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By

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ABSTRACT

On August 25, 1915 the Allied Powers officially declared the entirety of the Ottoman Empire’s Mediterranean coast under blockade after nearly a year of war and several months of direct hostilities with Ottoman troops. This blockade, while acknowledged to have played a role in producing severe shortages and civilian famine, remains understudied as an aspect of Allied policy during the First World War. This thesis critically examines the evolution of the blockade, particularly as it was manifested off the coast of Ottoman Syria where supply shortages and famine was particularly acute, in order to add dimension and depth to an aspect of the war that was both militarily significant and had a profound impact on daily civilian life throughout the war. The blockade of the Syrian coast was not a singular policy that emerged at the beginning of the war and remained constant; rather, it evolved over the first several years of the war in response to changing political and military circumstances and became fixed toward the end of 1915. The Allies had full knowledge that a blockade of the Ottoman Empire’s Mediterranean coast would produce food and supply shortages to the detriment of the empire’s civilian populations; however, this reality was understood as a necessary by-product of their wartime policies.
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Introduction

Was it all a dream? So I ask myself in the wide free security of my own dear country. Were they real, those years of indefinite apprehension, when in very exasperation at the deadly quiet, we fairly shrieked for something to go off with a bang, even if we ourselves should be annihilated in the crash! Anything, we cried, anything but the menacing monotony. Always before us, to the West, the smiling treacherous blue sea, changed by the blockade from a way for us to get out to a means to keep us in.¹

In the aftermath of the Great War, Frederick James Bliss penned an account of what he and his colleagues at Syrian Protestant College in Beirut had witnessed during the period from late 1914 to 1919. The opening sentences of his post-war account, quoted above, recall the looming presence of Allied warships that, for the better part of the war, were charged with blockading the coast of Ottoman Syria.² His astute reference to the blockade highlights the sense of enclosure and isolation that the blockading fleet inspired. The purpose of this thesis is to interrogate and analyze how Allied policies in the Eastern Mediterranean evolved over the first several years of the war and to periodize and contextualize the evolution of Allied policies, which culminated in the declaration of an official blockade on August 25, 1915. In doing so, this thesis assesses, first, the extent to which the Allied powers used economic warfare against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War to the detriment of the empire’s civilian population, and second, it analyzes how Ottoman authorities attempted to secure and control their Mediterranean coast in light of the Allied blockade.

Over the course of the First World War between 350,000 and 500,000 of the inhabitants of Ottoman Syria died, the vast majority falling victim to famine and disease. Considering the pre-war population of the region was about 4 million, the death toll ranges between 8.75 and 12.5 percent of the population. Beirut and Mount Lebanon were particularly hard hit by the

¹ Frederick James Bliss, "Retrospect: 1914-1919," AUB Archives, Howard Bliss Papers, AA: 2.3.2.18.3.
² I use Ottoman Syria to refer to the geographic region that encompasses modern day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
wartime famine with mortality rates as high as 50% in some areas.\textsuperscript{3} Explanations for the catastrophic loss of human life during the war abound. Frederick Bliss’ account, littered with apocalyptic images of starvation and destitution, points out that the catastrophic level of civilian suffering was made possible by a constellation of factors. Bliss credits “the blockade by sea; the commandeering of transportation facilities for military purposes by land; the breaking down of alleged attempts at government food regulation; the depreciation of currency; profiteering…[and] a swarm of locusts which darkened the land from the South,” with producing and sustaining a famine that “reduced the population of the Lebanon, for example, by one-third, and the lowest calculation.”\textsuperscript{4}

Contemporary studies on the famine have similarly noted that a “perfect storm” of factors played a role in producing and sustaining famine throughout the war years. While scholars like Schilcher, Thompson, and Tanielian have produced nuanced, well-researched studies on the famine which evaluate these causes; narratives that levy blame exclusively on Ottoman authorities who, it has been argued, deliberately starved the population of Syria to rid the empire of a population viewed as having questionable loyalty, still carry a level of currency.\textsuperscript{5}

Historiography of a very different bent pinpoints Allied policy in the Eastern Mediterranean,


\textsuperscript{4} Frederick James Bliss, “Retrospect: 1914-1919,” AUB Archives, Howard Bliss Papers, AA: 2.3.2.18.3.

namely the maintenance of a strict blockade until the bitter end of the war, as a deliberate attempt by the enemies of the Ottoman Empire to produce starvation in Syria, either to push the residents to revolt against the empire or to weaken them in case an Allied invasion took place.\(^6\) Neither of these explanations for the famine is sufficient, as it is evident that a host of factors were responsible for producing and sustaining famine conditions in Syria during the First World War. Thus, my aim in focusing on the blockade is not to argue that it was the only cause of famine and civilian suffering during the war; rather, its role in the famine remains difficult to evaluate because very little research has been done on Allied aims and policies regarding the blockade.

While several monographs have been written on the British economic blockade of Germany during this period, Ottoman and Middle East historians have comparably little secondary scholarship to rely on to understand the blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean. A number of recent studies on the war in the Ottoman Empire’s Arab domains mention the blockade or evaluate its role in producing supply shortages and famine in Syria, but very little work has been done to substantiate how, why, and when the Allies implemented a blockade of the Syrian coast.

One key study on wartime conditions in Syria that includes substantial detail on the blockade is an unpublished PhD dissertation from 1973 by Nicholas Ajay entitled “Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut, 1914-1918: The War Years.” Ajay’s dissertation details material, social, and political conditions in Beirut and Mount Lebanon and assesses how and why things unfolded the way they did during the war. His conclusions are largely based on interviews conducted in Lebanon in the mid 1960s, on diaries and written personal accounts, and on archival material from American University of Beirut (AUB). Ajay’s dissertation is an extremely valuable source for historians of this period because he includes in the appendix unpublished

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\(^6\) Rogan, 291.
personal papers and diaries, difficult to access archival materials, and transcripts from his interviews with individuals who lived through the war that could have just as easily gone unrecorded.

Ajay concludes his study by weighing which factors were most responsible for producing starvation, disease, and hardship in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. He notes the extent to which Ottoman authorities, particularly Cemal Pasha, have been blamed for deliberately inflicting hardship on the Syrian people; however, Ajay dismisses this particular narrative as one that has been exaggerated, partially in light evidence that atrocities were committed against Armenians. Instead, Ajay argues that the realities of total warfare, Ottoman incapacity to sustain its soldiers and civilians for four years of total war, and Syria’s pre-existing economic weaknesses were, together, responsible for the famine and high mortality rate. According to Ajay, the advent of total war was epitomized by the Allied use of blockades, which were the principle tool for perpetrating economic warfare. Ajay argues, and contemporary scholars have echoed, that the Allies deliberately used economic warfare, calculated to produce famine, as a weapon for defeating the Central Powers. Ajay quotes, David Loyd George, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1916 to 1922, who candidly makes this point clear:

In a war of this order, sea power was the key to ultimate victory so long as either policy could manage just to hold their own on land. If we maintained control of the seas without actually breaking on shore, the Central Powers could in the end be starved into surrender… Potential famine was therefore the most powerful weapon in the army of belligerents. As long as Britain kept her rule over the waves, neither she nor her Allies could be beaten by any shortage of food or essential material for waging war… It was a ruthless calculation, but war is organized cruelty… The sum total of the agony inflicted on mankind by war was never as great as it proved to be in the World War of 1914-18.

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Ajay’s dissertation mentions the Allied blockade at a number of points, particularly as it was observed from the Syrian shore. For example, evidence from the diary of Archibald Crawford, whose father was a professor at Syrian Protestant College during the war, included in Ajay’s appendix, substantiates archival documents from British, French, and American archives on the arrival and departure of ships from the port of Beirut for part of the war. Ajay’s coverage of the blockade, while mostly accurate, is drawn almost exclusively from memoirs, diaries, and newspapers, leaving a substantial body of sources untapped.

Linda Schilcher’s pioneering study, “Famine in Syria, 1915-1918,” was one of the first contemporary studies to second Ajay’s acknowledgment of the role of the Entente blockade in producing the wartime famine in Syria. Schilcher, like Ajay, argues that there were several culpable parties: Ottoman authorities who failed to remedy glaring civilian food supply issues, the Allied Powers who used the blockade as a tool of war, and finally German and Austrian officials in Syria who likewise failed to remedy the situation. It is noteworthy that many of Schilcher’s sources are German and the she identifies German and Austrian officials as failing to respond to the famine, as their role in the crisis, or rather their neglect of the crisis, is often unaccounted for. In addition to the presence of Central Power advisors on land in Syria, the presence and role of German U-boats in the Mediterranean during the war deserves scholarly attention, particularly as it relates to the Allied blockade and attempts to send humanitarian relief to the Syrian coast in late 1916. These topics will be addressed in chapter three of this thesis.

In her book Colonial Citizens, Elizabeth Thompson dedicates a chapter to the famine in Syria, likewise noting the role of the Allied blockade in producing and sustaining extreme shortages. Thompson also makes an initial attempt to argue that the Allies “knowingly used

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9 Diary of Archibald Crawford in Ajay, Appendix, 124-150.
10 Schilcher, 254.
famine as a weapon of war,” by noting the fact that both French and British authorities had knowledge of the severity of the famine, and yet were unabated in applying the blockade of Syria over the latter period of the war.\textsuperscript{11} Thompson also notes that French and British war planners differed in their opinions on the usefulness of the blockade for achieving Allied goals. Thompson explains that the British had experienced success in bargaining with the Sharif of Mecca to revolt against the Ottomans in exchange for lifting the blockade of the Red Sea, which encouraged them that blockading the Syrian coast might produce the same opportunity for manipulation. On the other hand, several documents signify French reticence to continue the blockade of the Syrian coast in light of evidence of the famine, noting that distributing food aid would win Entente support more effectively than starvation.\textsuperscript{12}

Melanie Tanielian’s dissertation similarly relies on the work done by Schilcher and Thompson, further commenting on the Allied blockade noting that it “successfully shut down all supply lines to the coastal region of Greater Syria and the Arabian Peninsula, resulting in skyrocketing prices.”\textsuperscript{13} Tanielian is careful to note that while the blockade was a contributing factor to the Syrian famine, the Ottoman government “employed its own ‘blockade’ in order to inflict an economic blow against the Entente powers.”\textsuperscript{14} The Ottoman “blockade” involved stopping payments on foreign debts, abrogating its capitulations, and increasing control of its coasts by prohibiting enemy ships from landing at Ottoman ports.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, Tanielian suggests that residents of mutasarrif of Mount Lebanon, which had been independently governed before the war, interpreted their lack of supplies as resulting from two blockades: first, the Allied blockade from the sea, and second, the blockade of supplies coming from Syria which

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Thompson1} Thompson, 21.
\bibitem{Thompson2} Thompson, pg. 22. See also Tanielian, 29.
\bibitem{Tanielian1} Tanielian, "The War of Famine," 29-30.
\bibitem{Tanielian2} Tanielian, "The War of Famine," 30.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., 30-33
\end{thebibliography}
were diverted for military need. Tanielian’s conclusions regarding the causes of the famine are worth quoting at length because her work is reflective of the state of literature on the famine and the blockade. She concludes:

It is clear that long-term historical developments joined the immediate necessities of war to cause mass starvation and death. Famines do not occur according to a universal pattern, but rather are the outcome of complex social, economic and political processes that are historically specific…The combined factors of an Entente and Ottoman blockade, wartime profiteering, bad harvests and recurrent devastating locust plagues led to an increasing shortage of food and/or purchasing power that led directly to excess mortality from starvation or hunger induced disease.

My work in this thesis follows, largely, from what has been written on the famine in Syria during the First World War because these are the works that have most critically engaged with Allied and Ottoman policies regarding the blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean. The volume of general studies being published on World War I in the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire has noticeably picked up over the last several years, coinciding with the centennial of the war’s outbreak. Three monographs—Kristian Coates Ulrichsen’s *The First World War* in the Middle East, Leila Fawaz’s *Land of Aching Hearts*, Eugene Rogan’s *The Fall of the Ottomans*—were published just in the time since I began my own research. Still, despite this explosion in published works on the war in the Middle East, there are still topics, like the blockade, which have not been addressed in substantial detail.

Furthermore, as Tanielian aptly notes, there is certainly a need to shift the historiographical focus of the war away “from being merely a political diplomatic event, toward it being understood as a dynamic social, economic and political process that left its mark on the composition and structure of society and on the psyche of the individual.”

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16 Ibid., 37.
17 Ibid., 48.
societies in the Middle East have been shaped and reshaped by their exposure to, and participation in, war-making and war preparation, and did not examine wars as a process of social change." \(^{19}\) While these assessments of the state of the field are true, it is also important to continue pushing forward the body of knowledge on all aspects of the war, keeping in mind the interconnectedness of the military and civilian experience during war. This thesis, while situated within the paradigms of diplomatic and military history, rests on the assumption that the First World War was a “dynamic social, economic and political process.” My aim is to critically examine the evolution of the Allied blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean in order to add dimension and depth to an aspect of the war that was both militarily significant and had a profound impacted daily civilian life throughout the war.

**Scope**

My research narrows in on the first two and a half years of the war to piece together some of the policies and circumstances which dictated Allied naval operations in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as Ottoman security policies toward their Mediterranean coast. I have chosen a narrow geographic scope and short time period in order tell a story that is detailed and nuanced, rather than one that is comprehensive. While a comprehensive study of the Allied blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean is certainly needed, this study is simply a step in that direction.

When the French ship *Jeanne d'Arc* came ashore under a flag of truce on August 25, 1915 to officially declare its blockade of the Syrian coast, the zone declared under blockade began, in the north, near the intersection of the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, and ended in the south at

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the Egyptian frontier. This thesis, when referring to the Allied blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean, uses those same boundaries. More specifically, however, my analysis focuses on Ottoman Syria, where the famine was particularly hard-hitting, a slightly smaller geographical region within the blockaded zone which begins at the northern boundary of the Vilayet of Beirut, and ends at the southern boundary of the Sanjak of Jerusalem. This study straddles the sea and the coast, transcending typical theater demarcations to tell two intertwined stories: one from the perspective of the sea, and another from the land looking out toward “the smiling treacherous blue sea.”

For the Ottoman Empire, war was initiated on October 29, 1914 when the Ottoman naval fleet attacked several Russian ports on the Black Sea, prompting the Allied powers to initiate hostilities. Four years and one day later, on October 30, 1918, representatives of Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire signed the Armistice of Mudros, officially ending hostilities between the two nations, and on November 13, 1918 an Allied fleet of forty-two vessels steamed toward Istanbul to occupy the empire’s capitol. This study is bookended by a different set of dates, however. Chapter one focuses on the prelude to the First World War, examining the political-economic landscape of Ottoman Syria from the mid-nineteenth century until the eve of the war, including the period between the Ottoman announcement of mobilization on August 2, 1914, and its official entry into the war several months later. Chapters two and three cover the period between August 1914 and the American entry into the war in April 1917. I have chosen this chronological scope for two reasons. First, the bulk of my primary sources have been gleaned from the U.S. National Archives’ consular correspondence files which cover the period that the U.S. remained neutral, and thus had diplomatic representatives stationed throughout the Ottoman

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20 “Declaration de Blocus,” NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), Vol. 377.
21 Rogan, 381-383.
Empire. Second, I have chosen to cover a period where Allied policy was still evolving into a strict blockade. The last ships to permeate the blockade did so in December 1915, however, attempts were made to enter the blockaded zone, notably by the United States, until April 1917.

Sources

The bulk of my research for this project was done at two archives: The National Archives outside London (TNA) and the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) both in Washington D.C. and College Park, Maryland. Additionally, I also visited the archives at American University of Beirut for a short period of time to access the Howard Bliss Papers. The majority of the sources I have consulted are in English, and almost all of them are written from the perspective of British, French, and American officials, save for a few Ottoman documents. Together, these sources tell one version of the events that took place during the First World War; one that is informed by European and Western prejudices of the Ottoman Empire and its people. Nonetheless, as the focus of this thesis is Allied policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, these sources are critical to the story.

I have left out, to a large degree, the French perspective on Allied policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. I am aware that this is a significant gap because, after all, the French Navy was charged with spearheading the blockade of Syria once it was officially declared in August 1915; however, the records and correspondence of the British Admiralty shed light on the French position so their role is not completely overlooked in this thesis. In a future project I hope to consult French archival sources on the blockade, but it is my initial impression that policies regarding the blockade originated in London more often than in Paris. Similarly, I have not consulted Arabic sources on the blockade, even though the work of other scholars indicates that
they do exist. Najwa al-Qattan’s recent work, for example, uses poetry, literature, and memoirs in Arabic to evaluate how local observers, as well as Syrians living outside the Ottoman Empire at the time of the war, interpreted and remembered the war. These gaps necessitate future research that can add to and expand upon my own conclusions regarding the blockade.

Layout

Chapter one of this thesis acts as a prelude to subsequent chapters by laying the groundwork for understanding the impact of the blockade. The several decades leading up to the First World War, marked by dramatic commercial and economic changes throughout Ottoman Syria, as well as the first months of mobilization provide the backdrop for understanding why the Allies could anticipate that a blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean would help accelerate the defeat of the Central Powers. Chapter two narrows in on the evolution of Allied policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, culminating in the declaration of an official blockade in August 1915. At the end of chapter two I discern why August 1915 seemed the right moment to make the blockade official and whether this official declaration marked a turning point in Allied policy in the Mediterranean. In chapter three I look specifically at the role of the United States in the Eastern Mediterranean over the period from the beginning of mobilization until the U.S.’s entry into the war in April 1917. The U.S.’s involvement as a neutral humanitarian actor necessitated cooperating with both the Allied blockading fleet and Ottoman authorities in Syrian port cities. This complicated dynamic, which involved American naval ships traversing the blockaded zone between August and December 1915, elucidates some of the factors which determined Allied and Ottoman policies. Furthermore, the fact that American ships were barred from entering the

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22 See Najwa al-Qattan, “An Army of Beggars and Beasts: The Civilians’ War in Syria and Lebanon” (presentation, The Gingko Library Conference, London, December 6-7). This presentation is available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HWx2ixYw7k
blockaded zone after December 1915, despite attempts to do so under the banner of humanitarian aid, indicates that an important shift took place in late 1915 regarding blockade. Finally, in the conclusion of this thesis I will evaluate the role of the blockade over the final period of the war: from April 1917 until October 1918. I will also examine reports from the Ottoman Empire over the course of the war that indicated the extent of civilian suffering, furthering a claim that others have made; namely, that the blockade was maintained until the very end of the war despite knowledge of the famine.

The intervention this thesis aims to make is simple: I argue that the blockade of the Syrian coast was not a singular policy that emerged at the beginning of the war and remained constant, but rather, that it evolved over the first several years of the war in response to changing political and military circumstances. By December 1915 the Allied blockade was essentially fixed, and from that period on was maintained with ferocity until the end of the war, producing famine and civilian suffering, as was its objective.
I. The Prelude to the First World War

Between March 1911 and September 1912, long before the opening shots of the First World War, a subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), an ad hoc organization within the British government responsible for undertaking research on military strategy, convened to discuss the question of economic warfare should Great Britain enter a war against Germany. The culmination of the subcommittee, which was made up of senior level civil servants from various government departments, was a 475-page document entitled “Trading with the Enemy.” As Nicholas Lambert has detailed in his book Planning Armageddon, the recommendations outlined in “Trading with the Enemy” bore the mark of key figures in the Admiralty who advocated for the adoption of an aggressive economic strategy, amounting to a strict blockade, against Germany and its allies in the event of war.23 The final report was clear: “the general policy at the outset of war with Germany should be to prohibit all trade with the enemy in goods, wares, and merchandise.” Lambert notes that after the committee’s meetings it was widely believed that a major European war would cause a collapse of credit and would lead to a world-wide economic depression. Lambert notes, “The question for the political executive was not whether the strategy should be implemented but rather, in light of the attendant high levels of collateral damage, how vigorously.”24

The collateral damage referred to above included first, potential damage to Great Britain’s reputation as a result of pursuing this policy, which was understood to be somewhat controversial in terms of adhering to customary international law (an issue that will be dealt with in later chapters). Second, and most importantly, in potentially pursuing all-out economic

24 Ibid., 179. Lambert is quoting the opening paragraph of “Supplies in Time of War: Trade in General,” 1913, TNA, CAB 17/32.
warfare against Germany and its allies, Great Britain was risking its own economic stability, and, as a consequence, the stability of the entire world economy, which rested upon an intricate and interdependent network of finance, communication, and transportation, all likely to fold under the pressure of a great war.

