce ought to be taken at face value. Across the Aegean, regional markets remained operational and trade continued – even between insurgents and Ottomans.¹⁸

In addition, the men who emerged as heads of the revolution tried to uphold a semblance of 'civilized' statehood that would qualify for recognition (and military support) from the European powers. A National Assembly in Epidaurus, which was located near Corinth, declared independence in January 1822, stressing that the Sultan was a 'hated brigand from faraway lands'.¹⁹ The statement demonstrates how notions of brigandage (or piracy) could delegitimize a warring party and indeed played a key role in the Greeks' struggle for international recognition. To further that same cause, the National Assembly also drafted a provisional constitution that erected the façade of a central government. A group of four executives held the power and represented the different regions and islands. Alexandros Mavrokordatos (1791–1865) served as president. He used an alliance with the notables of the key islands of Hydra, Spetses and Psaros to strengthen his power versus the military leaders of the Peloponnese. A son of a notable Phanariot family that once held great influence in Constantinople, Mavrokordatos had been living and studying in Pisa with the noted Philhellene Percy and Mary Shelley when the insurgency began. He now argued that the Greek struggle was not a political revolt – 'a war of faction or sedition' – but a national war of liberation from tyranny.²⁰ The creation of a Greek navy, 'a national fleet out of privately owned fighting vessels', was an important part of his effort to rebrand the revolt.²¹

16. Archives de Chambre de Commerce, Marseille (CCM), MR.4.6.1.4.3, 'Intendants to CCM', 06-08-1821.

17. The National Archives, Kew (TNA), FO 78/112, 'Hamilton to Moore', *Cambria* at Alexandria, 17-02-1822, fp. 151–152.

18. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 136–137.

19. Stites, *Four Horsemen*, 218.

20. D. Dakin, 'The Formation of a Greek state, 1821–33', in: R. Clogg (ed.), *The Struggle for Greek Independence. Essays to Mark the 150th Anniversary of the Greek War of Independence*, Bristol 1973, 156–181; Delis, 'A Hub of Piracy', 44.

21. Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 155–156.

Mavrokordatos and his Provisional Government accordingly claimed belligerent rights. In an official declaration of 13 March 1822, they announced a nearly boundless naval blockade of the region with an unconventional scope. Effective immediately, all 'maritime places still held by the enemy' were under blockade. This applied to every mainland port, stretching from Salonika in the north to Corinth in the south, as well as every island in the Aegean archipelago. Any vessel, under whatever flag, found entering these ports would be 'seized and disposed of according to the laws practiced by all nations in like cases'. The revolutionary authorities avowed to do so 'conformably to the rights of Europe and of all nations'.²² The blockade had to aid the Greek war effort on land, barring beleaguered Ottoman garrisons from provisions. This required selling prizes to generate additional income. Most importantly, the blockade had to bolster the authority of the Provisional Government as a belligerent party and as a 'civilized' nation among other civilized nations. However, the nations of Europe refused to give their consent.

The European Great Powers immediately felt the consequences of the blockade and doubted its legality. In June, Greek vessels took seven Austrian ships near Patras and carried them off to Missolonghi to be adjudicated as prizes.²³ The revolutionaries effectively enforced the blockade of Patras, where these actions directly aided the territorial siege of an Ottoman castle. This pattern did not hold for many other places. One Royal Navy officer told the Greek captains that the blockade was 'perfectly inadmissible' as it was 'absurd of itself [due to] the great number of vessels it would require to form an adequate blockading force'.²⁴

Established (even if still uncodified) conventions of maritime warfare maintained that a blockade had to be effectively enforced in order to be legitimate. These conventions were further solidified during the Napoleonic Wars, when the commercial warfare of the Royal Navy led to strong debates about the naval mandates of search and seizure against neutral shipping.²⁵ If a blockade was not properly enforced, it could cause confusion and give free reign to wandering raiders, which is exactly what happened later in Greece. There were many instances of troublesome crews and cunning privateers who became very inventive in justifying their captures. They eagerly took anything they could.²⁶ In the case of Patras, British officials did not want to confront the Greeks and wished to keep the Foreign Office's policy of neutrality. They preferred to wait for the Ottoman fleet's arrival instead, which they expected would 'at once put an end (...) to these teasing [*sic*] questions'.²⁷

Even without such transgressions of standard blockade tactics, Greek privateering challenged the very basis of legitimate warfare at sea. The legality of privateering depended on the backing of an internationally accepted sovereign, which the Provisional Government certainly was not. In London, the King's Advocate Sir Christopher Robinson wrestled with the problem. His legal opinion of October 1821 maintained that 'it would not be proper to consider persons as *pirates* who may be cruising under a state of alleged hostilities'. Yet, he also noted that there had to be 'a reasonable limitation of the arbitrary pretensions of such cruisers [*sic*]', otherwise their raiding could not be distinguished from the predatory behaviour of pirates.²⁸ Robinson offered no solution to the issue. According to him, the Greeks were not rogue pirates, but neither were they state-

22. Declaration of the Provisional Government, 13-03-1822, attached to TNA, FO 78/112, 'Adam to Bathurst', 10-06-1822, fp. 228–231.

23. TNA, FO 78/112, 'Adam to Bathurst', 10-06-1822, fp. 228–231.

24. *Ibid.*

25. M. McCarthy, *Privateering, Piracy and British Policy in Spanish America, 1810–1830*, Woodbridge 2013, 15.

26. Delis, 'A Hub of Piracy', 44 and 49; CCM, MR.4.6.1.4.3, 'Intendants to CCM', 11-06-1822.

27. TNA, FO 78/112, 'Adam to Bathurst', 10-06-1822, fp. 228–231.

28. A. Rubin, *The Law of Piracy*, Newport, RI 1988, 213–214.

sanctioned privateers. Robinson's opinion suggested that the crucial issue, which warranted a quick resolution, was the international recognition of the Greek revolutionary authorities.²⁹

Yet, the question of international recognition remained undecided as the blockade endured. This uncertainty hampered the avowed policies of strict neutrality that the Great Powers claimed to maintain. Europe's first-rank empires – Great Britain, France, Austria, Russia and Prussia – together subscribed to a policy of neutrality during the early years of the Greek Revolution, which was reiterated at the subsequent congresses of Laibach (1821) and Verona (1822). This neutrality had as much to do with the detest of revolutionary agitation as with mutual suspicions over potential strategic gains that could come to imperial rivals from any direct involvement.³⁰ The Great Power statesmen maintained their policy despite diplomatic overtures from the Greek authorities. They also weathered increasing popular outrage in Europe over the plight of fellow Christians, as evinced by the international outrage following the massacre at Chios, where an estimated 50,000 Greeks were killed or enslaved. All of this has been extensively covered in the literature.³¹ Still, the specific problems that the Greek blockade posed to the shared policy of neutrality are often overlooked. After all, the decision not to contest the blockade amounted to a *de facto* recognition of the Provisional Government's authority – at least in the realm of maritime warfare.

Eventually, the British government decided to accept Greek belligerency as a way out of this conundrum. Foreign Secretary George Canning (r. 1822–20 April 1827) announced it in 1823, but historians now stress that the decision was precipitated by the actions of Thomas Maitland as Governor General of the Ionian Isles. Maitland found maintaining neutrality difficult. Many refugees from the mainland found shelter on the isles and the revolutionary cause was quite popular with the inhabitants. Seeking to ensure 'tranquillity' in these colonial domains, Maitland first declared martial law and then decided to deal directly with the Greek revolutionaries.³² He also wrote to his superiors at the Colonial Office in the summer of 1822, arguing that the Greek blockade had really touched upon the larger, much more complicated issue of recognition. Although Maitland considered it wise 'not to come to any decision, but to leave the thing open', his report nevertheless indicated the direction taken by British diplomacy.³³

The Royal Navy's handling of the blockade shows a similar engagement with questions of recognition, running parallel to the dilemmas in the Ionian Isles. From Malta, the commander-in-chief of the British Mediterranean fleet, Graham Moore (1764–1843), instructed his captains in the Aegean not to oppose the blockading Greeks.³⁴ Although Captain Hamilton made repeated complaints about the stop, search and confiscation of vessels with the Provisional Government, he noted that he 'had not the means or indeed felt authorized to insist on them withdrawing their

29. V. Jakjimovska, 'Uneasy Neutrality. Britain and the Greek War of Independence (1821–1832)', in: I. van Hulle / R. Lesaffer (eds.), *International Law in the Long Nineteenth Century (1776–1914). From the Public Law of Europe to Global International Law?*, Leiden 2019, 45–72, 53.

30. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 117–119.

31. Frary, *Russia*, 34–35; D. Rodogno, *Against Massacre. Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914*, Princeton, NJ 2012, 65–70; M. Jarrett, *The Congress of Vienna and its Legacy. War and Great Power Diplomacy after Napoleon*, London, New York 2013, 248–260; F. Klose, "In the Cause of Humanity". *Eine Geschichte der humanitären Intervention im langen 19. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2019, 292–296; J. Mitzen, *Power in Concert. The Nineteenth-century Origins of Global Governance*, Chicago 2013, 174; P. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848*, Oxford 1994, 710–711; M. Šedivý, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, Pilsen 2013.

32. S. Gekas, *Xenocracy. State, Class and Colonialism in the Ionian Islands, 1815–1864*, New York, Oxford 2017, 71–73; Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 262.

33. TNA FO 78/112, 'Memorandum by Maitland', [n.d.], fp. 234–235.

34. TNA, FO 78/112, 'Moore to Croker', *Rochfort* at Malta, 23-07-1822, fp. 244–245.

blockade'.³⁵ Members of the Levant Company disliked this stance and complained of the 'critical' situation for British merchants in the region. One agent argued that Greek captains were 'not learned into the Laws of Nations' and did more harm 'than may have been contemplated by His Majesty's Government'.³⁶ Their complaints did not alter the conduct of the Royal Navy, which continued to avoid direct confrontation with the Greek blockading forces. Such conduct prefigured the recognition of Greek belligerency that lurked behind the interlinked questions of neutrality and the blockade.