While it cannot be assumed that the Ottoman Empire or the “Eastern Question” figured into the final report of the subcommittee on “Trading with the Enemy” in 1912, as Germany did not solidify its alliance with the Ottoman Empire until many months later, “Trading with the Enemy” was explicit in detailing the economic fallout that would accompany a great European war. Central, therefore, to the potential pursuance of economic warfare against Germany and its allies was the belief that Great Britain could survive an engineered economic crisis, while Germany and its allies would surely buckle under the pressure. Germany’s military strategy at the outset of the First World War, on the other hand, banked on the success of a swift military campaign that ended “long before economic factors could be brought into play.”

This chapter takes a step back from October 29, 1914, when the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War, and lays the groundwork for understanding why the kinds of economic policies the Allies implemented during the First World War were so crippling in Ottoman Syria. The second half of this chapter focuses on the period from the announcement of Ottoman mobilization on August 2, 1914, to the Ottoman Empire’s entry into the war in late October 1914. During this window of three months, the extent of Ottoman economic vulnerability became increasingly obvious, particularly in the commercial ports along the Eastern Mediterranean.

In late summer 1914, as war rumbled in Europe, the first signs of an impending international crisis swept into the Ottoman Empire via its port cities. Over the course of the nineteenth century cities like Jaffa, Beirut, and Tripoli had transformed into incubators of a distinctly European brand of modernity which depended heavily on international trade and foreign capital. Foreign trade had increased by more than tenfold between 1820 and 1914, and was driven by European steamship traffic which gradually reoriented Ottoman ports away from markets in Asia and Africa and toward ports like Liverpool, Marseilles, and Trieste. The fingerprints of industrial Europe were all over Syria’s major port cities owing to the fact that most of the infrastructure that made these commercial hubs function—wide ports, modern roads, telegraphs, and railroads—had largely been built by European firms and depended on imported fuel to operate on a daily basis. European-financed infrastructure projects, like the construction of the Beirut-Damascus railway in 1859 and the expansion of the port of Beirut which was completed in 1894, were some of the first examples of direct foreign investment in the Ottoman Empire. Together, these two projects, as well as a number of other French railroad expansion ventures, amounted to about 168.3 million francs in infrastructure investment.

The introduction of steamship traffic to the Mediterranean in the 1830s encouraged a steady increase in the number of goods exported from Syrian ports such as raw silk, citrus fruits, olives, sesame seeds, and soap. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, as the number of foreign steamship companies calling at Syrian ports increased, there emerged a

27. Fawaz, Land of Aching Hearts, 10-11.
29. Fawaz, Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth Century Beirut, 76.
tendency to mass-produce goods that would fare well in European markets, transforming Syria and Mesopotamia into cash-crop growing economies.\textsuperscript{31} Raw silk, for example, exceeded all other exports from Beirut by 1856, accounting for one fourth of the total value of exports that year. By the turn of the century, as much as 60% of the cultivatable area of Mount Lebanon and the coastal areas surrounding Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, and Acre was taken up by mulberry trees.\textsuperscript{32} Similarly, Oranges made up nearly forty percent of the exports from the port of Jaffa in 1913.\textsuperscript{33}

Despite demand for a few key raw materials, the Ottoman Empire maintained a significant trade deficit into the twentieth century. While the value of exports from the port of Beirut increased by only 36% between 1841 and 1910, the value of imports increased by about 270% over the same period.\textsuperscript{34} On the eve of World War I the value of exports from Beirut was $3,272,471 and chiefly consisted of wool, cotton lace, apricot paste, wheat, barley, and raw silk, whereas the value of imports was $18,753,137 and consisted mainly of items like coal, building materials, wheat, petroleum, and cotton goods.\textsuperscript{35}

Foreign merchants were particularly successful in opening up Ottoman markets to European goods because of capitulations between the Ottoman Empire and various European states. France was granted special economic privileges in the Ottoman Empire as early as the sixteenth century, making it the first European state to secure capitulations. By as early as the seventeenth century a number of other European states, including Italy and Great Britain, had negotiated similar arrangements. In the modern period, commercial arrangements became increasingly important as they opened the doors of the empire for European investment and set

\textsuperscript{31} Fawaz, \textit{Land of Aching Hearts}, 13.
\textsuperscript{32} Fawaz, \textit{Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth Century Beirut}, 63.
\textsuperscript{33} “Commerce and Industry: Jerusalem Consular District, 1914,” NARA, RG 84 (Turkey) Vol. 358.
\textsuperscript{34} Fawaz, \textit{Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth Century Beirut}, 62-63.
\textsuperscript{35} “Trade and Industries of Syria,” \textit{Daily Consular and Trade Reports}, September 3, 1914, NARA, RG84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
regular customs on imports and exports. On the whole, customs duties for European merchants were much lower than customs paid by local merchants, giving foreigners a noticeable advantage over locals. These commercial arrangements provided foreign merchants with incentive to trade in the Ottoman Empire; however, over time these arrangements privileged foreign trade at the expense of local merchants. Great Britain led the way in imports to both Syria and the Ottoman Empire as a whole. In 1912, for example, 35.3% of imports to Syria and over 20% of imports into the whole Ottoman Empire were from Great Britain. Austria, Germany, France, and Russia were also major trading partners.

Chief among the products imported to Syrian ports were European textiles, manufactured goods, building materials, fuel, and foodstuffs. Despite the fact that parts of the Ottoman Empire were major producers of wheat, barley, and other agricultural goods, at least two of the empire’s most bustling urban centers, Beirut and Istanbul, imported agricultural items because domestic producers could not compete with lower priced goods arriving via the sea. Mount Lebanon had historically relied on grain imports from other parts of Syria because local agricultural production was not enough to “satisfy the needs of the inhabitants,” however by the latter half of the nineteenth century foodstuff imports, at least for Beirut, were arriving via the Mediterranean rather than coming from the Syrian interior. One American commercial report from the port of Tripoli in 1913 identifies Turkey, Russia, and Cyprus as the major sources of flour, wheat, and barley imports, confirming the apparent favoring of sea trade even for products that originated within the empire. The fact that overland transportation was relatively ill suited for the

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36 Fawaz, Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth Century Beirut, 74.
38 Pamuk, 113.
40 “Commercial Report for the Year Ending 1914,” Tripoli, Syria, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 358.
transportation of foodstuffs to urban areas outside the agrarian hinterland became readily apparent during the lead up to First World War as Syrian port cities were increasingly unable to count on the Mediterranean as their lifeline.

Another signifier of European economic penetration was the increased significance of foreign capital in Ottoman commercial life. During the Crimean War, the Ottoman Empire contracted its very first foreign loans, borrowing £3,000,000 in 1854 and £5,000,000 in 1855, both times from British financial institutions. For lenders, which were either private banks or European governments, there were two major advantages to contracting loans with the Ottoman Empire. First, interest payments on loans were often backed by some of the state’s key revenues, meaning that sources of state revenue were pledged to funnel directly to the lending institutions as a way of guaranteeing regular and reliable interest payments. The 1854 loan, for example, had been backed by Egyptian taxes, one of the state’s most reliable sources of revenue. Second, early on lending countries set the precedent of asserting a degree of control over the way their loans were spent. A Franco-British commission was set up alongside the contracting of the 1855 loan, for example, and given “control of expenditures and the verification of treasury accounts.” In this way, lending countries, and in particular France and Britain, the suppliers of most of the empire’s foreign loans, were increasingly able to assert control over Ottoman finances.

The promulgation of the Reform Decree (İslahat Fermanı) of 1856, which explicitly called for financial reforms following the example of Europe, marked another turning point toward European financial integration. Responding to this call for reform, in 1856 a private

42 Ibid., 435.
43 Ibid., 433.
British bank calling itself the Ottoman Bank was established. While originally backed only by British capital, the Sublime Porte agreed to name the Ottoman Bank the official state bank if French capital was added to supplement the bank’s capital base. With this safeguard against unchecked British control over the state bank, the Imperial Ottoman Bank (Banque Impériale Ottomane) was born.\(^{44}\) Hanioğlu notes, “by 1875, the bank played such a central role in Ottoman debt management that the sultan granted it the right to control the budget and expenditures of the state,” essentially handing over control of the empire’s treasury to a foreign syndicate.\(^{45}\)

The fact that a foreign bank was the state’s preferred financial institution reassured European lenders to the extent that several new loan contracts were negotiated through the Imperial Ottoman Bank between 1862 and 1865. Increasingly, however, the Ottoman state’s borrowing practices became cyclical and self-sustaining, as new loans were used to finance the budget deficit and to pay off previous loans. By 1874, the annual interest payments on foreign debt amounted to £12,000,000, 55% of the state’s total budget.\(^{46}\) By 1875 the Ottoman government could no longer sustain its debt payments and defaulted unilaterally on all foreign loans.\(^{47}\) In 1881 the Administration of the Ottoman Public Debt was formed at the behest of several foreign creditors and governments. As part of this arrangement, the Ottoman government surrendered several sources of state revenue, which together amounted to about 20% of the state’s total revenue, in order to settle outstanding debt.\(^{48}\) The establishment of the Administration of the Ottoman Public Debt marked a final blow to Ottoman sovereignty over its own fiscal matters.

\(^{44}\) Eldem, 437.
\(^{45}\) Hanioğlu, 91.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., 439.
\(^{47}\) Hanioğlu, 92.
\(^{48}\) Eldem, 441-442.
The model of economic modernization that the Ottoman Empire followed, one that was driven and financed by industrial Europe, is certainly not unique. The Eastern Mediterranean region was one site among many that experienced rapid integration in the world economy, syncing these once-“semiperipheral” locations into an international network that was dynamic and interdependent. This type of globalization made newly integrated commercial hubs like Ottoman Beirut “vulnerable to economic fluxes such as commodity production and price fluctuations, integrated their regional labor markets into a global market, and made them dependent on foreign investments and loans.”

Alongside these dramatic economic shifts, new venues for expressing and circulating ideas, such as newspapers and theaters, emerged as important spaces for contesting dominant political, economic, and social trends. Unsurprisingly, concern over foreign influence in the empire and foreign economic and political penetration were among the most widely discussed themes in public discourse around the turn of the century. While some within intellectual and bureaucratic circles advocated for an open economic model which relied on trade and agricultural development, others were adamant on an economic strategy that favored protectionism and industrialization, which would eliminate some dependence on foreign manufacturing. The Ottoman government, as Pamuk points out, however, had “already committed itself to the free trade treaties and concessionary regime that gave extraterritorial privileges to foreign companies and citizens in economic and legal affairs.” Furthermore, the years leading up to the First World War were fraught with military challenges to Ottoman territory, beginning with the loss of Libya in 1911, and immediately followed by the Balkan

50 Khuri-Makdisi, 7.
51 Pamuk, 119.
Wars of 1912-1913. As a result of these disastrous military performances, the Ottoman government doubled its military budget and focused on modernizing its military, which meant that, to a large degree, economic reforms were put on the back burner until the Ottoman entry in World War I.\footnote{An exception to this was legislation passed in 1913 which encouraged domestic industry. Pamuk, 116 and 119.}

The international financial crisis that emerged in the summer of 1914, as Europe neared the brink of war, hit Ottoman cities just as it did London and Paris. As Europe stepped into the abyss of World War I, key Ottoman port cities inched close to economic collapse, prompting one American consular agent in Tripoli, Syria, to observe that the first months of war in Europe had “a paralyzing effect on trade to and from [Tripoli] as over 90 percent of all imports entering this port come from countries which are now at war with one another.”\footnote{“Commercial Report for the Year Ending 1914,” Tripoli, Syria, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 358.} Within this context of severe economic strain, came the announcement of Ottoman mobilization on August 2, 1914, just one day after Germany declared war on Russia. A number of important concerns related to mobilization—including the threat of imminent war, financial instability, the lack of supplies and food for troops, and the security of towns where large congregations of troops were being sent—were raised in letters and telegrams exchanged between various foreign diplomats. In the following section I will detail these topics from the perspective of foreign observers, particularly those in Ottoman Syria, as a way of capturing the anxiety that was pervasive between August and late early November 1914. This period has been neglected in most studies of the war in the Ottoman Empire because the official declaration of war did not come until November 11, 1914. Nonetheless, the prelude to war, particularly as it was experienced outside Istanbul, is an important period of study for understanding how quickly the economic landscape of coastal Syria changed with the onset of war in Europe. A number of factors worked in tandem to create
severe economic instability prior to any hostilities that involved the Ottoman Empire, which sowed the seeds for an even greater level of economic disaster once the Allies imposed a blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Conscription

Universal male conscription had, in theory, been a policy of the Ottoman state since the tanzimat reforms (1839-1876), but, in practice, several types of military service exemption stood in the way of truly universal conscription. For example, non-Muslim citizens were exempt from service if they could afford the exemption fee (bedel), while Muslim men were exempt if they were enrolled in school (medresa), if they lived in Istanbul or the Hijaz province, or if they were the sole breadwinner for their family (muîn), essentially limiting the pool of conscripts to Anatolian peasants.\(^\text{54}\) In 1909 the Ottoman conscription law was changed to eliminate some of these exemptions for non-Muslims, in theory making the army more inclusive of religious and ethnic minorities, however, an important exemption that remained was the muîn exemption.\(^\text{55}\) Despite these reforms, it still remained possible to evade military service as it was impossible for the state to enforce universal conscription to the letter of the law.\(^\text{56}\)

New military leadership was appointed in 1913, following the Balkan Wars, which led to an overall restructuring of the armed forces, notably occurring under the tutelage of German military advisors.\(^\text{57}\) The new military structure required a huge increase in troop levels, leading to the passage of a new Law of Military Obligation in May 1914 which aimed to operationalize mass mobilization and improve training while finally doing away with the remaining military


\(^{55}\) Beşikçi, 96-97.

\(^{56}\) Beşikçi, 118.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 122.
exemptions. In the wake of Ottoman defeats in the Balkan Wars, Hafız Hakkı Bey, a CUP officer and the future commander of the Ottoman Third Army commented on exemptions like muîn claiming, “It is mostly because of such leniencies that seven million people of the Balkans could defeat twenty-five million Ottomans.”

Just three months after the passage of the Law of Military Obligation, on August 2, 1914, Ottoman mobilization was announced as a prelude to the empire’s involvement in the First World War. At the time of the announcement, men between the ages of 21 and 23 were already under arms. The orders for mobilization required men between the ages of 20 and 45 to report for as active reserve and territorial reserve, depending on their age. Later in the war, the age range for service was expanded to include men as young as 18 and as old as 50. The sheer size and ambition of the Ottoman conscription policy during the First World War, and the impact it had on so many families who lost loved ones, occupies a huge place in the collective memory of the war, as detailed in the scholarship of Najwa al-Qattan. While the Ottoman government faced obstacles in realizing its goal to mobilize an army on par with those in Europe, in total as many as 2.8 million men were mobilized throughout the course of the war.

The first days of mobilization, at least in Jaffa, were “perfectly quiet” according to American Consul Jacob Hardegg who wrote to Otis Glazebrook, the American Consul at Jerusalem, on August 4, reporting that mobilization had begun with the collection of soldiers and horses. Within days, however, the arriving Ottoman recruiters were reportedly disrupting the

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59 Akın, 17-18.
60 Beşikçi, 108.
62 Pamuk, 118.
residents of Jaffa and Hardegg asked that 200 soldiers be sent from Jerusalem to help control the “disturbances.” As in Jaffa, elsewhere throughout Syria an initial calm was very quickly replaced by disorder and anxiety as the reality of mobilization sunk in and shock waves of the European war began to ripple throughout the Ottoman Empire.

On the topic of mobilization, Bayard Dodge, the son of an American philanthropist, Cleveland Dodge and later the president of Syrian Protestant College, remarked in a confidential report to the American Red Cross: “The Turkish army has been enlisted upon a scale never before witnessed in this country. The Minister of War has become acquainted with German methods and has aimed to form a Turkish Army in the same way that the German organization is formed. In theory this is splendid, but in practice this is terrible.”64 According to Dodge, serious lack of funds and poor planning doomed the mobilization effort. In his memoir, American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau seconded Dodge’s assessment that German methods were behind Ottoman mobilization, noting incorrectly that the official call for mobilization had come from Berlin, not Istanbul.65 Morgenthau had the benefit of hindsight, particularly in regard to Germany’s involvement in mobilization, in that his memoir was penned and published near the end of the war. Nonetheless, for these two American observers, the mobilization effort appeared reckless because the Ottoman Empire simply did not have the capacity to transport, feed, and clothe the massive number of men it was calling to arms. Morgenthau later recalled asking Minister of War Enver Pasha why he had employed such a reckless and disastrous mobilization policy. According to Morgenthau, “He [Enver Pasha] was much impressed by his success in

63 Ibid.
65 Henry Morgenthau, Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, [1918] 2003), 44.
raising a large army with practically no money—something, he boasted, which no other nation had ever done before.”

Bayard Dodge’s report to the American Red Cross similarly captured the problems associated with feeding and clothing conscripted soldiers. Dodge reported:

The other day, a good example of what suffering can be caused by lack of warm uniforms occurred. Several companies of soldiers were ordered to march by night across the high mountain pass between Zahle and Shwier… It was very cold and many of the solders had thin uniforms. A large number had no shoes and only thin caps on their heads. The suffering which occurred on the march was unspeakable. Although an efficient doctor was along, his utmost efforts failed to save the lives of about 85 men who dropped dead by the way or died as a result of the march.  

Dodge also reported that lack of food was an even more pressing matter. According to Dodge, the government was making an effort to procure food for soldiers, but “lack of organization caused inefficiency and a corresponding suffering all along the line.”

Ottoman Requisitioning

Closely related to the topic of conscription, and hinted at above in Dodge’s report on government efforts to procure food for soldiers, was requisitioning, which began several days after mobilization was announced. Individuals, both Ottoman subjects and citizens of foreign countries, as well as private businesses were targets of requisitioning. Requisitioning caused great stress to foreign consuls because there was an assumption that Ottoman authorities were targeting foreign subjects with a particular enthusiasm. On this topic Fontana remarked:

On August 10th requisition began, and has been carried on with the greatest rigor on Foreign Subjects—especially British—and Ottoman Subjects also. The country has been stripped of horses, mules, carts, and, in a great measure of food stores, and great mismanagements and waste have marked the ruthless and despotic requisition. More

66 Morgenthau, 46.
68 Ibid.
horses have been seized than could be fed, nor does there seem any probability of the
great food supplies collected being so handled as to suffice for the needs of the regular
troops for any length of time.\textsuperscript{69}

Similarly, an American Jew living in Saffed, Palestine wrote to Consul Hollis on August 18,
exasperatingly reporting, “The Turkish Government here started to take an hold on mules and
horses!”\textsuperscript{70} Talha Çiçek has noted that the Egyptian expedition fueled particularly harsh
requisitioning in Syria, even at the early date, months before the Ottoman Empire officially
entered the war. Çiçek argues, “The Ottoman central government and its governor general in
Syria, Cemal Pasha, attributed vital importance to the conquest of Egypt, and, therefore, all
human and material sources of Syria were mobilized for the realization of this goal with the
beginning of the war in European theaters.”\textsuperscript{71} Çiçek has also noted that a prevailing assumption
within the Ottoman administration was that the war would be short, which helps to further
explain the intensity and recklessness behind Ottoman mobilization and requisitioning.\textsuperscript{72}

Ambassador Morgenthau’s reflections on Ottoman requisitioning similarly convey the
sense of urgency and carelessness behind this policy which he called, “a wholesale looting of the
civilian population.”\textsuperscript{73} On the requisitioning of animals Morgenthau notes, “The Turks took all
the horses, mules, camels, sheep, cows, and other beasts that they could lay their hands on; Enver
[Pasha] told me they had gathered 150,000 animals. They did it most unintelligently, making no
provision for the continuance of the species; thus they would leave only two cows or two mares
in many of the villages.”\textsuperscript{74} Because railroads were used almost exclusively for military use
during the war, the requisitioning of the a great portion of pack animals from villages all over

\textsuperscript{69} B. A. Fontana to Mallet, August 31, 1914, TNA, FO 195/2400.
\textsuperscript{70} Joe Grinfeld to Consul General Hollis, August 18, 1914, NARA, RG 84, 350/14/10/1-2, vol. 182.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Morgenthau, 45.
\textsuperscript{74} Morgenthau, 45.
Syria was disastrous in terms of eliminating one of the only available means of transportation between villages and, later in the war, hindered food stuffs from being transported from the interior to coastal areas.\(^75\)

According to some reports, Ottoman authorities requisitioned goods directly from ports, a fact confirmed by a letter from a Mr. Beaumont to the British Admiralty which reported:

> Requisitions are causing great hardship to natives and foreigners who have not been exempted and are producing disastrous effect on economic life in the country. Measures include commandeering of cargos of grain and rice while still in lighters and not delivered to consignee. This has not been stopped and it threatens to prevent any ships calling here when Constantinople would in a few days be reduced to starvation. Severity of requisitioning [is] due to the fact that Government [is] absolutely without funds.\(^76\)

Likewise, a telegram from Consul General Hollis to U.S. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan seconds the fact that requisitioning policies were affecting commerce in Beirut. Hollis reported: “No merchants will attempt to import goods; for should any goods be imported, the merchant in the first place would not be able to find the cash to pay for them; and if he did manage to pay for them and get delivery from the customs, they might be immediately snatched away from him by the commandeering officials.”\(^77\) Not only were animals and foodstuffs requisitioned by Ottoman officials, several sources indicate that the army requisitioned manufactured goods like clothing and shoes because the government could not afford to provide troops with uniforms.

In his report to the American Red Cross, Dodge reported that conscripted soldiers had to commandeer material from local stores to put together make-shift uniforms and notes that the government had not adequately planned the feeding of soldiers and many had, as a result, been

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\(^75\) McGilvary, 35.
\(^76\) Mr. Beaumont to Admiralty, August 9, 1914, TNA, ADM137, no. 499, p. 441-442
\(^77\) Hollis to Secretary of State, September 1, 1914, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
reduced to begging. Morgenthau similarly recalled, “They [Ottoman officials] would enter a retail shop, take practically all the merchandise on the shelves, and give merely a piece of paper in acknowledgment.” A letter from a consular officer in Tripoli to Stanley Hollis indicates that requisitioning practices had frustrated bakers and merchants to the point that local bakers refused to bake, knowing that military authorities would take their product without payment. The letter notes:

For three days the bakers have refused to bake and even the prospect of a hard bed in the city prison has not caused them to relent. All of the young bakers have been taken for the army and the old and infirm men who are left have refused to bake for a government which, they say, has taken their goods away from them and has given nothing in return. When the last batch of drafted men was taken the bakers turned out a supply of bread which was composed mostly of bran and which nobody by a Turkish soldier could eat.

The letter from Tripoli also indicates that the military had “seized oil and petroleum from all of the foreign companies,” noting that these seizures were illegal and that no real compensation was provided.

The harshness of Ottoman requisitioning reflects the fervor with which mobilization for war was undertaken. After just six months of mobilization, the Ottoman government “raised over $50 million through requisitioning,” and had confiscated tens of thousands of animals for military use, on top of uprooting hundreds of thousands of men from their homes and farms. This extraordinary effort to mobilize on par with Europe’s great powers devastated the Ottoman economy, crippling commerce and agricultural production. Despite this reality, requisitioning, on the whole, was geared toward supplying the empire’s massive army and was frantically carried out as a military necessity.

79 Morgenthau, 46.
80 Ira Harris to Stanley Hollis, August 29, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 360.
81 Ibid.
82 Rogan, 59.
The Financial Situation

Accompanying the onset of war in Europe was a huge decline in the level of commercial steamship traffic in the Mediterranean owing to the fact that Great Britain and France, as well as other belligerents, were busy mobilizing their own armies, which entailed shipping soldiers and supplies rather than engaging in commercial trade. Not only did commerce slowly grind to a halt over the course of the fall of 1914, on August 3 the Ottoman central government announced a moratorium on banking transactions. Less than a week after mobilization had begun, all major banks refused to contract new loans or provide credit and stopped selling the remaining gold they had on hand. The foreign banks in Jerusalem, with the exception of the Anglo-Palestine Company, all closed their doors in August 1914. One American consular agent noted:

Money is very tight here and although there is very little in circulation, no doubt much of it is being hoarded away and will remain so until the end of the war. Practically all of the money not in use in business is locked up in the banks, public and private, and although many notes have fallen due none of them are being met. “No money” is the cry everywhere and every one is anxious for what the future will bring.

The bleak financial situation was apparent all along the Mediterranean coast, where commercial activity evaporated and even foreign institutions were faced with cash shortages. Reports from foreign consuls on the worsening financial situation became more frequent over the course of August and September.

On August 6 the American Consul in Jaffa, Jacob Hardegg, wrote to the American Consul in Jerusalem, Otis Glazebrook, raising concerns about the implications of economic strain on Jaffa as a result of the European war. Hardegg reported:

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83 Rogan, 58.
84 Ajay, Ajay, Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut,” 4.
86 Ira Harris to Stanley Holis, August 29, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 360.
It is difficult to say what the future may bring especially if the banks continue not to pay out any money or only very limited amounts. This would paralyze gradually every business, which in return may cause famine amongst the working class. Under such circumstances the situation here might soon become serious and I consider it advisable to apply to the American government to send a war ship to these waters which could comfort everybody, especially our American citizens.\footnote{Jacob Hardegg, US Consul Jaffa, to Otis Glazebrook, US Consul Agent Jerusalem, August 6, 1914, USNA RG84/vol. 014/#410.}

Similarly, on August 31, B.A. Fontana, the British Consul in Aleppo, wrote to Louis Mallet, the British ambassador in Istanbul, remarking:

> The declaration of war by Germany followed immediately by orders for general mobilization in Turkey produced a panic at Aleppo. The moratorium was declared on August 4th, and martial law was proclaimed on August 6th. All business stopped, and the majority of the wealthy and well to do families found themselves with very little cash in hand, merely a few Turkish liras in most cases.\footnote{B. A. Fontana in Aleppo to Sir Louis Mallet, August 31, 1914, TNA, FO 195/2400.}

The writers of these two reports convey the sense of panic that prevailed as a result of cash shortages, particularly since the closure of banks had left even the wealthy without the usual means of obtaining cash.

Consul General Hollis wrote to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan on September 1 reporting that local merchants were not able to pay customs on their imports because of cash shortages. According to Hollis, Ottoman authorities were confiscating some of the goods that local merchants could not pay customs duties on. In his letter to Bryan, Hollis explained:

> With such conditions prevailing throughout the country, and without any signs of any improvement in this deplorable state of affairs, and with the financial condition of this unhappy region rapidly going from bad to worse, no merchants will attempt to import goods; for should any goods be imported, the merchant in the first place would not be able to find the cash to pay for them; and if he did manage to pay for them and get delivery from the customs, they might be immediately snatched away from him by the commandeering officials.\footnote{Hollis to Secretary of State, September 1, 1914, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182}

A commerce report prepared by American consular agent Ira Harris in Tripoli similarly reported that the lack of funds had crippled local merchants and had led to a complete halt in imports by
early September 1914. Harris summarized, “During August and a part of September a small quantity of merchandise was brought into this port in order to fill contracts made previous to July 1. The greater part of these shipments was refused, however, as the consignees were not able to pay for them.”

As early September 5, the American Presbyterian Mission, originally the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) which first began working in Syria in the early nineteenth century, reported to Consul General Hollis in Beirut that it was having difficulty withdrawing money from the Imperial Ottoman Bank as there was an extreme shortage of gold in circulation. Shortly thereafter, the Vacuum Oil Company, an American company, offered to give cash assistance to the American Mission, but subsequently reneged on its offer because the company was also facing cash shortages. Writing to the Secretary of State on September 9, 1914, Consul General Hollis reported, “The financial condition of this country is getting worse every day.”

The fact that commercial steamship traffic plummeted in August 1914 was disastrous not only for commerce in Syrian ports but it also severely restricted the flow of mail to Ottoman ports. While the Ottoman postal service continued to function throughout the war, albeit under the scrutiny of censors, foreign postal services ceased functioning in October 1914. Coal shortages, which prevented regular train service, and Ottoman censorship disrupted regular mail services by as much as seventy five percent according to Ajay.

Limitations to the flow of mail meant that remittances from Syrian émigrés, amounting to as much as 40% of the total income of Mount Lebanon, could not be counted on as a reliable

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90 “Supplement to Commerce Reports: Turkey, Beirut,” pg. 5, September 30, 1915, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
91 Hollis to Secretary of State, September 9, 1914, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
92 Ibid.
93 Jacobson, “A City Living through Crisis: Jerusalem during World War I,” 76.
94 Ajay, Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut,” 294.
Margaret McGilvary, an American missionary living in Beirut during most of the war comments on the mail situation in her memoir recalling: “Still another cause of distress was the fact that, owing to the complete cessation of postal communication with the outside world, a large number of Lebanese were deprived of external sources of income, such as funds sent them by relatives resident in America or in other countries, or bank accounts which they had established abroad.” While certain sources, including Ajay, confirm that the war never completely inhibited the flow of mail from abroad, the fact that McGilvary commented on the importance of remittances indicates the extent to which the war disrupted this critical component of Syria’s economic stability.

Shortages

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the details already elaborated on regarding the financial situation and the effects of Ottoman requisitioning, as early as August 1914 shortages of food and fuel were already impacting daily life in Ottoman Syria. Almost immediately after the war began in Europe, coal was in short supply for two reasons: first, most of the coal imported at Beirut, for example, came from Great Britain and was thus unavailable once Great Britain began mobilizing its own army and resources for war; second, Ottoman authorities requisitioned a large quantity of fuel and moved stores of coal away from the coasts where they feared it could be sold to Allied ships. According to one American commerce report, “In consequence of the lack of

95 Fawaz, Land of Aching Hearts, 29. One American commerce report claims 3 or 4 million dollars per year came from North and South America alone. According to the report, “one bank alone has paid out in 1913 over 2.5 million dollars on account of remittances from South American to this country," Daily Consular and Trade Reports (Syria).
97 “Trade and Industries of Syria,” September 3, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
coal the gas works closed down early in the autumn of 1914 and has not since reopened, while
the railway operation has been restricted to the movement of troops.”

Another consequence of the lack of coal where wheat shortages in coastal areas because
transportation from the interior to the coast, in the form of freight trains, was hindered by
mobilization. Wheat shortages in coastal areas were also the result of orders made by Ottoman
authorities to hold all wheat in the interior rather than store it near the coast where it, like coal,
could be commandeered by the Allies.

Almost immediately after mobilization and requisitioning began, the price of
commodities skyrocketed. The price of kerosene jumped from 20 cents per gallon to 75 cents per
gallon by May 1915, and the price of petroleum jumped to “the almost prohibitive price of $1.80
per gallon” by November 1915. One American consular agent’s report from September indicates
an enormous amount of fluctuation in the price of foodstuffs, which he notes had risen fifty
percent in three days before falling back to their normal prices. The same American consular
agent also reports that the prices of meat and bread had “advanced about twenty per cent” but
showed no signs of falling.

The Abrogation of Capitulations & Foreign Institutions

Early in September 1914 the Ottoman government made the decision to end foreign
concessions and on October 1, 1914, the abolition of capitulations officially took effect. Ottoman
authorities framed the cancellation of capitulations as an economic reform that aimed to level the
playing field for Ottoman citizens and foreigners by obliging foreigners to abide by all Ottoman

98 “Supplement to Commerce Reports: Turkey, Beirut,” pg. 1, 30 September 1915, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
99 Trade and Industries of Syria, September 3, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
laws and pay the same taxes as Ottoman citizens.\textsuperscript{100} Despite this tone, foreign observers reacted to the abrogation of capitulations as an indication that hostile treatment of foreign subjects might follow. According to Morgenthau, “As October 1\textsuperscript{st} approached, the foreigners in Turkey were in a high state of apprehension. The Dardanelles had been closed, shutting them off from Europe, and now they felt that they were to be left the mercy of Turkish courts and Turkish prisons.”\textsuperscript{101} As Ajay has argued, the end of foreign privileges signified a particularly significant shift in the status of Lebanon, which had enjoyed autonomy and foreign protection since 1861. Ajay comments, “The reassertion of the central government’s authority and control over all foreign institutions undermined the ability of these institutions, as well as that of the Beirut consulates, to influence local affairs.”\textsuperscript{102}

Laws applying to foreign institutions were announced and amended throughout the war, reflecting the Ottoman government’s increasing suspicion of foreign subjects. One of the first of these provisions was a temporary law, announced on August 19, 1914, which approved government requisitioning of telegraph equipment from foreign institutions.

All public and private, scientific or foreign schools or institutions are obliged, as soon as mobilization is decreed, to inform local authorities if they own apparatus etc., of wireless telegraphy; that the Government puts under deal such apparatus, and should it deem it necessary, takes delivery of such apparatus in conformity with the law of requisition, and uses it.\textsuperscript{103}

In October, the Sublime Porte prepared new regulations pertaining to foreign religious, charitable, and education institutions. These new regulations included a stipulation that foreign

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\textsuperscript{101} Morgenthau, 81.
\textsuperscript{102} Ajay, \textit{Ajay, Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut},” 12.
\textsuperscript{103} SPC letter, 1 September 1914, AUB Archives, Howard Bliss Papers, AA: 2.3.2.16.6.
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schools without an official firman would be obliged to obtain one or close their doors, and a new regulation that foreign schools were required to teach Ottoman history.\textsuperscript{104}

With the initiation of hostilities in late October 1914, all foreign institutions owned by nationals of belligerent nations were forced to close down, and a number of buildings were taken over for government use, including the Anglo-Ottoman Bank in Jaffa which was taken over on November 4 by Ottoman authorities. Hardegg explained the event in a letter to Glazebrook:

The local government closed and sealed the Anglo Bank this morning. The director of the bank notified me immediately after the Government began its operations at the bank, and I was present during the entire time, and verbally protested against their action, but the Government replied that he is acting according to instructions. The cashier was asked to balance his books and cash, and after this was complied with, the entire cash together with the books were locked and sealed in the safes, they keys of which were taken possession by the Government, against his receipt for same, and his declaration that the Government is responsible for all the contents in the bank’s safes. The Turkish flag was hoisted on the balcony of the bank and soldiers stationed as guards.\textsuperscript{105}

Similarly, according to Antonio de la Cierva Lewita, a Spanish diplomat who lived in Jerusalem through much of the war, Ottoman authorities in Jerusalem occupied the French consulate buildings several days after the Ottoman declaration of war against the Entente powers.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Conclusion}

Dependence on foreign trade, the deep hole of foreign debt that the government had dug for itself, reliance on foreign capital, and the strategic importance of the Mediterranean for daily commercial life were all realities which made the Ottoman Empire and its coastal commercial hubs along the Mediterranean extremely vulnerable to fluxes in the world economy. These vulnerabilities were intensified in the period between August 1914 and late October 1914, as

\textsuperscript{104} Ajay, Ajay, Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut," 10.
\textsuperscript{105} Hardegg to Glazebrook, 4 November 1914, NARA, RG84 (Jaffa), vol. 014.
Ottoman authorities pushed the empire to mobilize at an unprecedented scale and speed. Prior to the outbreak of any hostilities that involved Ottoman troops, it was clear that cities like Beirut, Tripoli, and Jaffa were not equipped to weather a storm the size of a world war. While famine conditions were not apparent until late 1915, beginning with the onset of war in Europe financial strain, supply shortages, and Ottoman requisitioning produced economic hardship in commercial cities along the Syria coast.

Despite the prevalence of narratives which paint Ottoman policies as deliberately afflicting suffering on the empire’s non-Muslim populations, mobilization and requisitioning were experienced across the board and with a particular goal in mind, beyond arbitrary attacks on foreigners and Christians. Particularly in Syria, requisitioning of animals, food, and supplies, as well as the movement of supplies to the interior, were all measures that were enacted out of military necessity, albeit in a manner that was rash and shortsighted. During this early period, prior to the Ottoman entry into the war, Entente officials were well aware of the economic and financial situation in Syria. As the next chapter will demonstrate, Allied policies in the Eastern Mediterranean were implemented with full knowledge of the economic reality in coastal areas of Ottoman Syria. The Allied Powers employed economic warfare as a military strategy even before the Ottomans officially joined the war; first unofficially blockading the Eastern Mediterranean, and later enforcing a strict blockade that aimed at exacerbating an already dire economic and financial situation.
II: The Evolution of the Allied Blockade of the Syrian Coast

The following chapter examines how Allied policies in the Eastern Mediterranean shifted over the period from the onset of hostilities in August 1914 until late 1915 when the Allies’ official blockade was extended to include the Syrian coast, in theory sealing off all Ottoman ports on the Mediterranean. This chapter also provides an analysis of the ways in which Ottoman leaders, aided by their Central Power allies, reacted to Allied policies which challenged the sovereignty and security of Ottoman waters. The principle aim of this chapter is to elucidate and analyze how shifting circumstances in the Eastern Mediterranean, defined in this chapter as including the Adriatic and Aegean Seas as well as the region to the east of the longitude 23.5° E which runs from western extremity of Crete to the coast of modern day Libya, affected the status of the Syrian coast over the period under study.