What added to the mounting sense of inter-imperial crisis was the unicity of the British position. The other Great Powers did not share the decision to recognize the Greeks as belligerents. Instead, they favoured a more cautious and uninvolved stance. Austria, Prussia, France and Russia all took note of Canning's recognition of the Provisional Government as a warring party, but with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The Austrian Chancellor Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859) was the perfect opposite to the British stance, with his strictly anti-revolutionary policy. He remained steadfast in his legalistic support for Sultan Mahmud's sovereignty and openly disliked the Greek insurgents.³⁷ The other powers veered in-between. Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825) broke off diplomatic relations with Constantinople in 1822, yet he ultimately subscribed to neutrality and non-intervention.³⁸ French diplomacy combined clear favouritism towards the Greeks with respect for Ottoman sovereignty, as did Prussian policy.³⁹ None of the other Great Power governments immediately or openly followed Canning's lead, but they did not contest the recognition of Greek belligerency either. In fact, they tacitly and (in case of Metternich) begrudgingly accepted it. Although there were diplomatic tensions between Europe's prime imperial powers over Greek belligerency at sea, these did not lead to outright, mutual conflict. Their *de facto* acceptance of the Greek revolutionaries' right to conduct maritime warfare would open the door to concerted European mediation and further naval intervention at a later date.⁴⁰

2. Pirates, privateers and the perception of a shared threat

In contrast, the Ottoman authorities had no doubt: the Greeks were mischievous rebels who carried out illegal raids. Their violence had no legitimacy or legal basis. Hence, Greek raiding at sea amounted to nothing more than piracy, pure and simple. As such, it presented a significant threat to the livelihood and trade of all Sultan Mahmud's subjects – whether they were loyalist Greeks, North African pilgrims or Anatolian merchants. Although the Ottoman and European understandings of the Greek Revolution often differed, they shared a mutual view of the dangers posed by the Aegean raiders. Thus, by examining the maritime aspects of the uprising, new and unexpected cases of cooperation between Ottomans and Europeans appear. Maritime raiding (whether defined as piracy or privateering) must be unpacked to understand the nature of imperial involvement in the Greek Revolution prior to Navarino. This shared notion of threat solidified as the uprising endured and informed cooperative counter-measures from the different imperial powers.

Mobilizing the fleet of war at full strength was the Ottoman reaction. Members of the Sublime Porte in Constantinople (Istanbul) initially held differing opinions on whether the rebels had to be

35. TNA, FO 78/112, 'Hamilton to Moore', *Eurgalus* in Gulf of Lepanto, 29-05-1822, fp. 248–249.

36. TNA, FO 78/119, 'Liddell to Conyngham', 09-05-1823, fp. 161–165.

37. Šedivý, *Metternich*, 59–94.

38. Frary, *Russia*, 32, 34–35.

39. Puryear, *France and the Levant*, 24–26.

40. W. Smiley, 'War without War. The Battle of Navarino, the Ottoman Empire, and the Pacific Blockade', in: *Journal of the History of International Law* 18 (2016), 42–69, 54–55.

crushed with force or shown some mercy. The moderates gradually fell out of favour. The Porte issued a *fatwa* that denounced the Greeks as breachers of Islam and began to mobilize a large imperial fleet that was intended to end maritime raiding and quell the rebellions on the islands.⁴¹ In 1821, Sultan Mahmud II called on his North African subordinates in Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli and Egypt for naval aid. Each of these vassals provided men and ships, adding to the 24 ships of war (including three ships-of-the-line) that sailed the Aegean under the Ottoman flag.⁴² These naval forces engaged Greek privateers in battle. They did 'all the mischief' they could at insurgent ports, as an English officer wrote. One such instance was Vostizza (Aigio), where a small Ottoman squadron burned all houses and magazines along the shore in July 1822.⁴³ The Ottoman vessels also helped to evacuate Muslim and Jewish residents from places that fell to the Greeks, which was often accompanied by brutal massacres and the enslavement of civilians.⁴⁴ As such, the composite imperial fleet was a crucial factor in the Ottoman attempts to ensure the security of subjects' goods and lives under these volatile circumstances.

Yet, maritime raiding only increased while the war continued. It tended to become less and less attached to the rudimentary structures of the revolutionary authorities. Over the course of 1823 and 1824, Greek raiders took many ships under a large variety of flags. Impoverished sailors on the islands of Hydra and Spetses threw off 'their obedience to their primates' and commenced piracy against all nations, often to the dismay of fellow law-abiding islanders who feared for violent reprisal.⁴⁵ This upsurge in piracy posed a shared threat to the traffic of both the Ottoman Empire and the European powers. It also created an awareness that these different imperial entities had common security interests at sea. This became particularly apparent when the scope of piracy extended to the waters around Syria, Beirut and Cyprus. The 'uncurbed audacity of the Greek cruisers', as one agent of the British Levant Company wrote in July 1823, hurt the commerce of Great Britain, Austria, Russia, French and the Ottomans alike. The losses were only exacerbated because European vessels often carried Ottoman merchandise or passengers from different parts of the empire, making them potential prey for Greek privateers as well.⁴⁶

The fleets of the Ottoman Empire and European powers began to aid each other accordingly to protect their shared interests. Sometimes aid came through direct cooperation. Captain Hamilton of the Royal Navy brought three imprisoned Ottoman sailors under British protection in 1821, liberating them from the island of 'Calimieno' (Kalymnos), where their fellow crew members had been killed.⁴⁷ European captains and consuls also repeatedly shared intelligence on pirate sightings and dangerous islands with commanders of the Ottoman fleet, including Hadj Ali, the *capudan* of the Algerian squadron.⁴⁸ The Austrians were heavily involved in this exchange of information, which had much to do with their government's vehement dislike of the Greek insurgency. In return, the Sublime Porte granted Austrian ships docking rights at Smyrna (Izmir) to facilitate the Aegean operations of the expanding Habsburg squadron.⁴⁹ Another case of European-Ottoman cooperation

41. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 119–120; Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 538; Mylonakis, *Piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 29; M. Belhamissi, *Histoire de la marine algérienne (1516–1830)*, Algiers 1983, 135, 141–142.

42. Number given in Centre des Archives diplomatiques, Nantes (CADN), 22PO/1/65.

43. TNA, FO 78/112, 'Barthold to Green', 27-07-1822, fp. 240–241.

44. Mylonakis, 'Transnational Piracy', 37.

45. Dimitropoulos, 'Pirates during a Revolution', 30–33.

46. TNA, FO 78/119, 'Liddell to Conyngham', 25-07-1823, fp. 208–209; CADN, 166PO/D43/24, 'Méchain to Drouault', 18-09-1824, fp. 253.

47. TNA, FO 78/112, 'Hamilton to G. Moore', *Cambrian* at Smyrna, 18-09-1821, fp. 82–83.

48. CADN, 22PO/1/65, 'Malivoire to Deval', 27-09-1821.

49. Sondhaus, *The Habsburg Empire*, 63.

took place slightly later, in June 1826. Greek pirates took an Austrian ship carrying two hundred Arab passengers from Tunis, most of them *hadjis* on pilgrimage to Mecca.⁵⁰ The marauders pillaged the vessel and confiscated all its cargo. They left the passengers on a deserted island. The unfortunate pilgrims would have starved to death there if it had not been for the French Vice-Admiral Rigny, who picked them up and took them to Smyrna a few days later.⁵¹

Tensions also arose under the surface of such cooperation in particular between the different Ottoman and European fleets. Several incidents involving the vessels from North Africa caused diplomatic outrage. Claiming that they were Greeks, Algerine corsairs took several Ionian prizes and held their crews as slaves. Tunisian raiders pillaged a Maltese ship in 1823.⁵² When a group of imprisoned Greek boys was taken to the Regency of Tunis later that year, the Royal Navy sent over a squadron and threatened a blockade if Bey Mahmud (r. 1814 – March 1824) would not abide by earlier treaties that banned the enslavement of Christian captives.⁵³ Instances like these not only increased Philhellenic sentiments in Europe, but also revived the old popular dismay over ‘Barbary piracy’ and ‘Christian slavery’ that had been on the wane since the Anglo-Dutch bombardment of Algiers in 1816.⁵⁴

Although Philhellenism was on the rise across the European continent, such sympathies were not always shared by the navy personnel and diplomats serving in the Aegean. Great Power actors, who tried to manage the insecurities that the Greek Revolution had unleashed, talked of the Greeks disparagingly and sometimes used violence against them. The Royal Navy captain Hamilton, for instance, attacked several pirate haunts. He swept into the harbour of Hydra in June 1823 to comb the place for a suspected pirate ship.⁵⁵ He sent one of his commanders to Skopelos in July, where a group had kidnapped the son of a British consul, to ‘make an example of that place should it offer any resistance’. The islanders chose to release the captive, give up two ships and hand over ‘several chiefs among the pirates’ – all under the ‘dread of our men of war’.⁵⁶ Markedly un-Philhellenic rhetoric accompanied such micro-level gunboat diplomacy against small island communities. Hamilton’s reports talked of ‘so despicable an enemy’ and ‘the piratical line of conduct, which they [the islanders] seemed so inclined to pursue’.⁵⁷ Similar remarks appeared in the correspondence of French officials, who wrote of ‘New Hellenics’ characterized by ambition and greed.⁵⁸ Europeans could harbour humanitarian sympathy for the plight of fellow Christians in Greece, but this sympathy did not necessarily apply to the Greeks who were involved in piracy.⁵⁹

The Great Power’s stance towards the Greek revolutionary authorities began to harden as well, particularly because their patience with privateering was wearing thin. European sailors and naval commanders regularly complained about the ‘piratical excesses’ of the Greek privateers. De Rigny

50. On Greek violence against pilgrims and its challenge to the Sultan’s authority, Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 141.

51. CADN, 22PO/1/65, ‘Guys to Deval’, 14-06-1826.

52. TNA, FO 78/112, ‘Hamilton to Moore’, Smyrna 05-07-1822, fp. 250–256; FO 78/119, ‘Rous to Hamilton’, *Hind* at Smyrna 04-07-1823, fp. 360–361.

53. TNA, FO 8/4, ‘Bathurst to Canning’, [n.d.], fp. 111–117.

54. G. Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs. France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Stanford, CA 2011, 156–161.

55. TNA, FO 78/119, ‘Hamilton to Moore’, *Cambrian* at Port Mandre 26-06-1823, fp. 336–337.

56. TNA, FO 78/119, ‘Hamilton to Moore’, *Cambrian* at Stanchio 14-07-1823, fp. 344–349.

57. TNA, FO 78/119, ‘Hamilton to Moore’, *Cambrian* at Port Mandre 26-06-1823, fp. 336–337; FO 78/112, ‘Hamilton to Moore’, *Cambrian* at Alexandria, 17-02-1822, fp. 153–154.