This analysis is done from a number of perspectives: first, through the lens of Allied policy in the Mediterranean; second, through the much broader lens of Allied economic policy toward the Central Powers, of which the Ottoman Empire was a part; and third, through the lens of Ottoman policy regarding its coasts. In doing so, I aim to contextualize the evolution of Allied policy into an officially blockade, examining why the Allies chose August 1915 as an opportune moment to announce an official blockade, particularly in light of evidence that this announcement did little to change their actual practices.
The Mediterranean and the First World War

The opening shots of the First World War in the Mediterranean were fired just after 6:00 AM on August 4, 1914, the morning after the official German declaration of war on France, when a German battle cruiser, the SMS Goeben, bombarded Philipville on the Algerian coast. At roughly the same hour, a second Germany cruiser, the SMS Breslau, attacked the Algerian city of Bône, to the east of Philipville. According to one witness in Bône, the crew of the Breslau tried to come ashore during the night to cut telegraph cables, but commenced bombardment of the town at daybreak when they were spotted off shore. After only twenty minutes of bombardment the Breslau sped off. Later that day, following the bombardments of Philipville and Bône, Rear-Admiral Souchon, the commander of the Goeben and Breslau, was notified of

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109 H.L Danziger to Mason, August 4, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Consular Correspondence, Algiers), Vol 350.
the secret alliance between Germany and the Ottoman Empire and ordered to sail for Istanbul. Despite being close by on August 4, the French fleet in the Mediterranean did not engage with the Goeben and Breslau owing to “preoccupation with the ‘transport spéciale’” of escorting convoys of troops from North Africa to France.\textsuperscript{110} News of Great Britain’s declaration of war against Germany, which reached Rear-Admiral Souchon on the morning of August 5, while his ships were coaling at an Italian port, opened up the two cruisers’ positions to British attack. At the same time, Souchon also received word that the Austrian fleet would not be coming to assist the two German cruisers if there were hostilities, making it imperative to get the Goeben and Breslau to Istanbul as quickly as possible. After several days’ pursuit by the British 1\textsuperscript{st} Cruiser Squadron, and only one skirmish, the Goeben and Breslau reached the Dardanelles on the evening of August 10, a testament to the two cruisers’ speed as well as the lackluster performance of Allied naval operations.\textsuperscript{111}

On August 11 it was announced that the Ottoman government had purchased the Goeben and renamed them Sultan Selim and Midilli, a move that was calculated to stave off an Entente declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire for harboring the two German ships.\textsuperscript{112} American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau later commented: “I doubt if any two ships have exercised a greater influence upon history than these two German cruisers…For the arrival of these cruisers made it inevitable that Turkey, when the proper moment came, should join her forces with Germany.”\textsuperscript{113} While Morgenthau’s assessment was, of course, shaped by hindsight, the Goeben

\textsuperscript{111} Halpern, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1914-1918*, 13. For a more detailed account of Ottoman negotiations regarding the Goeben and Breslau, see Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 110-118.
\textsuperscript{112} Consul General Barnham (Smyrna) to Sir Edward Grey, August 11, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/19, p. 553. See also Aksakal, 116.
\textsuperscript{113} Morgenthau, 51 & 56.
and Breslau incident was, indeed, one of the first overt signals that the Ottoman government’s growing closeness to Germany might threaten allied interests in the Mediterranean.

Allied interests in the Mediterranean during the first several months of the war were, first and foremost, related to mobilization. During the first week of August, while the British squadron was taxed with shadowing the Goeben and Breslau, the French squadron busily engaged in the transport of the XIX Corps from North Africa.\textsuperscript{114} The British, on the other hand, were chiefly concerned with the security of the Suez Canal and believed that promoting Ottoman neutrality for as long as possible would safeguard the canal, and thus the mobilization of Great Britain’s Indian troops.\textsuperscript{115} The importance of the Suez Canal for British mobilization efforts is clear when one considers that between August 1 and the end of December 1914, 376 transport ships traversed the canal carrying a total of 163,700 soldiers.\textsuperscript{116} The British and French navies, particularly after August 10, were cognizant of potential Ottoman threats to Allied shipping, so much so that, according to British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey, shortly after the Goeben and Breslau incident, the Allies went as far as to offer the Ottoman Empire a guarantee that their territory would remain in tact at the end of the war if the Sublime Porte opted to remain neutral and sent the Goben and Breslau back to Germany; however, there is no indication that a genuine guarantee of territorial integrity existed.\textsuperscript{117} Nevertheless, Edward Grey sent a telegram to Cairo on August 14 reassuring his ministers, “The British and French navies have complete control of Mediterranean and can ensure absolute freedom of Egypt from attack by sea.”\textsuperscript{118}

Despite confidence in the Allied position in the Mediterranean, the Admiralty remained in close contact with Louis Mallet, the British ambassador in Istanbul, as well as with other

\textsuperscript{114} Halpern, \emph{The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1914-1918}, 24.
\textsuperscript{115} Edward Grey, \emph{Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916} (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1925), 172.
\textsuperscript{116} Rogan, 116.
\textsuperscript{117} Grey, 172-174
\textsuperscript{118} Sir Edward Grey to Mr. Cheetham, August 14, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/19, p. 644.
British diplomats stationed throughout the Ottoman Empire. British consuls in Smyrna and Jaffa reported on conditions within their districts, making particular note of the treatment of foreign subjects who were reportedly being subjected to harsh Ottoman requisitioning policies. On August 22, the French admiral requested that a British cruiser sail from Port Said to Jaffa to show its flag as a way of making the British fleet’s proximity known to Ottoman authorities should there be further abuses to the foreign subjects within Ottoman domains.\(^{119}\) On August 28, another report from Malta reached the Admiralty, this time suggesting that Ottoman authorities were treating Russian subjects in Jaffa with particular harshness. This same report also noted that mobilization continued, with some troops moving “northerly nightly” and others being mobilized south toward Egypt.\(^{120}\)

On August 30, the *Dublin*, the British ship which had been sent to Jaffa, returned to Egypt with intelligence on Ottoman mobilization. The Captain of the *Dublin* relayed that troops from Aleppo and Damascus were moving south to the Egyptian frontier where “a large quantity of ammunition is stored,” and furthermore noted, “intelligence from Sinai is to the effect that a large concentration of camels computed at 5,000 as well as mules, ponies, etc. is taking place at Gaza.”\(^{121}\) It is interesting to note that correspondence sent from and received by the British Admiralty indicate a high level of Allied cognizance regarding Ottoman mobilization, particularly mobilization toward the Egyptian frontier. Eugene Rogan argues that the British did not receive intelligence reports on mobilization for the Suez Canal campaign until December 30; however, information gathered during the *Dublin’s* journey to Jaffa suggests that as early as

\(^{119}\) To Admiralty, August 22, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/20, p. 133.
\(^{120}\) From A.S. Malta to Admiralty, August 28, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/20, p. 257.
\(^{121}\) Mr. Cheetham to Admiralty, August 30, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/20, p. 322.
August 30 British war planners in Egypt were aware of troop and supply concentrations in southern Palestine.\textsuperscript{122}

Reports from the captain of the \textit{Dublin} also conveyed that “telegrams from Constantinople of British and French and Russian Consuls are delayed for several days, whereas telegrams from German Consul are sent through at once.” Furthermore, on August 28, Mallet sent a telegram to the Admiralty warning, “It is no doubt a fact that very active preparations are in progress and that Germans here expect hostilities. Gold has arrived for German and Austrian Banks here from Germany, quantities of medical accessories have been purchased and put on board German ships and private German residents have sent away their wives.”\textsuperscript{123} This report from Mallet, as well as the information conveyed after the \textit{Dublin’s} visit to Jaffa, illustrates the growing sense that hostilities with the Ottoman Empire were imminent, and, while Allied subjects and institutions were being subjected to harsh requisitioning, German interests were being protected.

These reports to the Admiralty over the last week of August and the first week of September 1914 inclined the Foreign Office to give up on pushing for Ottoman neutrality, despite Ambassador Mallet’s continued negotiations with Ottoman leaders, and brace for hostilities. At this point, not only were Russia ports on the Black Sea a potential target if the Ottomans were to officially declare war, but the mobilization of Ottoman troops south also hinted that the Suez Canal was vulnerable to attack. As a signal of the Foreign Office’s concern over the future of British relations with the Ottoman Empire, on September 9, Churchill ordered the withdrawal of the British naval mission, a small group of British military advisors who represented the last of three British naval missions over the period from 1908 to 1914, citing

\textsuperscript{122} Rogan, 118-119.
\textsuperscript{123} Sir L. Mallet to Admiralty, August 28, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/20, p. 277.
“German intrigues” as having “paralyzed” the Turkish navy.\textsuperscript{124} The mission’s commander, Admiral Limpus, was reassigned to the British fleet in the Dardanelles.\textsuperscript{125}

In August 1914, amidst growing tensions in the Mediterranean, the U.S. Navy sent the \textit{USS North Carolina} to the Eastern Mediterranean as a protective measure for American interests in the region. The presence of a US ship was supposed to, first, calm anxiety surrounding Ottoman mobilization and the requisitioning of goods and property, including that of American citizens, and, second, to deliver gold to American institutions as it had become virtually unobtainable since the start of the war in Europe.\textsuperscript{126} Both the French Admiral and British cruiser squadron in the Mediterranean were alerted of the \textit{North Carolina’s} movements weeks before it entered the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{127} The \textit{USS North Carolina} reached Beirut on September 23, 1914, bringing “great relief” to Americans who saw the ship come to port according to Howard Bliss, the president of Syrian Protestant College.\textsuperscript{128}

While the Allies could do little to prevent the United States, as a neutral, from protecting its interests in the Ottoman Empire, by September 1914 the flow of goods considered contraband during war such as copper, coal, and even foodstuffs, were being restricted from entering the Mediterranean aboard neutral ships. Until the start of the First World War the international law regime surrounding the laws of naval warfare, including laws of blockades and contraband, was drawn from the London Declaration of 1909. On the subject of contraband, the London Declaration distinguished between items that could be treated as absolute contraband of war such as weapons, ammunition, and warships, liable to capture if their destination was an enemy port,

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\textsuperscript{124}Winston Churchill to Louis Mallet, September 9, 1914, ADM 137/20, p. 516. \\
\textsuperscript{125}Joseph Heller, “Sir Louis Mallet and the Ottoman Empire: The Road to War,” \textit{Middle Eastern Studies} 12, no. 1 (1976), 17. \\
\textsuperscript{126}“I expect the ‘North Carolina’ will be in your port in about two weeks and will deliver you some gold,” Morgenthau to Bliss, September 8, 1914, AUB Archive, Howard Bliss Papers, AA: 2.3.2.13.2. \\
\textsuperscript{127}Circular to R. A. Talbot, S. N. O. Gibraltar, A.S. Malta, August 29 1914, TNA, ADM 137/20. \\
\textsuperscript{128}Howard Bliss to Stuart Dodge, 28 September 1914, AUB Archives, Howard Bliss Papers, AA: 2.3.2.9.5.
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and items considered conditional contraband such as foodstuffs, fuel, and clothing which were liable to capture only if their destination was an enemy army or state. The London Declaration also outlined that goods such cotton, rubber, and “articles serving exclusively to aid the sick and wounded” could not be treated as contraband of war. The laws surrounding contraband of war were meant to provide a legal framework for the rights of both belligerents and neutrals to engage in trade during wartime. In August 1914 the British Government announced that it would act according to the provisions of the London Declaration during the “present hostilities,” “subject to some additions and modifications.” The additions and modifications, which were announced on September 21, 1914, amounted to a completely different understanding of conditional contraband than the London Declaration had lain out. The Allies’ policy was to treat absolute and conditional contraband without distinction in view of the fact that conditional contraband items like food were likely to fall into the hands of state or military authorities, and were therefore necessary to control and restrict. The German Ambassador to the United States criticized British and French negligence of the London Declaration noting, “It is Great Britain’s acknowledged aim to hit not only the military but also the commercial power of their adversaries, by way of paralyzing neutral trade.”

The Admiralty’s efforts to control trade in coal are indicative of this policy. On September 8, Mallet wrote to the Admiralty reporting, “[The Ottoman] Minister of Marine is making enquiries for Cardiff coal for fleet. I have told British contractors who are anxious to supply it that they should reply to His Majesty’s Government who have forbidden its supply to

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enemy fleets and that so long as *Goeben* retains her German crews and character they cannot allow any Cardiff coal to be supplied to Turkish fleet.”¹³¹ On September 30, a similar message was sent from the Admiralty to one of fleet’s ships, the *Indefatigable*:

> It is important that no coal should be allowed to reach the Turkish fleet. You are to stop all colliers bound up the Dardanelles with coal destined for Turkey, on the ground that they are for use of German warships in Turkish waters. The coal must be purchased for His Majesty’s Government as Turkey is nominally at peace with England. If necessary the colliers with someone in charge are to be sent to Alexandria.¹³²

Despite the fact that the Ottoman government had purchased the *Goben* and *Breslau*, technically making them neutral ships, the presence of Rear-Admiral Souchon and the two ships’ crews in Istanbul, as well other evidence of German interests in the Ottoman Empire playing a significant role in Ottoman mobilization, inclined the Admiralty to tread cautiously when it came to allowing supplies to reach Ottoman ports. Not only were contraband items like coal prohibited from reaching Ottoman ports, the Admiralty and the French Navy (Marine Nationale) exchanged correspondence in October 1914 regarding “shipments of copper and cereals from America for Germany” which were reportedly being shipped via Italy. The French telegram suggested, “It would be very desirable consequently to take efficacious measures to search ships at Gibraltar and remove contraband.”¹³³

Months before the Ottoman Empire officially entered the First World War its effects could be felt in the Eastern Mediterranean. The financial system in cities like Beirut had quickly crumbled with the onset of the European war, normal commercial traffic was nearly halted as the empire’s major trading partners were consumed with their own mobilization efforts, and Ottoman supplies of coal and other fuel sources were critically low owing to Allied regulation of Mediterranean entry points. Allied efforts to control the flow of contraband into the

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¹³¹ Mallet to Admiralty, September 8, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/20, pg. 500.
¹³² From Admiralty to R.A. Indefatigable via A.S. Malta, TNA, ADM 137/33, pg. 385.
¹³³ From Marine Bordeaux to Admiralty, October 21, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/33, pg. 578.
Mediterranean, while similar in practice to a blockade because the Allies were indiscriminate in their treatment of neutral and belligerent shipping, did not actually constitute a blockade because there was not official declaration of a blockade, as the London Declaration stipulates. Thus statements like, “the British had instituted a blockade in the Mediterranean even before the declaration of hostilities,” are misleading in that they fail to parcel out the difference between wartime regulation of contraband and a blockade. Nevertheless, the coastal areas of Ottoman Syria were hard hit both by Allied regulations regarding fuel and the general stoppage of commercial traffic, even while the Ottoman Empire remained neutral.

The Ottoman Empire became fully embroiled in the Great War on October 29, 1914, when the German-Ottoman fleet entered the Black Sea and sunk at least two Russian warships without provocation. Ottoman authorities had delayed the empire’s entry into the war as along as possible, aware that mobilization would take several months; however, by mid September 1914, German war planners were adamant that Ottoman entry into the war should not be delayed any longer. Germany’s ambitions in prompting the Ottoman Empire to officially join the Central Powers were several. They hoped for:

[A]nti-colonial, Islamic revolutions in Entente territories; Russian assignment of additional troops to the Caucas and the Black Sea regions; a shift in Bulgarian and Romanian opinion as the Central Powers demonstrated naval superiority in the Black Sea; and even the acceleration of Ottoman preparations for the expedition against Egypt.

The Ottoman naval provocation in the Black Sea, carried out under the authority of a German admiral, marked the opening of hostilities for the empire, while the official declaration of war on Russia and its allies came several days later on November 10, 1914. The British and French

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135 Aksakal, 179-180.
136 Aksakal, 156.
137 Ibid., 183.
naval fleets were ordered to commence hostilities against the Ottoman Empire on the morning of October 31, although the Entente powers did not officially declare war on the Ottoman Empire until November 4, 1914.\footnote{Admiralty Circular, TNA, ADM 137/33, p. 723.}

*The Evolution of the Blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean*

One of the interventions this study aims to make is to reconsider the blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean as a fixed policy that was implemented by the Allies throughout the course of World War I. While a number of recent studies of WWI in the Ottoman Empire’s Arab domains mention the blockade or evaluate its role in producing supply shortages and famine in Syria, none have attempted to illustrate the blockade’s evolution. The following section aims to do just that by detailing both Allied and Ottoman policies during the period from the onset of the war until the blockade became official. While the Allies had the upper hand in dictating the status of the Ottoman Empire’s Mediterranean coast due to their military superiority, it is important to consider Ottoman policies as well. Ottoman authorities on land and Allied commanders at sea acted and reacted to one another, particularly over the first several months of the war, and built their respective policies around their enemy to a degree. Rather than seeking to lay blame on one or the other, what follows is a chronological narrative that focuses on the evolution of the blockade.

With the official declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire, regulations regarding contraband were officially, and, for the first time, legally, applied against Ottoman ports. British and French contraband lists were presented in a number of iterations throughout the war, as were contraband lists for other belligerent powers. These items included, but were hardly limited to: live animals, coal, cotton, copper, brass, petroleum, wood, wool, rice, wheat, and other
“provisions which may be used as food for man.”¹³⁹ Although goods were still classified as either absolute contraband or conditional contraband, both categories of goods were easily blocked from entering the Mediterranean. Even neutral ships carrying contraband destined for neutral ports were, at times, prohibited from entering the Mediterranean due to suspicion that their cargo would subsequently be sold to a belligerent nation. On November 8, for example, the Admiralty wrote to one of its diplomats in Italy reporting, “His Majesty’s Government have decided for the time present to stop at Gibraltar all copper except that consigned to the Italian government (with some restrictions).”¹⁴⁰ Later in November, Stanley Hollis wrote to the Secretary of State observing, “It is easier for the camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for any vessel which is all suspicious to get into the Mediterranean, or out of it, for that matter, since the escape of the ‘Goeben’ and ‘Breslau’ stirred up the Ententist naval commanders.”¹⁴¹ According to Hollis, from August 1914 when the Goeben and Breslau entered the Dardanelles, the Allies had effectively cut off Ottoman ports from outside commerce.

Even without an official blockade announcement, the geography of the Mediterranean worked to the advantage of the allies and allowed them to control goods coming in and out of the sea. As mentioned, prior to the outbreak of hostilities the Allied Powers already had control over two major entrances to the Mediterranean: the Suez Canal and Gibraltar. Once the war began, Allied fleets began patrolling the entrance to the Straits of Otranto, sealing off the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s Mediterranean access, and by November 1914 had initiated a patrol outside the Dardanelles.¹⁴² In a letter from Hollis to the Secretary of State on American vessels coming

¹³⁹ “British Embargos,” published by the US Department of State, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 360.
¹⁴⁰ Admiralty to Sir R. Rodd (Rome), November 8, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/95, pg. 76.
¹⁴¹ Hollis to Secretary of State, November 27, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
to Beirut from American ports Hollis first pointed out, “no vessels for years, except for men-of-
war and yachts, have arrived in these waters from any American ports.” Hollis continued:

At present, with all trade and commerce dead, and with no signs of it reviving, there is
not the least likelihood of any merchant vessels coming to this coast from any ports of the
United States, and even if any did, they would have to run the gauntlet of the British
fleets at Gibraltar and Port Said and Suez, where they would probably be pretty
thoroughly searched.143

British control of these two critical choke points, Gibraltar and the Suez Canal, meant that any
ship, regardless of its affiliation, could be searched for contraband upon entering the
Mediterranean from these two points. Other than Turkish ports, the only other belligerent ports
inside the Mediterranean belonged to Austria-Hungary along the Adriatic Sea which the French
could effectively and easily restrict by blockading Strait of Otranto which is only sixty miles
wide. 144 Italian ships continued traveling to Jaffa and Beirut during the early months of the war,
however, according to the diary of Conde de Ballobar, Italian ships only arrived at Jaffa every
two weeks.145

One of the most immediate and pressing shortages as a result of Allied control over
commerce in the Mediterranean was coal. The Ottoman Empire had its own sources of coal,
however, there was no railroad connection between these coal mines and Istanbul, making it
necessary to ship Ottoman coal on the Black Sea. By November 1914, however, the Russian
Black Sea Fleet had eliminated Ottoman sea routes on the Black Sea, making the empire’s
domestic coal source obsolete.146 Efforts were made to find other domestic sources of coal to
supplement what Germany was supplying, however coal shortages were a constant feature of the

143 Hollis to Secretary of State, November 27, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
144 Halpern, The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1914-1918, 94.
145 Ballobar, 30.
war. In Syria, as elsewhere in the empire, the lack of coal forced authorities to turn to wood as a fuel source for the railroads, causing deforestation throughout Mount Lebanon.\footnote{Ajay, "Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut," 180.}

Besides the control of commerce, the stated objective of the Allied fleets in the Eastern Mediterranean was to “provide [protection] against possible attacks by the Turks on Egypt, against risings in the country, and against massacres of the Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire.”\footnote{Admiralty, TNA, ADM 137/1091, pg. 14.} I will turn to Allied concerns over an attack on Egypt shortly, however it is worth noting that the Allies’ position in the Mediterranean as a safeguard against “massacres of the Christian populations” was not unprecedented. In fact, since the 1860 civil war in Mount Lebanon, the presence of warships representing the Great Powers on the Mediterranean horizon was a common accompaniment to diplomatic crises of all kinds. Davide Rodogno comments on the significance of this imagery remarking, “When late-nineteenth-century legal scholars looked back at the nineteenth-century \textit{historique de l'intervention}, they mentioned the anchoring of warships at visible distance off the shores of the target state or naval blockade.”\footnote{Davide Rodogno, \textit{Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 20.} The deployment of naval forces to the Eastern Mediterranean, then, was not unprecedented; however, with the break in diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Allied powers, their presence was more ominous, particularly to residents of coastal areas.