58. CADN, 166PO/E/222, Dejean, ‘Rapport sur les affaires de la Grèce’, 31-03-1824.

59. Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, 76–78; Y. Cartledge, ‘The Chios Massacre (1822) and Early British Christian-Humanitarianism’, in: *Historical Research* 93 (2020) 259, 52–72.

noted in April 1826 that the Greeks appeared to be carrying against neutral shipping rather than 'the Turks'.⁶⁰ They considered any vessel carrying whatever merchandise to an Ottoman port a righteous prize. According to him, few merchants managed to escape this 'pillaging' at the hands of Greek corsairs.⁶¹ Metternich painted a similarly bleak picture, lamenting the 'total destruction' of European commerce in the Aegean archipelago.⁶² Even the British ambassador in Constantinople at one point admitted that Greek privateering had become 'unusually prejudicial to the interests of the neutral'.⁶³

Naturally, the political institutions that issued these hindersome privateering licenses came to bear the brunt of European complaints. Austrian, French and British diplomats put the blame on the Provisional Government in general and on the questionable procedures of the Greek prize courts in particular. As one British report noted, cargoes were often confiscated and brought on land before legal proceedings had even started. If a case did make it to court beforehand, then there was generally a strong bias in favour of condemnation. This is hardly surprising, given that 15% of the total prize value went to the money-strapped Greek authorities.⁶⁴

The governing bodies on the Greek mainland argued that there was little they could do. They issued declarations on proper belligerent conduct and promised to keep a tighter grip on the privateers, but this hardly had any effect on the freewheeling activity of many privateering crews.⁶⁵ Piracy, meanwhile, was on the rise in virtually all the nooks, crannies and straits of the Aegean archipelago. Internal divisions partially caused this further increase of piratical activity. The Greek military effort fell into disarray after the advances of Ibrahim Pasha. Soon, the factional infighting between different regional groups lapsed into outright civil war. Hydra and Spezia, two islands with a large privateering industry, revolted against the Provisional Government in 1826. Their sailors began to plunder shipping without restraint. Many other islanders and coastal dwellers did the same. Pirate ships haunted the vast body of water that stretched from the Morea and Malta in the north to Crete and Syria in the south.⁶⁶

They were indiscriminate in choosing their targets and very violent in their tactics of plunder. In the summer of 1826, pirates killed the entire crew of a Sardinian ship, except for one sailor from Ragusa. He lived to tell the tale because he hid in a barrel that the pirates threw into the sea. It drifted ashore on the beaches of Tinos.⁶⁷ A French merchant captain reported in September 1826 that Greek pirates, who had accosted his vessel near Chania on Crete, hung him overboard by his feet while they searched the ship for money.⁶⁸ Another merchant ship, the *Superba* of Malta, delivered an inventory of all the items it had lost to a pirate crew from Milo in April 1827. They had virtually stripped the ship bare, as the inventory listed everything from the top sails and the oars to the captain's pillowcase.⁶⁹

Naval commanders, consuls, merchants and local authorities deployed the complete arsenal of security measures, ranging from convoys to punitive expeditions and legal proceedings. The

60. CADN, 166PO/B/84, 'Rigny to Marine Minister', Smyrna 25-04-1826.

61. CADN, 166PO/B/84, 'Rigny to Guilleminot', Smyrna 21-04-1826.

62. Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna (HHStA), StAbt, Frankreich, Diplomatische Korrespondenz, 257, Weisungen, 1825, 'Metternich to Vincent', 20-10-1825, fp. 49-50.

63. 'Stratford Canning to Canning', [n.d.] in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 4-5.

64. *Ibid.*

65. 'Proclamation by the Provisional Government of Greece', Nauplia 27-05-1826, in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 11-14.

66. CADN, 166PO/B/84, 'Extracts from Rigny to Marine Minister', 23/26-03-1826.

67. CCM, MR.4.6.1.4.3, 'Intendants to CCM', 12-09-1826.

68. CADN, 166PO/D84/41, 'David to Desages', Smyrna 15-09-1826.

69. 'Statement of the piracy on Superba of Malta', Talbot at Milo, 28-04-1827, in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 101-103.

situation, after all, appeared to be out of control. Merchants no longer dared to leave the ports of Malta and Smyrna.⁷⁰ They would only take to sea under the protection of naval convoys, although these were often ineffective. It could take weeks before the designated vessels arrived at the port. In addition, insurance did not cover deviations from the ship's intended voyage, which convoys often necessitated. Nor did a convoy guarantee a safe arrival. Greek pirates who operated in the narrow straits of the Aegean archipelago repeatedly managed to cut ships off and plunder them, especially when they sailed in the rear.⁷¹

Other security practices did little to alleviate the threat of Greek piracy. The different Great Power fleets chased pirates at sea, conducted punitive expeditions on islands and tried to bring the culprits to court. Sometimes the anti-pirate missions caused severe diplomatic scandals, owing to their violence, brutality and arbitrary confiscations. One of the most notorious incidents took place on 9 August 1827. The Austrian colonel Silvestro Dandolo (1766–1847) entered the harbour of Spetses, commanding seven ships of war. He came to demand the return of four Habsburg merchant vessels – all rightful captures, according to the local prize court and the island notables. They argued that the Austrians would have to start new legal proceedings if they wished to overturn the sentences, ‘according to the laws of war and the rights of nations’. Dandolo accepted no such thing. The Habsburg state, he argued, would not recognize the Greek authorities, their admiralties, or their sentences. Dandolo attacked the harbour of Spetses the next day. A barrage of combustibles destroyed the local fleet and killed 11 seamen. ‘Our town’, the notables wrote, ‘has been ruined by the Austrian commander. Our people have been occupied for two days in burying their dead’.⁷² Soon after, the Greek Provisional Government complained about Dandolo's conduct to the British foreign secretary. They claimed the Austrian commander ‘had not even a shadow of right’ and ‘transgressed the laws of neutrality’.⁷³ London and Vienna exchanged accusations in the ensuing row.⁷⁴ What this episode indicates is that unilateral measures and the first few attempts at naval cooperation failed to end the many threats to security at sea. In fact, resolving the piracy problem even began to tarnish diplomatic relations between the European Great Powers. The sense of inter-imperial crisis was reaching its peak in the first half of 1827, but from that clenched situation, new, more direct forms of cooperation would emerge.