In addition to supposedly acting as a protective measure against massacres of Christians, the Allied fleets were also keeping a close watch on the status of their citizens who remained in the Ottoman Empire once the war began. British, French, and Russian diplomatic staff were evacuated in early November 1914; however, a significant number of teachers, doctors, missionaries, and other individuals holding citizenship of Entente nations remained in the empire
after November 1914. When the Ottoman Empire entered World War I, these individuals were regarded as citizens of enemy nations and were subjected to a host of state policies aimed at curtailing their movements.

Businesses owned by French, English, and Russian subjects in Jaffa were closed within a week of the war announcement, and a general panic spread throughout the city as many people fled toward the interior fearing foreign bombardment. On November 17, 1914, Ottoman authorities in Jaffa ordered all foreign citizens, including men, women, and children, to visit the Serai within eight days in order to register with the Ottoman authorities. In the same month, Ottoman authorities announced that religious institutions and schools of belligerent nations would be forced to close, and their teachers and staff would be permitted to return to Europe.

The Spanish consul general, Ballobar received these specific orders in December 1914:

1) The clerics of the belligerent nations, including the women clerics, are obliged to be at the cited ports (Jaffa, Haifa, Beirut, Mersin) before the 28th of this month and then leave Turkey
2) The same disposition is applicable to the women and children under the age of 18 belonging to one of the four enemy nations
3) Subjects of neutral nations can leave, under the same conditions and the indicated time frame, by sea.

Around the same time, Ottoman officials also announced that Jews who retained citizenship of any of the Entente powers were required to take Ottoman citizenship or risk expulsion from the empire. Both this order directed at foreign Jews, and the abolition of capitulations in August 1914 which had done away with privileges afforded to foreign citizens, aimed at eliminating foreign influence that had long been able to flourish in Syria and

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150 Hardegg to Glazebrook, November 8, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Jaffa), vol. 14.
151 Hardegg to Glazebrook, November 17, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Jaffa), vol. 14.
152 Ballobar, 31.
153 Ibid., 39.
154 Ibid., 32.
Palestine. As a result of these orders, the Zionist leader Dr. Arthur Ruppin estimated that 15,000-18,000 Jews complied by taking Ottoman citizenship, while 4,000 retained their foreign citizenship. The status of these Entente subjects, now enemies of the Ottoman Empire, changed at a number of points throughout the war, and Ottoman officials were well aware that as long as they detained Entente citizens they had a bargaining chip, as will be detailed shortly.

In addition to moderating neutral commerce and looming on the Mediterranean horizon as a show of force, the Allied fleets were also engaged in intelligence gathering, particularly on the movements of troops and supplies towards Egypt during the early part of the war. Gathering intelligence often involved sending small landing parties ashore; such landing parties also seized the opportunity to attack Ottoman infrastructure like telegraph lines and railroad bridges. These types of operations along the Eastern Mediterranean involved both British and French personnel, and, until late January 1915, involved French, British, and Russian ships. Even when the French fleet took charge of operations off the coast of Syria in February 1915, intelligence-gathering operations involved the cooperation of both the French and British navies. Aboard what had formerly been a German cargo ship called the Aenne Rickmers, but was commandeered by the French seaplane squadron, for example, the captain, chief engineer, and many of the crew members were British, while the pilots and mechanics who operated the seaplanes were French.

A Russian ship called the Askold, which was assigned to the Mediterranean after spending the first months of the war in the Indian Ocean, and a British ship called the HMS Doris, were the first to initiate operations along the Syrian coast in December 1914. The Askold

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first appeared off the coast of Beirut on December 1, 1914.\textsuperscript{158} On December 13, the \textit{Doris} was sent from Port Said to commence its patrol between al-Arish and Alexandretta in cooperation with the \textit{Askold} which was doing the same. The sailing orders for the \textit{Doris}, included: “A) Watching for and stopping supplies entering Alexandretta, Beirut, or Haifa for the Hedjaz railway. B) Capturing any enemy vessels that may be met and observing any signs of activity in the movements of troops or railway materials.”\textsuperscript{159} On December 15 the \textit{Askold} captured a German ship off the coast of Haifa, then sailed to Beirut where it captured another small ship, and on December 18 the \textit{Askold} stopped south of Sidon where it sent a landing party ashore to cut telegraph lines.\textsuperscript{160}

In a letter to Otis Glazebrook on December 16, Consul Hardegg of Jaffa reported sightings of two war cruisers, detailing:

On Sunday evening last, a large cruiser speedily passed Jaffa, without stopping but merely swinging nearer and farther from the shore until it was out of sight. Of course it caused great excitement, but as it did not stop, the people were soon greatly eased.

This morning, another cruiser, smaller than the previous one, stopped about half of a mile from the shore. As this cruised was flying the British flag, it caused great fear and excitement in the city. All the stores were immediately closed, including the Deutsche-Palestine Bank, and the Ottoman subjects were advised by the Serai to leave immediately for the interior at the expense of the government. About after an hour’s stay, this cruised released an hydroplane, which soared over all directions of Jaffa for about fifteen minutes, and thence landed on the cruised again. This hydroplane, I believe, had borne the French colors. The cruised remained here until about noon then left towards the direction of Haifa.\textsuperscript{161}

It is likely that Hardegg saw both the \textit{Askold} and the \textit{Doris}, as both would have been in the vicinity of Jaffa around the time of his letter. The \textit{Doris} had a seaplane aboard for the purpose of intelligence gathering, which explains Hardegg’s reference to a hydroplane. During

\textsuperscript{158} Ajay, "Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut," 188.
\textsuperscript{159} Sailing orders for Doris from Sd. R.H. Peirse, Vice Admiral, S.N.C. Egypt, TNA, ADM 137/1091, pg. 42.
\textsuperscript{160} Ajay, PhD Dissertation, 189.
\textsuperscript{161} Hardegg to Glazebrook, December 16, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Jaffa), Vol. 14.
the course of its operations, the *HMS Doris* sent seaplanes over Gaza and Jaffa on multiple occasions; sent landing parties to destroy telegraph lines, bridges, roads, and other military infrastructure in Alexandretta and Mersina; solicited intelligence from Armenian residents in Dortyol; and captured POWs near Adana.¹⁶² The *HMS Doris* aimed in particular to wound the Ottoman railroad network at its weakest points. A railway bridge near the Dortyol station was an easy target because it was close enough to the sea to be hit by a ship’s guns and because the area was not adequately guarded owing to the fact that a majority of troops were being mobilized south where Cemal Pasha was preparing the invasion of Egypt.¹⁶³

Around the time that the Allied fleets commenced operations along the Syrian coast, plans to evacuate teachers and staff of religious institutions representing enemy nations were underway.¹⁶⁴ However, prior to their departure, Ottoman authorities rescinded approval for their evacuation in reaction to bombardments of the Syrian coast by the *Askold* which had killed civilians.¹⁶⁵ Instead, beginning on December 13, French religious clerics living in Jerusalem were required to depart for Urfa, in the interior of Anatolia, where they would be detained.¹⁶⁶ On December 21, American Consul General Hollis wrote to the Secretary of State reporting that a British ship, the *HMS Doris*, had fired shorts at the coast of Alexandretta (Dortyol). On the Ottoman authorities’ response to this incident Hollis related: “This report, caused the Government here to rescind the orders it had formerly given that all non-combatant belligerents, with the exception of non clerical males over 18 years of age, could leave Syria for their own

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¹⁶³ Erickson, 157.
¹⁶⁴ Ballobar, 31.
¹⁶⁵ Çiçek does not specify which ships had bombarded the Syrian coast or where. It was, in all likelihood, the *Askold*. Çiçek, 144-145.
¹⁶⁶ Ballobar, 37-38.
countries.”\textsuperscript{167} Ottoman authorities had warned that bombardments of the Syrian coast would be met with reprisals against British and French subjects, making the 	extit{Doris’} attack on Dortyol a test of this threat.\textsuperscript{168} One letter from an informant in Beirut indicates that Allied bombardments did affect interned Allied subjects. The letter conveys: “[A]ll male British subjects except three were sent from Beyrout to Damascus soon after the war was declared. They were fairly well treated except when our fleet was bombing the coast—then they were shut up for 48 hours & so crowded that there was only standing room.”\textsuperscript{169} Similarly in August 1915, Stanley Hollis wrote to British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on “Ill treatment of British and French Interned Civilians by the Turks.” Hollis noted:

> While there may be a variety of reasons for these deportations, I am convinced that the sole and only reason why they have been carried out at this particular time is the fact that the Ententists men-of-war have done more or less shooting at sundry Syrian ports. As long as these men-of-war refrained from these shootings, the only effect of which was to exasperate the authorities, the non-combatant belligerents were left more or less alone by the authorities; but from the moment these senseless shootings recommended, the trials and annoyances of these unfortunate non-combatant belligerents began anew.\textsuperscript{170}

Interestingly, Robert Cecil, British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, responded to this letter remarking, “I think Mr. Hollis went rather beyond his duties in criticising the naval operations as senseless. No doubt the ships knew what they were about.”\textsuperscript{171}

On the use of interned Allied subjects Çiçek notes, “First Zeki Pasha, Cemal’s predecessor, and later Cemal Pasha threatened the Entente states via the Italian and American diplomats, as well as through proclamations in newspapers warning that the citizens of the Entente had been detained as hostages in Damascus and Jerusalem and would be killed in groups

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{167} Hollis to Lansing, 21 December 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 361.
  \item \textsuperscript{168} Ajay, “Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut,” 206.
  \item \textsuperscript{169} Mr. Dallas to Mr. Monk, July 27, 1915, TNA, FO 383/92.
  \item \textsuperscript{170} Hollis to British Secretary for Foreign Affairs, August 26, 1915, TNA, FO 383/92.
  \item \textsuperscript{171} Hollis to British Secretary for Foreign Affairs, August 26, 1915, TNA, FO 383/92.
\end{itemize}
of three for each Ottoman killed in the allied bombardment." While the knee jerk reaction of Cemal Pasha was to prohibit non-combatant belligerents from leaving, a subsequent promise made by the British Admiralty to limit its bombardments to military targets was enough to smooth things over. On January 14, 1915 the first of several groups on non-combatant belligerents were allowed to leave the Ottoman Empire aboard neutral ships.

Among the foreign citizens remaining in the empire after the onset of war, many were Jews who had immigrated to Palestine over the preceding several decades and had retained the citizenship of the countries they emigrated from. Many Jews who had French, British, and Russian citizenship were evacuated from the empire, like other non-combatant belligerent subjects, aboard neutral ships. The USS Des Moines, for example, was allowed to take “French; British; Russians and Greeks” aboard for relocation to Alexandria; however, it was not permitted to transport “men of belligerent nations between the ages of 16 and 50, except Jews.”

According to consular records from Jaffa, the United States Navy participated in these operations from December 1914 to December 1915 and took part in the evacuation of at least 3,379 individuals from Palestine, both Jews and non-Jews. Furthermore, Çiçek notes, “some 2,700 Jews of Entente states were sent to Egypt on Italian vessels. Allied bombardments of the Syrian coast were few in number throughout the war, likely as a reaction to threats made by Ottoman authorities against Entente subjects who remained in Ottoman domains. In any case, intelligence-gathering operations were arguably more important

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172 Çiçek, 145.
173 Ibid.
174 Jews, regardless of age or sex, were expelled from the empire and deported to Egypt and other Allied bases, whereas men of belligerent nations were deported to the interior of the Ottoman Empire. I am not aware of any clear reason why Jews were subjected to different regulations than non-Jews, but there was likely a diplomatic arrangement that spelled out these policies. Commander of USS Des Moines to Jacob Hardegg, US Consul Agent Jaffa, September 20, 1915, USNA RG84/vol. 007.
175 The role of the United States in these operations will be revisited in chapter three.
176 Çiçek, 83.
to the Allies’ overall strategy than acts of sabotage.\footnote{Erickson, 156.} A number of Allied reports indicated that the ports of Alexandretta, Beirut and Haifa were mined as early as December 1914, however the both the Doris and Askold were able to send small landing parties ashore in certain areas in order to make contact with residents who could provide information about mobilization and supply locations.\footnote{Ibid.} A report from the Askold’s captain on “reconnaissance of the Syrian coast” from December 12-18, which was circulated to the British Admiralty, indicates that the ship’s crew gathered information the general political situation along the 60 miles of coast they covered; including, troops concentrations throughout Syria, the condition of roads between Beirut and Damascus, and the loyalty of Lebanese Christians in the case of an Allied invasion.\footnote{“Reconnaissance reports for Syrian coast,” 18 December 1914, TNA, ADM 137/1091, pg. 53-55.} Additionally, the captain of the Askold reported that the ports of Beirut and Tripoli were not mined, despite rumors to the contrary. According to reports from Dortyol, when the Doris landed, not only were Armenian residents eager to help Allied landing parties by providing information, but some Armenian railway workers actually helped cut Ottoman telegraph lines.\footnote{Erickson, 153.}

In his book \textit{Hard Lying}, Lewin Weldon, a British intelligence officer details his experience aboard the \textit{Aenne Rickmers}.\footnote{Lewin Weldon, \textit{Hard Lying}, 10.} Weldon arrived in Port Said on January 16, 1915, and spent a few days there looking for boatmen who knew the Syrian coast. Weldon hired four Syrian Christians, and, shortly thereafter, the \textit{Aenne Rickmers} began operations along the Syrian coast. On his operations, Weldon writes: “At that time we knew that there were many people in Palestine and Syria who were willing to help us with information of enemy movements, etc., if we could arrange some system for collecting their news. The only way of doing this was to land agents on the coast behind Turkish positions, and to pick them up again when they had found out
all our friends had to tell them.”

Intelligence operations like the ones Weldon details in his memoir continued throughout the war and were, in fact, made more expansive as the war went on. For example, beginning on August 31, 1915 the French occupied the island of Arwâd, only one mile off the coast of Tripoli, and used the island as a base for Allied intelligence operations along the Syrian coast. In January 1916 intelligence operations were further expanded when the size of the espionage squadron doubled from two ships to four. Ottoman authorities were aware of Allied intelligence operations and worked to counter them by setting up treason tribunals and exacting harsh punishment on those convicted; however, intelligence gathering and Allied espionage continued successfully throughout the war. These operations were part and parcel of Allied policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, the extent and success of intelligence operations being an indicator of Allied pressure on the Ottoman Empire’s Mediterranean coast.

During the first several months of 1915, Allied operations in the Eastern Mediterranean shifted slightly as a result of the decision to attack the Dardanelles. While Allied fleets gathered outside the Dardanelles preparing for a February offensive, the British and French fleets exchanged communication on divvying up the Eastern Mediterranean into zones of patrol. The Admiralty proposed the following arrangement:

With regard to the Syrian coast, it would be agreeable to us if a French Vice Admiral were appointed to command in that quarter, any British ships employed in the Levant coming under his command. We hope however that any measures other than those of emergency on the Syrian coast the French sqd…may also be the subject of previous consultation between the two governments, as the attitude of the natives affects very

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182 Weldon, 10.
184 Ibid., 143.
185 Ibid., 142.
186 Ajay, “Political Intrigue and Suppression in Lebanon during World War I,” 151.
seriously the problem of the defence of Egypt.”

This plan put the French in charge of patrolling the Syrian coast; however, any actions taken by the French fleet necessitated consultation with the British Admiralty, given their concern for the security of Egypt, their major naval and administrative base in the Mediterranean. This arrangement also freed up British ships for the Dardanelles campaign. On February 2, 1915 Vice Admiral Dartige du Fournet was appointed to command the French 3rd squadron detached to the Syrian coast. The British fleet was responsible for patrolling outside the Dardanelles and along the Egyptian coast, constituting the areas just north and south of the Syrian coast.

While Ajay notes, “in the first five months of 1915…the French were fully committed to the blockade now and it was their units which were spotted off Beirut,” it is clear from communication exchanged between the French and British fleets that blockade still remained unofficial, although the French had been assigned to patrol the Syrian coast and were, for all intents and purposes, blockading the region under their control. In May, a French ship called the Jeanne D’Arc shelled a village south of Tripoli, and, a day later, sunk a small boat near Jouneh. Incidents like these punctuated Allied naval operations from the war’s outset until August 1915; however, during this period the presence of warships shadowing the Syrian coast discouraged shipping and, in the case of Beirut, completely eliminated all commercial traffic by May 1915, further indicating that Allied policy had evolved into an undeclared, illegal blockade.

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188 January 27, 1915, TNA, ADM 137/1091, pg. 17.
190 February 2, 1915, TNA, ADM 137/1091, pg. 21.
191 See figure 1.
193 Ibid., 194-195.
194 “Arrivals and departures grew less and less, until now, at the present time, they are absolutely nill. The harbors are empty and it is impossible to even conjecture when any merchant vessels will ever be seen in
From February until late summer 1915 the Allies focused their attention on the military campaign in the Dardanelles. By May 1915, as Allied war planners grew increasingly concerned that their position was a losing one, fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula moved toward stalemate. In late May, the first German U-boats broke through the Straits of Otranto and entered the Mediterranean, reaching Istanbul several weeks later. The first two German submarines to enter the Mediterranean had been transported via train to Pola, then one of the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s Adriatic ports, and assembled there. A third U-boat, the U21, entered the Mediterranean via Gibraltar and reached Istanbul on June 5, 1915. These U-boats were sent to the Mediterranean “as a direct response to the British and French attack on the Dardanelles,” according to Halpern and altered the balance of powers in the Mediterranean because they were a major threat to British steamers. The emergence of this new threat to Allied supremacy provoked renewed fervor for controlling commerce, particularly fuel, in order to restrict the submarines’ access to supplies. Allied suspicion of Greek vessels, by that point the only neutral power in the Eastern Mediterranean, meant that even small boats were subject to Allied scrutiny and paranoia, perhaps for good reason as Germany was using Greek steamers to smuggle fuel and supplies to its submarines. It is interesting to note that at least one commerce report indicates that steamship service to Beirut completely ended in late May, perhaps coinciding with the emergence of the U-boat threat.

Allied operations in the Eastern Mediterranean aimed at several interrelated things during the first nine months of the war. Gathering intelligence was key to Allied strategy, particularly in

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195 Rogan, 186-187.
197 Ibid., 117.
198 Ibid., 111.
199 Ibid.
regard to the movement of troops and supplies south to the Egyptian frontier. Allied ships also
bombarded a number of coastal towns along the Syrian coast, usually aiming to damage
infrastructure that would cripple Ottoman supply lines, as was the case in Dortyol. The fact that
Ottoman supply lines were targets of Allied sabotage is interesting because it reflects a strategy
to not only control the sea but also to damage internal supply systems whenever possible. Allied
patrols were also important for controlling commerce, however there was no official blockade in
place until the late spring of 1915. Nonetheless, the Allies were able to successfully control the
flow of contraband goods throughout the Mediterranean, even aboard neutral ships, as a result of
their control of critical choke points like the Suez Canal and the Straits of Gibraltar.