3. Concertation as a closing of the ranks

A merger of fleets in the end succeeded where convoys, punitive expeditions and informal instances of working together had failed. If anything became clear during the hectic period of 1821–1827, it was that the archipelagos around Greece were simply too stretched out and hard to oversee for any national squadron alone. None of the Great Power squadrons was large enough to offer sufficient

70. ‘Memorial from British merchants’, London, 22-09-1827, in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 197; CADN, 166PO/D84/41, ‘David to Guilleminot’, Smyrna 16-02-1826.

71. Angster, *Erdbeeren und Piraten*, 270–271; ‘Hamilton to Neale’, *Cambrian* at Castri, 07-03-1827, in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 85–86.

72. ‘Primates of Spezzia to Greek Government’, Spezzia 21-07-1827 [old style], in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 132–134. Also, Sondhaus, *The Habsburg Empire*, 71.

73. ‘Greek Provisional Government to Stratford Canning’, Napoli 22-07-1827 [old style], in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 136–137.

74. HHStA, StAbt, Großbritannien, Diplomatische Korrespondenz, 179, Weisungen, Oct.-Dec. 1827, Subfolder, ‘Weisungen, 1827, X-’, ‘Metternich to Esterhazy’, 31-10-1827, fp. 49–61 and 72–86; ‘Weisungen, 1827, X-’, ‘Metternich to Esterhazy’, 31-10-1827, fp. 72–86.

protection to merchants in the vast body of water where pirates and privateers roamed.⁷⁵ In this sense, it is not surprising that the navies of Great Britain, France and Russia joined forces under a shared mandate in July 1827. This mandate emerged from a series of diplomatic negotiations in London and would eventually bring the allied fleet into the bay of Navarino. Much has been written about the secret meetings, drafted protocols and multilateral negotiations that paved the way to the London Treaty and its destructive aftermath.⁷⁶ Historians have highlighted the diplomatic details, imperial concerns and legal innovations of the London talks, where the three Great Powers (Austria and Prussia declined the invitation) agreed to mediate on behalf of the Greeks together – and decided to use naval force in case this mediation faltered. Scholarship has failed to note how this diplomatic agreement built on the ad-hoc naval cooperation and shared notions of a Greek pirate threat that already existed. As a result, the pivotal role of navy actors as well as the Greek Provisional Government has been overlooked in the context of the inter-imperial involvement in the revolution.

Prospects remained grim for the Greek authorities. By the time the uprising went into its fifth year, the revolutionary effort was splintering into rival regional factions and began to buckle under Ottoman-Egyptian military might. In 1824, Ibrahim Pasha (1789–1848), the son of Egypt's viceroy Mehmed Ali (1769–1849), landed in the Morea with 17,000 troops. He quickly tallied up several victories.⁷⁷ Facing a dire situation, the Greek Provisional Government actively tried to provoke Great Power involvement in the conflict. It did so by playing on mutual rivalries among the imperial powers of Europe. Different revolutionary factions offered their international contacts petitions to place Greece under French, Russian or British protection.⁷⁸ These proposals had little impact besides the frantic plotting, scheming and worrying that they caused in the Europe's capitals. Still, the revolutionary authorities continued to hedge their bets on the Great Powers. When the latter complained about the conduct of Greek privateers, the Provisional Government not only issued a scathing proclamation against 'some wicked men unworthy of the name of Greek'. It also asked the 'neutral powers' to help them maintain order at sea, through direct naval cooperation.⁷⁹

Around the same time, the servicemen of the British and French Aegean squadrons pushed for more substantial cooperation between their fleets. The first plans to join forces in an organized manner really started taking shape in the spring of 1827. Vice-Admiral Rigny and Captain Hamilton exchanged letters that expressed their shared desire to cooperate. 'I think nothing but the united efforts of the European squadrons can protect their [merchants'; EdL] commerce', Hamilton wrote.⁸⁰ Rigny agreed and offered to contact the French ambassador in Constantinople, though he also stressed that they could do little on their own accord. For their squadrons to take direct action together, they would first need the diplomatic backing of their governments.⁸¹

75. Angster, *Erdbeeren und Piraten*, 271–272; Anderson, *Naval Wars*, 508; Belhamissi, *Histoire de la marine*, 142; P. Earle, *The Pirate Wars*, St. Martin's Griffin, New York 2003, 231–233.

76. A recent example being Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*.

77. Smiley, 'War without War', 56.

78. Dakin, 'The Formation of a Greek State', 171–172; HHStA, StAbt, StAbt, Großbritannien, Diplomatische Korrespondenz, 173, Weisungen, 1825, 'Metternich to Esterhazy', 08-09-1825, fp. 19–27; Frankreich, Diplomatische Korrespondenz, 257, Weisungen, 1825, 'Metternich to Vincent', 20-10-1825, fp. 29–32.