The fact that Allied policies amounted to a blockade without an official announcement of
a blockade technically ran counter to customary international law. The Paris Declaration of 1856,
the document that outlined international laws regarding naval blockades, mandated that the
blockading nation must make an official announcement if it intended to initiate a blockade.
Furthermore, according to the Paris Declaration, “Blockades, in order to be binding, must be
effective, that is to say, maintained by force sufficient really to prevent access to the coast of the
enemy.” Blockades imposed without sufficient ships or firepower to make them effective were
considered “fictitious blockades” and were made illegal prior to World War I.201

In May 1915 the Sublime Porte published a circular which called into question the Allied
naval policies in the Eastern Mediterranean, protesting their actions as amounting to a fictitious
blockade.202 An English translation of the Sublime Port’s circular read:

> It appears from official military reports that the warships cruising near the coasts of
> Syria, Palestine and the Hedjaz do not content themselves with preventing the landing—
> at the ports of the Ottoman coast in those regions—of articles which are contraband of

201 “Declaration Respecting Maritime Law,” Paris, April 16, 1856, ICRC,
202 Morgenthau to Lansing, May 10, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 377.
war, but also of all merchandise whatsoever in which trade is allowed in time of hostilities. This action of the enemy naval forces constitutes a flagrant violation of contractual international law.

The Imperial Military is not aware that a blockade has been declared and communicated to the neutral powers; but there are serious reasons to believe that no such act has taken place. In any event, this declaration and this communication have not taken place with respect to the local authorities; moreover, the blockade has never been effective, since the united fleets of France and Great Britain cannot suffice for such an operation.  

In the above circular, Ottoman authorities clearly invoked the language of international law to argue against Allied policy in the Mediterranean. The points made in the circular are valid and reflect an astute reading of the situation unfolding in the Mediterranean. Not only is the Sublime Porte making an accusation that Allied policy violates international law, it is also calling into question the Allied fleets’ capacity to enforce a legitimate, legal blockade. The Sublime Porte’s protest contains a contradiction in that the document complains that the Allied fleets were completely disrupting commerce, but also objects to the potential application of an official blockade arguing that the French and British fleets were not large enough to impose a true blockade. This contradiction illustrates, perhaps, the willingness of Ottoman leaders to bring attention to their situation using any means at their disposal.

By the end of the summer the Allies had declared their blockade official, although it is unlikely that the Sublime Porte’s protest deterred Allied operations or figured into their calculations. As early as June 1915 there was communication between the French and British about extending the blockade south of the Samos Straits. In November 1914 Britain and France had “imposed a blockade on the Aegean coastline from the Thracian port of Dedeağaç (the modern town of Alexandroupoli in north-eastern Greece) to the island of Samos, south of the Turkish port of Smyrna.”

Admiral de Robeck was in charge of this zone under blockade,

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203 Note Verbale from Sublime Porte, May 12, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 377.
204 Rogan, 93-94.
which included the entrance to the Dardanelles where the British were staging an attack beginning in February 1915.

The major goal in extending the blockade south of the Samos Straits was the stoppage of all trade to the Ottoman Empire. In a report on “Contraband and other trade between Neutral States and Turkey,” it was noted that “a considerable volume of trade in contraband and other supplies” was going on between Greece and the Ottoman Empire. The report mentions that the Greek government was taking steps to control trade from its ports; however, the report concluded that “it is not anticipated that these steps will be effective in stopping the trade.”

There is little evidence that Greek trade in contraband and supplies was substantial, and in fact Syria’s major port, Beirut, was not visited by any Greek ships after May 1915. Thus, it appears that the proclamation of a blockade of “the whole coast of Turkey from Enos to El-Arish” aimed at completely eliminating trade, at that point barely existent, in order to counter the U-boat threat and to tighten Allied control over the Syria coast. “The principle advantage of the formal declaration of a blockade is that vessels captured will be liable to condemnation; this will of itself act as a very serious deterrent to the small smuggling vessels engaged in trade.”

In early July 1915, the Admiralty sent a letter to Conte de Saint Seine, inquiring whether “the French Naval Forces could extend this blockade [the British blockade that extended as far south as the Samos Straits] over some part of the Turkish Coast between Samos Strait and the Egyptian Frontier.” The letter continued, “Admiral de Robeck, who has been consulted, states that an extension of the blockade to the South would be of great assistance, and suggests that, if only a short additional line can be blocked, that portion of the coast which is within easy reach of

205 Draft Communication to the Vice Admiral (E. Mediterranean), June 1915, ADM 137/1147, pg. 46.
206 Ibid.
the railway should be selected.\textsuperscript{207} By August, the details of the blockade were settled and the Admiralty reported, “In view of the necessity of stopping supplies to the enemy at the Dardanelles and in Syria we are instructing the C-in-C to declare a blockade of the coast of Asia Minor from the Samos shore to the Egyptian frontier.”\textsuperscript{208} The French Vice Admiral declared a blockade, effective August 25, 1915, from latitude 31° 20’ N to 36° 50’ N, the Samos Straits to Al Arish.\textsuperscript{209} The blockade announcement was sent ashore to Beirut, according to Stanley Hollis, “under a flag of truce, from the French man-of-war Jeanne d’Arc.”\textsuperscript{210}

\textit{Conclusion}

A number of observations can be made about the timing of the Allied declaration of the blockade of the Syrian coast. First, the Sublime Porte’s objections to Allied operations, which they deemed as constituting an illegal, undeclared blockade, were very astute. The fact that the Allied declaration of a blockade came only months later does not necessarily indicate that the Entente Powers took international law seriously. Rather it suggests that extending the blockade south to the Egyptian frontier might totally eliminate commerce to Ottoman ports, including contraband smuggled on Greek vessels. The extension of the blockade in August 1915, while the Allies were still committed to breaking through the Dardanelles, indicates that the blockade was, at first, declared out of military necessity; namely, that the Allies imagined that the Ottoman army could be defeated in the Dardanelles if supplies dried up.

While August 25, 1915, did mark a turning point in Allied policy because the blockade was made official, the Mediterranean was securely in the hands of the Allies from the beginning.

\textsuperscript{207} Admiralty to Conte de Saint Seine, July 18, 1915, ADM 137/1147.
\textsuperscript{208} August 21, 1915, TNA, ADM 137/1147, pg. 59.
\textsuperscript{209} Hollis to American Embassy Constantinople, August 25, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 377.
\textsuperscript{210} Hollis to Morgenthau, August 25, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 377.
of the war, save for the few days in August 1914 when the *Goeben* and *Breslau* were able to make their grand escape to Istanbul. The Allies’ ability to control Mediterranean choke points like Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, and the Straits of Ontranto meant that the entire sea could essentially be blockaded without the exertion of substantial naval force. As a result, the Allied fleets off the Syrian Coast, from November 1914 until August 25, 1915, were occupied with intelligence gathering and sabotaging Ottoman infrastructure. These two objectives did not change with the declaration of the blockade; however, the timing of the blockade declaration after German U-boats became a threat to Allied supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean indicates that this shift in the balance of powers may have been a contributing factor in the Allied decision to enforce an official blockade after August 1915.

As the following chapter details, the blockade announcement did not prevent American naval ships from calling at ports along the Syrian coast after August 25. The U.S.’s role as a neutral country and a provider of humanitarian relief made their position in the Eastern Mediterranean unique, and the fact that their operations continued after August 25, 1915, further elucidates how the Allied blockade evolved.
III. America and the Blockade

This chapter analyzes the actions and policies of the United States Navy and the American Red Cross in regard to the Allied blockade of the Syrian coast, as well as in reaction to Ottoman security policies regarding their Mediterranean coast. Both organizations worked in tandem to transport money, people, and humanitarian aid to and from several ports along the Eastern Mediterranean during the first fifteen months of World War I. American naval ships operated along a corridor from Alexandria to Istanbul, frequenting ports like Jaffa and Beirut, despite the presence of Entente warships which were, after August 1915, officially blockading the Syrian coast, although their unofficial blockade could be said to have begun by December 1914. Americans, as representatives of a neutral power, were obligated to adhere to the policies of both the Entente and Central powers, depending on their location. Thus, American humanitarian efforts provide an important vantage point from which to observe Allied naval operations. Furthermore, interactions between Ottoman authorities and American diplomats regarding U.S. interests and naval operations signify some of the anxieties that compelled Ottoman authorities to regulate their ports more intensely after December 1915.

Branden Little suggests that “incorporating humanitarianism into the history of war deepens our understanding of the political, diplomatic, social, and cultural contours of the conflict.” He furthermore notes that the study of humanitarianism “illuminates…the formation of ideas, structures, and practices of interventionism, and the ways in which humanitarian responses to war catalyzed the creation of new forms of international interaction and awakened the world to the possibilities of aid amid disaster and in its wake.”211 American humanitarianism in the Eastern Mediterranean, while a story in and of itself, is thus intertwined with the story of the

blockade because humanitarian operations necessitated “new forms of international interaction.” The humanitarian work facilitated by American diplomats and seamen, protected as neutrals until the U.S. entered the war in April 1917, was unprecedented in scale and shaped the U.S.’s interactions with the international community during the first half of the war. American relief to Syria during the First World War represents only a small window into the massive humanitarian effort undertaken by various organizations in the U.S. during the war. Nonetheless, the story of American relief in Syria is uniquely complicated because of what it elucidates regarding “the political, diplomatic, social, and cultural contours” of the First World War in the Ottoman Syria.

American Neutrality

American interests in the Middle East at the outset of the First World War were closely intertwined with those of American missionaries who had successfully established several schools, hospitals, and a printing press in Ottoman Syria over the course of the nineteenth century. Trade between the U.S. and the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was never substantial, especially compared to trade done between the Ottoman Empire and European commercial powers. In 1913, for example, American imports amounted to only $474,050 out of a total of $18,754,137 in imports to Beirut. Despite a modest level of trade between the U.S. and the Ottoman Empire, this commercial relationship remained important because it allowed the U.S. to steadily expand its diplomatic presence in the region, which in turn provided additional support and safety to American businesses and missionaries operating in the Ottoman Empire. In 1906 the U.S.’s consular office in Istanbul was

\[\text{212}\] The top three products exported from the U.S. to the port of Beirut in 1913 were sewing machines, petroleum, and furniture. “Trade and Commerce at Beirut, Syria for year 1914 and January 1915,” NARA, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 189.
raised to embassy status, and in 1909 the U.S. State Department established the Division of Near Eastern Affairs.  

The United States had a reputation in the region for being more benevolent than imperialistic or expansionist. America’s benevolent image was partially related to the prestige of American missionary institutions. Additionally, a great deal of humanitarian aid following the sectarian conflict in Mount Lebanon in 1860 came from the United States via its missionaries, strengthening the U.S.’s positive reputation. Following French intervention to abate the massacres in 1861, one-quarter of the $150,000 in aid to the Syrian people of Mount Lebanon came from the United States. The precedent of American aid in earlier moments of crisis, as well as the long and successful history of American missionary institutions in the region, helps to situate the U.S.’s involvement in Greater Syria during World War I.

In early November 1914, the U.S. took on a new role in the Ottoman Empire as one of a few neutral powers whose diplomats remained at their posts when the empire joined the Central Powers. Furthermore, American institutions, one of the most prestigious being Syrian Protestant College, remained open through most of the war. On November 6, 1914, Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation regarding America’s neutrality in relation to the state of war between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire. The proclamation called for “impartial neutrality,” ordering all American subjects to adhere to several new provisions of the Penal Code of the

216 Many institutions closed after the U.S. severed diplomatic ties with the Ottoman Empire in April 1917.
United States, which amounted to a prohibition against Americans serving in the armed forces of either belligerent nation (Britain or the Ottoman Empire).  

As a declared neutral power, the United States was permitted, under international law, to engage in humanitarian aid. The legal basis for neutral humanitarian aid comes from the Geneva Convention of 1906 which sanctions rights and protections for medical personnel to attend to sick and wounded soldiers. On the participation of neutral states the convention provides, “A recognized neutral state can only lend the services of its sanitary personnel and formations to a belligerent with the prior consent of its own government and at the authority of such belligerent.” Additionally, the London Declaration of 1909, which defines how blockades should be implemented during times of war and specifically notes the rights afforded to neutral states within a blockaded region, also outlines several provisions that were relevant to America’s position in the Eastern Mediterranean during the war. According to a memorandum circulated by the U.S. Department of State on October 15, 1914, private individuals were under no obligation to discontinue trade with belligerent nations. The memo specified, “For the Government of the United States itself to sell to a belligerent nation would be an unneutral act, but for a private individual to sell to a belligerent any product of the United States is neither unlawful nor unneutral, nor within the power of the Executive to prevent or control.” This memo reflects the State Department’s understanding at the outset of the war there was a distinction between private commerce and activities undertaken by the U.S. government. As chapter two demonstrated, Allied policies toward neutrality and contraband were markedly different than

217 “Neutrality—Great Britain and Turkey: By the President of the United States of America, A Proclamation,” November 6, 1914 (Received by American Consular General in Beirut on December 14, 1914), NARA, RG 84 (Beirut), vol. 182.
218 “Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field,” Geneva, 1906, ICRC.
219 “Neutrality and Trade,” October 15, 1914, NARA, RG 48 (Turkey), vol. 360.
what the London Declaration outlined and what the U.S. State Department understood to be customary international law. Still, the U.S. Navy was obliged to play by the rules of the Entente nations while in the Mediterranean in order to maintain its neutral status.

In the fall of 1914 President Wilson proposed earmarking federal funding to the American Red Cross for relief of noncombatants. While the Geneva Convention outlines the right of the ARC to deliver neutral aid to wounded soldiers, there was not precedent for engaging in humanitarian relief for noncombatants, as President Wilson had proposed. Despite this impulse to expand its operations, Julia Irwan notes that pushing the boundaries of neutral humanitarian aid put the U.S. in a potentially provocative situation vis-à-vis the belligerent nations. Irwan argues, “Neutrality was contested terrain; the United States had to tread carefully to avoid becoming embroiled in world turmoil.” Thus, in December 1914 the ARC decided to abstain from engaging in noncombatant relief, arguing that the organization did not see how it could “impartially administer” noncombatant aid and “citing the organization’s limited funding, small endowment, and tiny staff as clear impediments to staging effective response.” With this decision, the ARC, at least initially, limited its work to the relief of wounded soldiers and left noncombatant relief under the charge of other voluntary aid societies.220

In an account of relief work undertaken in Syria throughout war, Bayard Dodge notes that the American Red Cross, in response to need generated by the war, sent funds to its Beirut chapter in January 1915. One of the first and most extensive ARC-funded projects in Syria was a medical expedition to Palestine in early 1915, which provided aid to wounded soldiers of Cemal Pasha’s Fourth Army who were attempting an attack on the Suez Canal. Dodge details this expedition:

At the cost of about $5000 an expedition was sent down to the borders of the desert. This expedition was made up of sixteen students from the American College of Beirut...The efficient work of this expedition pleased Ahmed Djemal Pasha [sic] so much, that he never lost an opportunity afterwards, to assist the American College and to use its medical graduates for the army service.\textsuperscript{221}

Throughout the war the American Red Cross with cooperation and funding from the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief and the Rockefeller Foundation, worked with the Ottoman Red Crescent Society to facilitate both military relief, and, later on, civilian relief.\textsuperscript{222} The topic of humanitarian relief will be revisited later in this chapter. On top of American Red Cross work in Syria, the U.S. Navy also played an active role in relief efforts of a different sort.

\textit{The U.S. Navy in the Mediterranean}

In late August 1914 the U.S. Navy decided to send the \textit{USS North Carolina} to the Eastern Mediterranean as a protective measure for American interests in the region. The presence of an American ship was supposed to first, calm anxiety surrounding Ottoman mobilization and the requisitioning of goods and property, including that of American citizens, and second, to deliver cash to American institutions as it had become virtually unobtainable since the start of the war in Europe.\textsuperscript{223} French and British naval authorities were alerted of the \textit{North Carolina's} movements weeks before it entered the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{224} The ship reached Istanbul in the first weeks of September 1914. Subsequently, Ambassador Morgenthau used the ship as a way to transfer funds to Americans in Syria and Palestine. A total sum of $25,000 was sent to Beirut ($10,00 for SPC, $10,000 for Beirut Missions, and $5,000 for the American Consul) and 7,500 Turkish

\textsuperscript{221} Bayard Dodge, “Brief Account of Relief Work in Syria During this Period of War, AUB Archives, Howard Bliss Papers, AA: 2.3.2.18.3.
\textsuperscript{222} See Tanielian, 135-167.
\textsuperscript{223} “I expect the ‘North Carolina’ will be in your port in about two weeks and will deliver you some gold.” Morgenthau to Bliss, September 8, 1914, AUB Archive, Howard Bliss Papers, AA: 2.3.2.13.2.
\textsuperscript{224} Circular to R. A. Talbot, S. N. O. Gibraltar, A.S. Malta, August 30, 1914, TNA, ADM 137/20.
Pounds plus 1,000 Pounds Sterling was sent to Jaffa.\textsuperscript{225} The \textit{North Carolina} reached Beirut on September 23, 1914, bringing “great relief” to Americans who saw the ship come to port according to Howard Bliss, the president of Syrian Protestant College.\textsuperscript{226} The ship then sailed to Jaffa where some of the money it was carrying was distributed as relief for American Jews, while the rest was consigned to the Anglo-Palestine Bank.\textsuperscript{227} The \textit{North Carolina} was the first of a handful of American ships to frequent the Syrian coast during the period from September 1914 to December 1915. These ships included the \textit{North Carolina, Tennessee, Vulcan, Chester, Jason,} and \textit{Des Moines}.

In addition to carrying relief funds, American ships were also instrumental in evacuating civilians from Syria and Palestine throughout late 1914 and early 1915. The American Consul Generals in Jerusalem and Jaffa were directly involved in negotiating with Ottoman authorities regarding the expulsion of foreigners from Palestine, owing to the fact that a large number of foreign belligerents were under U.S. diplomatic care as their respective diplomatic posts had been vacated. The first groups of “refugees” to leave Ottoman ports aboard American vessels were Jewish immigrants from Entente nations who had opted out of applying for Ottoman citizenship, as had been required by the authorities, and, as a result, were deported by Cemal Pasha.\textsuperscript{228} On December 27, 1914, the \textit{USS Tennessee} carried 500 refugees from Jaffa to Alexandria, this being the first instance of American participation in refugee evacuation. The \textit{Tennessee} made three additional journeys between Jaffa and Alexandria in January and February 1915, in total, during these three months, carrying 3,087 refugees to Alexandria.\textsuperscript{229}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{225} Morgenthau to Joseph Oman and Captain Williams, September 19, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 361.
\item\textsuperscript{226} Howard Bliss to Stuart Dodge, September 28, 1914, AUB Archives, Howard Bliss Papers, AA: 2.3.2.9.5.
\item\textsuperscript{227} Herdegg to Otis Glazebrook, September 24, 1914, USNA, RG 84 (Jaffa), vol. 14.
\item\textsuperscript{228} The word “refugees” is used in American Consular records. For elaboration on Cemal Pasha’s deportation of non-Ottoman Jews see Çiçek, 83.
\item\textsuperscript{229} “Record of American Ships,” NARA, RG84 (Jaffa), vol. 14
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
While American ships were active along the Syrian coast for the whole of 1915, it appears that the evacuation and deportation of non-Ottoman subjects was a complicated matter that was subject to erratic Ottoman regulation. From U.S. diplomatic and consular records it is clear that the American Navy was at the mercy of Ottoman officials when facilitating the transportation of non-Ottoman subjects. For example, Between February 16 and late June 1915, American ships frequented Jaffa, as they did Beirut, but they did not transport subsequent groups of refugees to Alexandria until June 27, when the USS Tennessee evacuated 131 people.\(^{230}\) A change in Ottoman policy regarding the process for Jewish immigrants to obtain Ottoman citizenship might explain this hiatus. Beginning in February 1915, with the permission of the Ottoman central government, the application deadline for applying for citizenship was extended and the fee required to apply, originally 40 francs, was waived. According to Ottoman officials, 3,000 Jewish immigrants applied for citizenship in February 1915.\(^{231}\) Italy’s entry into the war in May 1915 added an additional complication, as Italian steamers had apparently been permitted to transport neutral subjects from Mersin prior to May.