79. 'Proclamation by the Provisional Government of Greece', Nauplia 27-05-1826, in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 11–14.

80. 'Hamilton to Rigny', *Cambrian at Egina* 28-02-1827, in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 65–66.

81. 'Rigny to Hamilton', Smyrna 18-03-1827, in: *Piracy in the Levant*, 90–92.

As was often the case in the 19th-century Mediterranean, naval commanders were ahead of diplomats and statesmen in their willingness to cooperate for the sake of security. The senior representatives of the Great Powers only opted for direct naval cooperation in the waters around Greece a few months later in July 1827. They did so after a series of multilateral negotiations that greatly resembled the work of earlier diplomatic bodies, such as the Allied Council in Paris (1815–1818) and the ambassadorial conferences on ‘Barbary piracy’ and the slave trade (1816–1823).⁸² With the ‘Treaty for the Pacification of Greece’ (also known as the Treaty of London), Great Britain, France and Russia decided to mediate together in the ongoing war between the Greek revolutionaries and the Ottoman Sultan. They would try to resolve the Greek conflict by arranging Greek autonomy (not sovereignty, it should be noted) under Ottoman suzerainty. Yet, they also agreed to use naval power when diplomatic means would not bring a satisfying solution.⁸³

The Treaty of London not only resembled the cooperative plans of naval actors; it also revolved around established notions of shared threats at sea. Piracy played a crucial part in the making and wording of the treaty. The idea that plunder in the Aegean Sea amounted to a crisis of inter-imperial proportions permeated the agreement. The signing parties voiced ‘the necessity of putting an end to the bloody struggle, which brings anarchy and disorder to the Greek Provinces and Islands of the Archipelago’. They stressed the harmful consequences for their own maritime trade, as the fighting ‘every day causes fresh impediments to the commerce of the European states, and gives room to piracies that not only expose the subjects of the Contracting Parties to considerable losses, but also necessitates burdensome measures of surveillance and repression’.⁸⁴ Piracy – in particular, the need to end it – served as a crucial legitimization of the new cooperative measures. The re-establishment of peace and security at sea was central to the London talks and the resulting treaty.⁸⁵

In their professed aim of restoring tranquillity at sea, the signees decided to use naval means in unconventional ways. The British, Russian and French fleets would form a joint squadron, in case talks with the Ottoman authorities came to nothing. The squadron would ‘intercept every expedition of men, arms, &c., which was directed by sea against Greece, from Turkey or Africa’.⁸⁶ Yet, the treaty, and in particular the instructions to the naval commanders, also underscored that the cooperating powers would not take part in the hostilities. This created a paradoxical situation in which the allies could impose a blockade on Ottoman shipping – an act beholden to wartime – while they maintained that they were not at war with the Ottoman Empire. This resulted in a new type of military intervention: one conducted outside of a state of war but allegedly legitimized by the international imperative for security at sea.⁸⁷

These tensions between intervention and restraint only increased when the Ottoman Porte rejected the Great Power initiative. The allied ambassadors in Constantinople presented the treaty on 16 August 1827, stressing that the Sultan’s conduct against Greece was hurting both ‘the safety of commerce’ and ‘the perfect tranquillity of Europe’.⁸⁸ Pertev Efendi, at that time

82. B. de Graaf, *Fighting Terror after Napoleon. How Europe Became secure after 1815*, Cambridge 2020; B. Vick, ‘Power, Humanitarianism and the Global Liberal Order. Abolition and the Barbary Corsairs in the Vienna Congress System’, in: *The International History Review* (2017), 1–22.

83. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 124–126; Jakjmovska, ‘Uneasy Neutrality’, 65–67; Smiley, ‘War without War’, 57.

84. TNA, FO 93/81/29, ‘Greek Treaty’, signed by Dudley, Polignac and Lieven, London 06-07-1827, fp. 15–18.

85. C. Zwierlein, ‘Mediterranean Transformations. From the Security of Mercantilist Trading Empires to a Modern Security Regime’, in: *Pedralbes* 40 (2020), 323–366, 348, 351–352; Smiley, ‘War without War’, 57; Jakjmovska, ‘Uneasy Neutrality’, 65–67; Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 126–127.

86. TNA, FO 93/81/29, ‘Greek Treaty’, fp. 15–18.

87. Smiley, ‘War without War’, 55, 57–58; Jakjmovska, ‘Uneasy Neutrality’, 64.

88. TNA, FO 93/81/29, ‘Greek Treaty’, Annex B, fp. 37–40.

serving as the Reis Efendi (the Ottoman equivalent to a minister of foreign affairs), brushed aside all offers of foreign mediation. He stressed that the Greek question was an internal affair of the empire, that military intervention would be a violation of the laws of nations and that the Porte was ‘not afraid of naval squadrons’.⁸⁹