After the June 27 evacuation, the next opportunity for an American ship to carry passengers was in August when the USS Chester was given permission to transfer Entente women from Alexandretta to Alexandria.\(^{232}\) On August 30 a British diplomat reported: “The minister of war [Enver Pasha] has allowed 44 British, French, and Russian women and children to leave Ourfa for Alexandretta and has promised that 30 who were proceeding from Beirut to Ourfa will be stopped and sent to Alexandretta.”\(^ {233}\) Several hundred Entente subjects, including the women evacuated in August and September from Alexandretta, had been forcibly relocated.

\(^{230}\) “Record of American Ships,” NARA, RG84 (Jaffa), vol. 14
\(^{231}\) Çiçek, 83-84.
\(^{232}\) “Interned in Turkey: English Lady’s Terrible Experiences, Armenians Slaughtered in the Night,” The Egyptian Gazette, September 27, 1915, TNA, FO 383/92.
\(^{233}\) to Sir. H. MacMahon, August 30, 1915, TNA, FO 383/92.
from areas in Syria to Urfa and other interior towns in Anatolia, and this evacuation was the result of Allied diplomatic wrangling aimed at getting Ottoman authorities to release the detained women.\(^{234}\) The status of non-Jewish belligerent subjects was constantly changing and deportations to Urfa, Damascus, and other interior towns continued throughout 1915. More research is necessary on the subject of Entente deportations to fully understand why certain groups were exempted from this policy, how these deportees were treated, and to piece together how Allied diplomats responded to reports of ill-treatment at the hand of Ottoman authorities. These topics are outside the scope of this thesis.

From September to November 1915 the *Chester*, *Caesar*, and *Des Moines* also continued to evacuate Entente Jews from Jaffa. The individuals evacuated in these several journeys during the fall of 1915 were a mix of Entente and neutral Jews, as well as other unspecified neutral subjects. According to Consul General Glazebrook, 67 Russians, 45 French, 18 British, 11 Ottomans, 4 Austrians, 3 Serbians, 74 Americans, and 43 “neutrals” were taken aboard the *Chester and Des Moines*, which both left Jaffa on September 22, 1915. Glazebrook furthermore reported that all the refugees on these ships were Jews except for 30 Greek Christians.\(^{235}\) Glazebrook’s information on the refugees transported from Jaffa in September conflicts with information conveyed by Consul General Hollis, who was under the impression that Jews holding citizenship of neutral states were not permitted to leave. According to Glazebrook on the other hand, Americans and other neutrals, whose nationalities were not specified, were among the passengers of the *Chester and Des Moines*. The fact that these two American diplomats had different information regarding who was permitted to leave is an indication of the fluidity of Ottoman regulations, which were undoubtedly a source of frustration for American diplomats.

\(^{234}\) For more information on deportation of non-Jewish Entente subjects see Çiček, 144-147.

The last refugee evacuation took place on December 3 when the Des Moines transported 432 British, French, and Russian Jews from Beirut to Cyprus and Crete. After these final journeys, which were aimed at evacuating the remaining Entente Jews who had been deported, American ships were not permitted to revisit Syrian ports, despite several attempts to do so throughout 1916 and early 1917. The inaccessibility of the Syrian coast to all ships after the final refugee evacuation in December 1915 will be revisited in more depth shortly.

In addition to several U.S. Naval vessels, Italian ships also engaged in transporting deportees and neutral subjects. Çiçek notes that 2,700 non-Ottoman Jews of Entente states were transported to Egypt on Italian ships between December 1914 and January 1915, and additionally mentions that Italian ships facilitated the evacuation of certain groups of clergy in early 1915. Additionally, until Italy entered the war it seems that Italian vessels also evacuated Italian subjects and other neutrals. On Ottoman policies regarding the departure of non-Ottoman subjects and the role of Italian vessels, Stanley Hollis notes:

The action of the military authorities, has, from the beginning, been full of anomalies and inconsistencies. For instance, they have professed a great eagerness to get the belligerents Jews out of the country, while, at the same time, they have not permitted either neutral Jews or Christians to leave. They have permitted departure from Mersin, while at the same time they have prohibited departures from Beirut. Before Italy entered into this war, it was possible for neutrals to leave here by going overland to Mersin and embarking on the Italian passenger steamers there. Since Italy entered into the war no more Italian or any other for that matter, passenger vessels have visited this coast.

Despite several changes to Ottoman policy, which hindered the American and Italian vessels from transporting refugees for several months of 1915, several thousand people were evacuated.

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236 Hollis to Lansing, December 4, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
237 “After a week on the Syrian coast I will be able to tell you that we will leave Beirut this evening, having successfully completed the mission which brought us here... The Des Moines went to sea and returned to Jaffa on Wednesday and successfully embarked all the expelled Jews.” From USS Des Moines to Morgenthau, December 3, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
238 Çiçek, 83 & 145.
239 Stanley Hollis, “Why the Turks Refuse to Allow People to Leave Beirut by Sea,” October 20, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 382.
from the Ottoman Empire from December 1914 to December 1915. U.S. consular records indicate that at least 3,379 individuals were evacuated from Jaffa alone aboard U.S. ships by December 1915, although the total number of evacuations from all Eastern Mediterranean ports aboard both American and Italian ships is not available. 240

**Ottoman Security Policies**

Despite permitting American ships to call at Ottoman ports, and cooperating, at times, with America’s neutral humanitarian operations, Ottoman authorities were generally suspicious of American movements because they feared that the U.S. Navy was conspiring with the Allied fleets. On December 27, 1914, Talaat Pasha sent a complaint to Ambassador Morgenthau that the *North Carolina* was using wireless technology to communicate with Foreign Office in London. Talaat’s letter charged:

> The wireless telegrafic apparatus on board the American battleship, which had arrived lately at Beyrouth, was not taken out in spite of your promise that this wireless apparatus should never be used at all.

> News received from Beyrouth show absolutely that the above mentioned battleship has always been in communication with Sir Edward Grey in London, as well as with America and Port Said.” 241

Morgenthau responded by inquiring with Captain Oman of the *North Carolina* whether the ship’s apparatus had been used at port. Apparently the *North Carolina* had not used its wireless device, in compliance with the orders of the Sublime Porte, but another American ship, the *Vulcan*, had used its wireless after departing from Beirut while on the high seas which was permissible. 242 Despite this reassurance that the U.S. Navy was not colluding with the British Foreign Office, on December 27, 1914, at 12pm the Sublime Porte gave Morgenthau notice that

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240 “Record of American Ships,” NARA, RG84 (Jaffa), vol. 14
241 Talaat Bey to Morgenthau, December 27, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 361.
242 Morgenthau to Talaat Bey, December 27, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 361.
all ports in Asia Minor and Syria would be closed to all ships.\textsuperscript{243} One day later Morgenthau followed up with this urgent message: “Closing ports revoked. Modified one will be issued shortly.”\textsuperscript{244} This exchange indicates that Ottoman authorities took very seriously potential breaches to the security of their ports. American diplomats, especially Ambassador Morgenthau, painstakingly reassured the Sublime Porte at every juncture of the U.S.’s commitment to neutrality. Nonetheless, these early encounters encouraged Ottoman authorities to specify their security policies.

In January 1915 the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs circulated a \textit{note verbal} which defined Ottoman territorial waters as a zone of six miles from the coast. The \textit{note verbal} also reiterated the obligations of neutral powers warning that “The war vessels of friendly powers which enjoy the hospitality of the Ottoman Empire in the waters subject to its sovereignty should comply with the strict duties of neutrality, of which the most important is that of not having relations with the naval forces of the enemies of the Imperial Government.”\textsuperscript{245} In February, Ottoman authorities accused the \textit{North Carolina} of sending signals to an enemy ship, to which Morgenthau replied “only such perfunctory visits and signals as demanded by international naval courtesy have been received by the \textit{North Carolina}, [and] that the local authorities at Beirut have been fully informed in each instance.”\textsuperscript{246} Responding to some of the allegations against the \textit{North Carolina}, Stanley Hollis wrote to Morgenthau, “These people are so ignorant of what ‘wireless’ really is that when they see the signal men of the ‘North Carolina’ practicing the ordinary Morse signals by lights, from one mast to the other, they imagine wireless is

\textsuperscript{243}\textit{Morgenthau to Lansing, December 27, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 361.}
\textsuperscript{244}\textit{Morgenthau to American Consul General Beirut, December 29, 1914, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 360.}
\textsuperscript{245}\textit{Note Verbale from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, January 21, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.}
\textsuperscript{246}\textit{Note Verbale #159, February 2, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.}
working.”

By late February 1915, Ottoman authorities, apparently tired of reminding the U.S. Navy what its rights and duties were as a neutral, published a set of regulations for “vessels of neutral nations touching” at Ottoman ports. In addition to outlining the proper course for obtaining permission for each neutral ship’s landing, the regulations state that “the Captain of the vessel will give his word of honor that he will not give wireless news or whatever notification about local conditions.” And, furthermore, “The Captain will give his word that the enemies’ ships will not get the least sign concerning local conditions.”

Captain Decker of the USS Tennessee, unimpressed by the new set of regulations, which banned wireless communication even between American ships, wrote to Hollis saying he could “no longer accept the conditions imposed by the Ottoman government relative to the use of wireless.” The Tennessee did, however, continue to call at Syrian ports until at least June 1915 so it appears that Captain Decker was forced to get used to the new regulations.

Another set of Ottoman regulations toward neutral ships was circulated in August 1915 which stipulated that no one from any American ships would be allowed to disembark from their vessels, that no letters would be allowed to pass from American ships except via the Turkish Post Office, and that no one would be allowed to board American ships except Consul General Hollis. According to American diplomatic correspondence exchanged between Beirut and Istanbul, this new regulation was retaliatory in nature. On July 17, Cemal Pasha had reportedly asked Captain Schofield of the Chester for a loan of 300 tons of coal in repayment of a previous loan given to the North Carolina by Ottoman authorities at Beirut. In a letter to Morgenthau, Schofield detailed his response to Cemal’s request: “I explained to him the altered circumstance,

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247 Hollis to Morgenthau, February 11, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380. RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
249 Decker to Hollis, February 28, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
250 Hollis to Lansing, August 6, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
that coal was contraband of war and that for me to furnish it would be an unneutral act which
would involve my government in difficulties.”\textsuperscript{251} Schofield continued, “On July 20\textsuperscript{th} three days
later the order denying the hospitality of the Port to officers and men was issued. The
conjunction of these two events is significant.”\textsuperscript{252} Schofield’s reading of the new regulations was
that they were hostile and intended to inconvenience American operations, rather than being a
reflection of Ottoman security concerns. Consul General Hollis was equally irked by Cemal
Pasha’s apparent hostility and remarked, “The whole affair is discreditable to the local
authorities, as our officers and men have not given them any cause for the imposition of such
restrictions, but have, on the other hand, acted always with great circumspection and most
perfect propriety when ashore.”\textsuperscript{253} In another letter several days later, Hollis remarked:

As the prestige and usefulness of our ships in these waters has become greatly diminished
through the progressive restrictive measures levied against them by the Ottoman
Authorities here, such as the refusal to allow any person whomsoever but myself to go on
board of our ships, or to allow any but the commanding officers to come ashore, and the
refusal of the authorities to allow any letters or anything of the sort to pass between our
ships and this office, or vice versa, it is becoming a debatable question as to whether or
not they will serve any useful purpose by remaining here while such restrictive,
unfriendly and repressive regulations are framed and enforced against them by Ottoman
authorities.”\textsuperscript{254}

These exchanges from July and August 1915 reflect a palpable shift in the relationship between
Ottoman authorities and American diplomats. While Morgenthau’s correspondences retained a
very measured tone, messages from Consul General Hollis and U.S. Navy personnel were
increasingly critical of Ottoman policies and questioned the sustainability of U.S. operations
given the political climate.

\textsuperscript{251} Schofield to Morgenthau, August 1, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{253} Hollis to Morgenthau, August 12, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
\textsuperscript{254} Hollis to Morgenthau, August 20, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
The official announcement of the Entente blockade in late August 1915 further complicated the U.S.’s position in the Eastern Mediterranean. In September, the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned, “it will no longer be permitted for warships and merchant vessels of neutral states to visit Ottoman coasts which have been declared under blockade by enemy states.”

Days later, on September 4, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs again articulated:

> The Imperial authorities being required to take precautionary measures as a result of the blockade to which the enemy forces have subjected the Ottoman coasts. Even if the blockade is irregularly established, the presence of neutral war vessels in those regions might give rise to unfortunate misunderstandings and even expose the vessels to regrettable accidents, for which the Imperial Government can assume no responsibility.

This *note verbale* signifies that by fall 1915 the Ottoman central government had washed its hands of any responsibility toward American ships operating in the blockaded zone. While the letter suggests that “regrettable accidents” may arise from a misunderstanding or miscommunication between American ships and the blockading fleet, it is likely that this statement was also a public renouncement of responsibility should German U-boats mistakenly attack an American ship. As detailed in the previous section, however, the U.S. Navy continued to operate within the blockaded zone until December 3, 1915, despite increasingly difficult Ottoman regulations and the announcement of an official blockade. Interestingly, although no U.S. ships were allowed to visit Jaffa or Beirut after December 1915, American diplomats continued to hope that the situation would change. Throughout 1916 American philanthropic institutions raised funds and awareness for the plight of civilian populations in Syria, and even planned to deliver material aid to Beirut around Christmas in 1916, even though American ships were not able to proceed to Beirut at any point after December 1915. The specific involvement

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255 Note Verbale to the Embassy of the United States from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 377.

256 Note Verbale to the Embassy of the United States from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, September 4, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
of American philanthropic organizations is the subject of the next section.

American Philanthropy

In early 1915 reports from Americans in the Middle East began reaching the US on the suffering of certain civilian populations of the Ottoman Empire. In February 1915, American philanthropist Cleveland Dodge received a letter from his son Bayard, who worked at Syrian Protestant College in Beirut, detailing both civilian and military suffering in Syria as a consequence of Ottoman mobilization efforts. In May, the US ambassador in Istanbul, Henry Morgenthau, and the treasurer the American Board, William Peet, both sent word of atrocities being committed towards Armenians in Eastern Anatolia. In September, Ambassador Morgenthau telegraphed Washington D.C. urging the State Department to form a relief committee to address the needs of destitute Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Heading Morgenthau’s request, the State Department reached out to Cleveland Dodge, who was a close friend and former classmate of President Woodrow Wilson, to spearhead fundraising efforts to benefit Armenian war sufferers. On September 16, 1915, Dodge brought a committee together in New York and appointed James L. Barton, the executive secretary of the American Board in Boston, as chairmen of the Dodge Relief Committee, as it was initially known. Charles R. Crane, the chairman of the board for the Constantinople College for Girls, was chosen as the treasurer of the committee. In November the committee was renamed the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR), reflecting concern for both Syrian and Armenian populations. The ACASR became the primary conduit for U.S. aid to the region as well as the

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257 The American Board was formerly known as The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.
259 Grabill, 48.
principle lobby for increased American attention to the plight of Armenian and Syrian war sufferers in the Middle East.

In 1915, the ACASR raised $177,000 to be sent to Armenian and Syrian war sufferers, which, it was quickly assessed, was not nearly enough to meet the needs of the growing number of destitute people. In order to foster wider public support for the needs of Armenians and Syrians, Barton and his colleagues lobbied Congress to pass a resolution of sympathy for their cause. In 1916, the United States Senate passed a resolution on July 7, 1916, suggesting that the president “set aside a day upon which a direct appeal to the sympathy of all American citizens shall be made and an opportunity shall be given for our public-spirited people to contribute to a much-needed fund for relief of Syrian people.” A week later, the Senate similarly passed a resolution requesting that the president “designate a day on which the citizens of this country may give expression to their sympathy by contributing to the funds now being raised for the relief of the Armenians in the belligerent countries.” President Wilson later selected Saturday, October 21 and Sunday, October 22 as “joint days upon which the people of the United States may make such contributions as they feel disposed for the aid of the stricken Syrian and Armenian people.” The ACASR printed the president’s proclamation, along with quotes from a report on famine in disease written by an unnamed source in Syria, in a booklet that was circulated to “every clergyman, governor, and mayor in United States.”

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260 Grabill, 49.
261 “Proclamation,” August 31, 1916, NARA, RG 200, Box 70, file 966.21.
262 Ibid.
263 Ibid.
264 Grabill, 50.
In addition to relief activities undertaken by the ACASR, the Rockefeller Foundation also made large financial contributions to the relief effort, totaling about $610,000. Similarly, the Armenian-American community formed a relief organization, the Armenian Benevolent Union, which collected over $1.5 million to be sent as aid. Syrian immigrants were also highly involved in philanthropic efforts throughout the United States. The most significant of these organizations was the Syrian-Mount Lebanon Relief Committee which was founded in June 1916 with Najib Malouf as its chairman, Amen Rihani as assistant chairman, and Khalil Gibran as secretary. In addition to helping coordinate U.S. government relief, the Committee raised almost $166,000 in donations from Syrians across American over the course of two and a half years. Similarly, the Syrian Ladies’ Aid Society of Boston was founded in 1917 to raise funds to relieve the famine. More significant than contributions raised by these organizations, however, were remittances sent directly to family members living in Syria. One Iowa newspaper reported on the work of the Syrian immigrant community in America:

The Syrians in American are responding nobly to the cry of their brothers. These American Syrians have sent nearly one million dollars for relief out of their comparative poverty. They are entering into the suffering of their Asiatic relatives by observing fast days, and are sending the Syria the resulting savings.

Despite the deep commitment of Syrian immigrants to securing humanitarian aid for their countrymen and women, their total contributions to the aid effort are largely overshadowed by the ACASR which had the backing of influential elites and American politicians. Nonetheless,

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266 Moranian, 195.


their efforts to speak on behalf of their communities in the Ottoman Empire, often using American newspapers as their mouth piece, contributed to the philanthropic fervor that overtook the United States during the war.

American Jews were also active in raising support for their coreligionists in Palestine. The most significant American organization to work in Palestine during the war was the Joint Distribution Committee, an umbrella organization which brought together the Central Relief Committee and the American Jewish Relief Committee, as well as other Jewish philanthropic organizations like the Central Committee for Relief of Jews Suffering Through the War. None of the organizations that worked under the umbrella of the JDC were exclusively involved in aid work in Palestine, making their mission and reach much larger than the voluntary aid societies working on behalf of Syrians and Armenians. By 1917 the JDC had distributed $8,821,000 in aid, $1,000,000 of which went to Palestine.

American diplomats also played a role in providing relief for and advocating on behalf of the Jewish population in Palestine. The first intervention made by the U.S. was its effort to keep the Anglo-Palestine Company, the primary bank for Jewish immigrants, operating when all other foreign financial institutions were closed in late 1914. Although the bank was officially shut down because of its affiliation with Great Britain, the American consuls in Palestine and Ambassador Morgenthau in Istanbul were able to pressure Ottoman authorities to allow the bank to continue working throughout most of the war. This was important because the bank was able

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272 Bulletin of the Joint Distribution Committee, November 1917. JDC Online Archives.
to issue bank notes as credit to members of the Jewish community, giving them a safety net of sorts during the ensuing financial crisis caused by war and famine.\textsuperscript{274}

Throughout the entirety of the war, the JDC was a lynchpin in the success of American relief efforts to Palestine. Financial assistance from American Jews reached Palestine via the Anglo-Palestine Company, aboard JDC-sponsored ships destined for Mediterranean waters, in the transfer of gold bullion arranged at the American embassy in Istanbul, and, most significantly in the form of material food and medical aid. As a result of the blockade and rising food prices throughout Palestine, monetary assistance was insufficient for addressing the needs of the Jewish community. As early as February 1915, Cleveland Dodge mentioned in a letter to Mable Boardman of the American Red Cross that, “the Jews in New York have united with the Protestant missions and are raising the sum of $300,000 to send a vessel to Palestine and Syria and Asia Minor, for the relief of the needy Jews and Christians in those countries.”\textsuperscript{275} The JDC and the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs procured the use of the US Navy vessel the \textit{USS Vulcan} to carry nine hundred tons of food and medical supplies to Jaffa in the spring of 1915.\textsuperscript{276} The ship’s cargo was divided up, based on a prior diplomatic arrangement, to be split among the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities in Jaffa and Jerusalem. The Jewish community received 55\% of the shipment, Muslims received 26\%, and Christians 19\%.

As a result of the ACASR’s successful lobbying effort to obtain presidential backing for fundraising efforts, and following the example of the \textit{USS Vulcan}’s successful aid delivery operation in May 1916, in early October the American Red Cross sought permission from the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{274} Jacobson, 81-82.
\bibitem{275} C. Dodge to Mable Boardman, February 23, 1915, NARA, RG 200.
\bibitem{277} Jacobson, “A City Living through Crisis,” 83.
\end{thebibliography}
Allied fleets for the delivery of food to Syria. Mabel Boardman wrote to Lord Bryce on October 13, 1916 reporting that the ARC had “obtained the consent of the Allies for the shipment of food.” The *USS Caesar* was commissioned to transport coal to the *USS Des Moines*, an American ship already in Mediterranean waters, and arrangements were made for additional space on the ship to be reserved for relief supplies. Newspapers across the United States reported on the preparations being made by the ACASR, the Red Cross, and the U.S. Navy for the “Christmas ship,” as it came to be known, to embark for Syria in December 1916. A number of newspapers reported that negotiations took place between the Ambassador Morgenthau in Constantinople and Ottoman leaders in order to get a guarantee that the American ship could enter Turkish waters to both distribute aid and rescue Americans who were stranded in Syria.279

The ships cargo was made up of “certain consignments of clothing and food for various organizations and societies working in Palestine and Syria,” as well as “trunks and boxes which contained personal effects of Americans in Syria.” It is important to note that hospital supplies and medical relief, despite having special status under the Geneva Convention of 1906 and the Declaration of London (1909), were likely not included in the *Caesar’s* cargo. British Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, had, earlier in 1916, rejected an American Red Cross Appeal to send a medical commission and hospital supplies to the Central Powers, and had, furthermore, explicitly stated that hospital supplies would be considered absolute contraband of war.281 In a letter to Lord Bryce, Mabel Boardman reports, “The blockade of the Palestine coast is maintained so strictly that we were unable to obtain permits [from the British government] for medical supplies to be landed from one of our own naval vessels on that coast. We wanted to send supplies, drugs,

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278 Boardman to Bryce, October 13, 1916, NARA, RG 200, Box 70, file 966.62
280 Ward to Garells, 4 December 1918, NARA, RG 200, group 1, box 914, file 967.
281 Grey to Page, 22 March 1916, NARA, RG 200, group 1, box 69, file 940.407.
etc., that were greatly needed at the Jewish Hospital in Jerusalem, but could not get a permit for even this.”282 Boardman’s letter was written several months before the Caesar's cargo was prepared, however it remains unclear whether the British Government allowed hospital supplies to be included in this shipment.

A report prepared by Earnest Bicknell and sent to a Mr. Geo M. Verity on December 16, 1916, included important details about the “Christmas Ship.” Bicknell reported:

Tomorrow a ship loaned us for the purpose by the Navy Department will sail from New York, with 2,000 tons of food supplies for the people of Syria. This cargo will be taken to Beirut, the chief harbor of Syria, and will be distributed among the starving population of that country by our American Red Cross Chapter at Beirut, where we have a very competent and well organized group of American citizens, forty in number. The cost of this cargo of relief supplies has been shared by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, but in granting permission for the supplies to go into Syria the Turkish Government expressly required that the distribution should be in charge of the American Red Cross, in conjunction with the Turkish Red Crescent Society, the latter corresponding to the Red Cross Societies of other countries.283

Bicknell’s letter indicates that Ottoman authorities had given permission for the delivery of relief. Ottoman permission was only half the battle, however, as approval from the blockading nations was also required. Despite the fact that the ARC reportedly had obtained Allied permission to permeate the blockade and deliver aid as early as October 1916, official correspondence between William S. Benson, the acting secretary of the U.S. Navy, and Ernest Bicknell, the director general of civilian relief for the American Red Cross, tell a more complicated story. According to Benson, the USS Caesar had only been given orders to travel as far as Alexandria as of December 2, 1916. Benson informed Bicknell, “The State Department has not yet completed the arrangements regarding the port to which the Caesar will go to

282 Boardman to Lord Bryce, July 22, 1916, NARA, RG 200, Box 70, file 966.
283 Bicknell to Mr. Geo M. Verity, December 16, 1916, NARA, RG 200, box 69, file 940.62.
discharge her cargo and consequently it is not definitely known that the *Caesar* will be permitted to go to Beirut.”  

The *Caesar* was never allowed to proceed past Alexandria once it arrived in the Mediterranean, despite efforts to secure permission from the proper authorities, which by late 1916 included Ottoman authorities, the Allied navies, and German U-boat captains. Even in March 1917, several months after the *Caesar* sailed from New York carrying relief cargo, Ambassador Elkus, who had replaced Morgenthau in 1916, reported to be still “endeavoring to arrange for the Caesar and Des Moines to come to Beirut from Alexandria.” According to Ambassador Elkus, Ottoman authorities seemed willing to allow the ship to come to Beirut, however, the German and Austro-Hungarian governments were had not yet granted the ship an assurance of safe passage amidst the Central Powers’ submarines. It is likely that the U.S. abandoned hope of permeating the blockade when it joined the Allied effort in April 1917.

The fate of the cargo aboard the *Caesar*, which included relief cargo paid for by the ACASR as well as cargo consigned to individuals in Beirut, was the subject of controversy after it became clear that it would not reach Beirut. One report by Reverend William Hall of the Syrian Protestant College, explains that the ship’s cargo “was sold and the funds finally found their way Beirut for the purchase and distribution of food there, but there was little food to be bought.” At the end of the war, Lieutenant Colonel Ward was tasked with investigating what happened to certain boxes of cargo aboard the *Caesar* which were consigned to individuals. According to letters exchanged between Ward and American Consul General in Alexandria...

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284 W.S. Benson to E. Bicknell, December 2, 1916, NARA, Naval Correspondence, 27485-237.
285 Elkus to Bliss, March 10, 1917, AUB Archives, Howard Bliss Papers, AA 2.3.2.13.5.
286 Ibid.
Arthur Garells, some of the cargo had ended up in Salonika. Ward, endeavoring to get an
explanation regarding this cargo:

On my arrival in Cairo I promptly telephoned to you and received an intimation that none
of the remainder of the cargo of the “Caesar” was in Alexandria but that all of it had been
shipped to Salonika, even the personal effects… In view of the fact that some of the
people in Beirut for whom these parcels were intended desire to put in claims for loss of
property, I should like to have a statement from you in writing as to just what authority
was given you to forward all these cases to Salonika. Evidently someone greatly
exceeded their authority in taking the liberty to give away personal effects belonging to
individuals in Beirut and Syria without properly consulting those individuals.”

Several weeks later, Garells responded to Ward, apparently offended by his insinuation that the
consulate had mismanaged the Caesar’s cargo. In his response, Garells cites official orders from
Robert Lansing, the Secretary of State, to “make immediate arrangements [to] forward all
serviceable cargo for relief situation [in] Salonica.” Regardless of whether or not Ward got to
the bottom of his investigation, the fact remains that the “Christmas Ship” never reached Beirut,
and with America’s entry into war in April 1917 the U.S.’s tenure as a neutral humanitarian actor
came to a close.

What changed after December 1915 that made it impossible for American ships to
permeate the blockade and land at Ottoman ports? Is it possible to understand why the American
Red Cross and the ACASR put such effort into raising funds to send a shipload of relief to
Ottoman ports while it was growing increasing clear to American diplomats in the region that
permission was not going to be easily obtained? One letter from Stanley Hollis helps explain
why American ships were forced to conclude evacuation operations after December 1915. Hollis
explains:

There are certain difficulties in the way which always must be overcome before we can
ship refugees out of this country. In the first place, we must get the permission of the
Ottoman authorities, and that is not east in view of the unreasonable attitude adopted by

288 Ward to Garells, December 4, 1918, NARA, RG 200, group 1, box 914, file 967.
289 Garells to Ward, January 2, 1919, NARA, RG 200, group 1, box 914, file 967.
the authorities at Constantinople… In the second place, it is difficult to find ports where refugees from Syria can be landed. Egypt refuses to accept any more people whomsoever from Syria; Cyprus will receive only British and Rhodes will accept only Italian subjects… In the third place, owing to the strict blockade of the coast by the French fleet, our Naval commanders must always first get permission of the French admiral before they enter any Syrian port, and the French Admiral is very insistent on this matter. Evidently the presence of our naval vessels in these waters is not particularly agreeable to the French admiral.”

As Hollis’ letter indicates, several factors inhibited American operations after December 1915. The growing sense of Ottoman mistrust toward the U.S., which was palpable by the summer of 1915, meant that authorities increasingly levied regulations toward American ships that made their operations more difficult. While several American documents indicate that Ottoman authorities had refused to allow neutral ships to call at their ports after December 1915, Hollis described the Ottoman position regarding its ports as dictated by military strategy. In a memorandum titled “Why the Turks Refuse to Allow People to Leave Beirut by Sea,” Hollis explained to his colleagues:

The reason why all these difficulties are placed in the way of persons wishing to depart is solely military: the military authorities have an extraordinary read of information concerning affairs here getting to Egypt, and they also wish to detain in the country all those who were born Ottoman subjects as they wish to make soldiers of them.

Apparently security was of such importance that, according to Hollis, the refusal to provide permits for additional non-Ottoman subjects to leave came directly from Enver Pasha, and not from Cemal. Hollis continued:

I have long ago discovered that the military authorities have an almost superstitious dread of news passing between here and Egypt. It is for this reason that they, months ago, placed an embargo upon our naval vessels in these waters by not allowing their officers and men to come ashore, and by not permitting any persons whomsoever from the shore to visit the ships. The current report here is that the Turks are making preparations for the capture

290 Hollis to Lansing, December 4, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 380.
291 Stanley Hollis, “Why the Turks Refuse to Allow People to Leave Beirut by Sea,” October 20, 1915, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 382.
of Egypt.\textsuperscript{292}

Interestingly, Hollis cites the Egyptian campaign as impacting Ottoman security policies. As detailed in chapter two Allied intelligence operations were quite successful in regard to obtaining information about Ottoman troops movements. Despite being vigilant against any non-neutral activity, the U.S. Navy’s presence in the Eastern Mediterranean understandable made Ottoman war planners anxious. Their policies, rather than being overtly hostile or aimed at curtailing American humanitarian activity, were directly related to the security of their coasts and shifted as a consequence of growing suspicion that American operations would negatively impact Ottoman military objectives.

In addition to blaming Ottoman authorities for not allowing American ships to call at their ports after December 1916, the Allied blockading fleets also denied authorization for American ships to enter the blockaded zone. Captain Blakely of the \textit{Des Moines} wrote to Ambassador Elkus in Istanbul in January informing him, “I have… just received information from the French admiral commanding the Third Squadron, in charge of the blockade of the Syrian coast, to the effect that he will not be able hereafter to accord permission to visit the Syrian coast.”\textsuperscript{293} While the details available in American diplomatic correspondence are vague, it is likely that the one of the major factors in denying the U.S. permission to enter the blockaded area after early December 1915 was the presence of U-boats. A confidential letter to Secretary of State Lansing on January 8, 1916 relays that a German U-boat called at Beirut on December 24, 1915, and that Beirut was, shortly thereafter, “visited a number of times by a French destroyer, evidently searching for the submarines.”\textsuperscript{294} Captain Blakely’s letter from January, mentioned above, indicates that on December 25 the French Admiral had provided the \textit{USS Caesar} with

\textsuperscript{292} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{293} Blakely to Ambassador Elkus, January 5, 1916, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 391.
\textsuperscript{294} Hollis to Secretary of State, January 8, 1916, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 391.
permission to proceed to Beirut to pick up 250 French refugees (Algerians and Tunisians, according to Blakely), but that several days later this permission was withdrawn.\footnote{Blakely to Ambassador Elkus, January 5, 1916, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 391.}

Additionally concerning was the fact that Hollis also warned of mines were floating in Beirut harbor. In February 1916 Secretary of State Lansing wrote to Ambassador Elkus regarding a shipment of medical supplies that had supposedly been approved by the French and Italian governments for delivery to Beirut. Stanley Hollis, privy to information that he clearly could not share via telegraph, responded curtly, “Please telegraph Blakely keep away from here until further notice this is important.”\footnote{Lansing to Elkus, February 12, 1916, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 391. Hollis to Elkus, February 12, 1916, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 391.} Full details on why the Allied blockading fleet was adamant about restricting access to the Syrian coast after December 1915 are not present in U.S. diplomatic correspondence, but other sources would likely fill in the whole picture. A logical explanation for the Allies’ more strict blockade policy after December 1915 is that American ships within the blockaded zone were, first of all, endangered by the presence of U-boats, and second, that American ships might get in the way of Allied military operations, particularly related to their pursuit of U-boats. It is unclear whether the mines that were reportedly floating in Beirut harbor were placed their by the French destroyer as part of their efforts to eliminate the U-boat threat, or if the port was mined by the Ottoman authorities. In either case, all of these considerations impacted the status of the Syrian coast and impacted the U.S.’s ability to operate there.

\textit{Conclusion}

\footnotetext[295]{Blakely to Ambassador Elkus, January 5, 1916, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 391.}
\footnotetext[296]{Lansing to Elkus, February 12, 1916, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 391. Hollis to Elkus, February 12, 1916, NARA, RG 84 (Turkey), vol. 391.}
This chapter has attempted to illustrate how the United States interacted with both the Entente blockading forces and with Ottoman authorities to operate as a neutral humanitarian actor during the first several years of the First World War. Between January and December 1915 the U.S. Navy facilitated the evacuation of civilians from several Syrian ports. Many of these evacuees were Jews of Entente nations who had been expelled by Ottoman authorities for refusing to take Ottoman citizenship. Additionally, women and children of belligerent states were also, at times, allowed to leave via the sea, as were neutral civilians. Ottoman authorities were consistently aware of potential threats to their security, and endeavored to control the movements of American ships and their crews.

After December 1915, American ships were unable to revisit Syrian ports despite several attempts made throughout 1916. Beginning in October 1916 the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief began to make plans for an American ship to be sent to Beirut to deliver material aid for the benefit of the region’s civilian population. Clearly, those involved in arranging permission for the “Christmas Ship” to sail to Beirut believed that an exception would be made to the policies that had prevented American ships from reaching Beirut earlier in 1916. In the end, however, authorization was denied from at least one belligerent party, dragging the episode into the early spring of 1917 when the U.S. entered the war.

This chapter raises a number of important questions that cannot be adequately answered without further research. First, what were the circumstances which made Entente Jews subject to different regulations than other Entente civilians who were detained rather than evacuated? Did the presence of German submarines in the Eastern Mediterranean affect the U.S. Navy’s ability to continue its operations? Was permission denied for the U.S. to enter the blockaded zone out of
military necessity, or were the Allies chiefly concerned with curtailing American humanitarian efforts? These questions, and others, can only be answered with more research.
Conclusion

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge on the First World War in the Middle East by taking a close look at the Allied blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean and analyzing how it evolved over the first several years of the war. While the blockade has been analyzed in more recent scholarship as a contributing factor to the wartime famine that decimated the population of Syria and Mount Lebanon, very little secondary scholarship has been done on the blockade in its own right. This dearth of scholarship has meant that the blockade is poorly understood, over simplified, and that claims of its severity lack substantiation.

As this thesis has shown, from August 1914 until about May 1915 the Allied Powers’ policy in the Eastern Mediterranean closely resembled an unofficial blockade; however, commerce, while hugely diminished by the war, was not completely restricted and was carried on very modestly by neutral ships. May 1915 marked a shift in Allied policy, largely resulting from the emergence of the U-boat threat to Allied supremacy in the Mediterranean. Shortly thereafter, in August 1915 an official blockade was declared along the Syrian coast, extending the blockaded, which had previously only covered the entrance to the Aegean. Between August 1915 and December 1915 the only ships present in the Eastern Mediterranean, besides the Allied blockading fleet, were American naval colliers, which were permitted to call on Ottoman ports in order to deliver money and supplies to American institutions, to deliver humanitarian aid, and to facilitate the evacuation of Jews carrying citizenship of enemy nations who had been expelled from the Ottoman Empire and neutral subjects. December 1915 marked a final shift in the status of the Eastern Mediterranean. The last American ship permitted within the blockaded zone was the USS Des Moines which left Beirut during the first week of December. Despite attempts to get
permission from the necessary authorities for additional American ships to pass through the blockade for humanitarian purposes, from mid-December 1915 until the end of the war Ottoman ports on the Mediterranean were completely cut off from the outside world.

The shift in policy after December 1915 is not easy to explain and, as chapter three indicates, blame for this shift in policy cannot necessarily be placed on the Allied Powers since German submarines likely posed an additional threat to neutral American ships. After the Des Moines left Beirut on December 3, 1915, the landscape of the Mediterranean shifted as a result of German U-boat activity, increasing Ottoman suspicion and tightened security policies regarding the Mediterranean coast, and heightened Allied concerns that American ships could not be guaranteed safe passage inside the blockaded zone. It is unclear why the American Red Cross and the American Committee for Armenian Syrian Relief undertook a massive fundraising campaign during the second half of 1916 aimed at sending relief supplies to Syria, when no American ships had been allowed to pass through the blockade for several months. It is my sense that little candid communication went on between American diplomats in the Ottoman Empire and the ARC prior to the Caesar’s departure, or, alternatively, that certain arrangements had been made for the ship to pass through the blockade but not all of the proper authorities had been consulted.

Just after Christmas in 1916 the USS Caesar left New York loaded with 2,000 tons of material aid, including food supplies. Despite being reportedly bound for Beirut, the Caesar was never allowed to proceed past Alexandria once it arrived in the Mediterranean, despite efforts to secure permission from the proper authorities, which by late 1916 included Ottoman authorities, the Allied navies, and the Central Powers. Some of the Caesar’s cargo was sold in Alexandria and some was sent to Salonika, including personal cargo destined for individuals in Syria.
Several months later, in October 1917 the New York Times ran an article that quoted Rev. William Hall of Syrian Protestant College saying, “If the Caesar had arrived, it would have meant that other ships would follow, but her failure to come dashed all hope for relief.”

The failure of the “Christmas Ship” operation, followed shortly thereafter by the U.S.’s entry into the war in April 1917, at which point neutral humanitarian activity was impossible, marked a final shift in the evolution of the blockade, and, as Hall noted, “dashed all hope for relief.” While it is evident that the Allies were well aware of famine and the extent of civilian suffering throughout Syria, the blockade, as an instrument of total war, was maintained until the very end of the First World War. Dashed American efforts to relieve the civilian population in late 1916 and early 1917 signify that the last evolutionary phase of the blockade involved an increasingly “ruthless calculation,” to use the words of David Lloyd George, whereby the Allies quite literally planned to starve the Ottoman Empire into surrender. Only future research on the maintenance of the blockade from April 1917 until the end of the war can bring to light the extent to which the Allies “knowingly used famine as a weapon of war” during this period.

298 Thompson, 21.
Bibliography