Now the three allies saw themselves forced to execute the military clauses of the London Treaty. They moved their fleets towards each other and merged them into a shared squadron. Their respective naval commanders received vague instructions with cloaked references to a possible use of force. Officially, they were told that the allies acted as conciliators who had to establish an armistice at sea by blockading the Greek territories but without falling into hostilities.⁹⁰ This puzzled Vice-Admiral Edward Codrington (1770–1851), the commander-in-chief of the British Mediterranean squadron. ‘Surely’, he wrote, ‘this must be like a blockade; if an attempt be made to force it, by force only can that attempt be resisted’. In the end, he was told that he could enforce the blockade, ‘when all other means are exhausted, by cannon shot’.⁹¹ Metternich, who wanted no part in the Treaty of London, heard of these allied ventures and could not hide his profound aversion. In disbelief and with dread, he wondered: ‘Whither does this absurdity not lead us?’⁹² The endpoint of the naval cooperation between Russia, France and Britain was still uncertain at that time, but it did bring two things to light. Firstly, it indicated the degree to which Great Power involvement in the Greek Revolution resulted from maritime issues and utilized naval means. Secondly, it exposed how this merger of naval forces upended previous forms of cooperation at sea and thereby ceased the informal collaborations with the Ottoman fleet. In its stead came a closing of the ranks that put the British, French, Russian and Ottoman navies on a course of collision.

4. Conclusion

As the summer of 1827 ended and chill autumn winds blew over the waters, it became clear that the Treaty of London led to one destination: the bay of Navarino. By late October, 120 warships filled the wide inlet on the western coast of the Peloponnese. The cooperating European squadrons had blockaded the Ottoman fleet there in a bid to keep the Sultan’s forces from taking to sea. On 20 October, a single shot on the Ottomans’ side (which was likely an accident) started the hostilities that came to dominate the maritime history of the Greek Revolution.

This article has broadened the temporal scope and stressed the importance of the six years before the clash at Navarino. These first phases of the Greek Revolution saw a significant degree of naval involvement from various imperial powers. Diplomatic uncertainty, anxieties about security at sea and ad-hoc forms of maritime cooperation marked the unfolding of the Greek Revolution between 1821 and 1827. When the revolution spread across the sea, it immediately created a sense of inter-imperial crisis. In that atmosphere, questions over belligerency, shared security concerns and effective protective measures steered the European powers towards international recognition of (and subsequent military support for) the Greek authorities. It became clear that naval commanders operating in the chaotic island world of the Aegean Sea often preceded the decisions of senior diplomats in faraway capitals, who decided on direct participation and cooperation during a later phase. As such, the maritime conduct during the opening years of the Greek Revolution lay the basis for the

89. Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 133.

90. TNA, FO 93/81/29, ‘Greek Treaty’, Annex F, fp. 55–60.

91. Cited in Smiley, ‘War without War’, 58.

92. Cited in *Ibid.*, 60–61.

Treaty of London and its destructive merger of the Russian, British and French fleets. However, the diplomatic and maritime alliance of the three Great Powers also occluded earlier instances of cooperation at sea, which, before 1827, had still involved the Ottoman navy as a partner in protection, surveillance and small-scale operations.

Naval cooperation in the Aegean shows us that we can only understand 19th-century international relations in Europe and its environs from an inter-imperial perspective. Rival imperial powers fostered their interests through collaboration, but this always occurred against a background of simmering conflict and brooding mistrust.⁹³ The imperial involvement in the Greek Revolution makes it abundantly clear that we need to focus on the degree to which they shaped events together, especially at sea. This shows us that Greek autonomy, independence, statehood or sovereignty could only exist within the frameworks that the Great Powers delineated, adding further clout to Michael Herzfeld's thesis of a 'crypto-colonial' situation in post-revolutionary Greece.⁹⁴ Multilateral naval engagement in the Greek Revolution also sheds new light on the post-1815 international system, indicating how it effectively fostered imperial interventionism and contributed to the political reshaping of the Mediterranean Sea as a space of uneven power relations, order and security.

Furthermore, the Greek Revolution happened at a critical moment in a legal and military sense. Conceptions of what was accepted in maritime warfare were in flux after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. European statesmen had begun to delegitimize privateering as an accepted wartime practice, equating it to lawless piracy. This had already happened in relation to the privateers of North Africa's so-called Barbary Regencies (Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli). They faced the brunt of a new repressive and interventionist sensibility against alleged threats to security at sea. Through the Anglo-Dutch bombardment of Algiers in 1816, the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle of 1818 and a shared Anglo-French diplomatic expedition in 1819, European authorities increasingly problematized privateering in the Mediterranean.⁹⁵ Maritime raiding during the Greek Revolution could hence become a point of contention, confusion and cooperation. The revolutionary authorities became acutely aware of this as the foreign dismay towards Greek maritime conduct increased. In the wake of Navarino, Ioannis Capodistrias, the first president of the newly-christened Hellenic State and Russia's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, decided to heed the threats of the Great Powers. He curtailed privateering and clamped down on piracy. The anti-piracy expedition and allied occupation at Gramvousa – the notorious 'pirate fortress' off the coast of Crete – in early 1828 were a sign of these changes.⁹⁶ A new phase of Greek statehood had begun: backed by the European Great Powers, who forced the authorities to toe their line in matters of security.

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93. D. Todd, 'A French Imperial Meridian, 1814–1870', in: *Past & Present* 210 (2011), 155–186, 161.

94. M. Herzfeld, 'The Absent Presence. Discourses of Crypto-colonialism', in: *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101 (2002) 4, 899–926.


95. E. de Lange, 'The Congress System and the French Invasion of Algiers, 1827–1830', in: *The Historical Journal* 64 (2021) 4, 940–962.

96. The work (in Greek) of Despina Themeli-Katifori is still the most detailed and exhaustive on this particular period. Also, for a brief description, Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, 428–429; Mylonakis, *Piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 33.

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