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Suppressing Rebellion, Projecting Authority: The 1895–1896 Druze Uprisings and Abdulhamid II's Resistance to British Influence

Abstract

Unfortunately, studies on the period 1894-1896 of the Ottoman Empire emphasise the Armenian issue, which overshadows the effects of Sultan Abdülhamid II's policies outside Anatolia. The Sultan was worn out due to the Armenian incidents that took place during these years and was subjected to intense pressure, especially from Britain. The sailing of the British navy close to the Ottoman ports posed a constant threat, while these pressures and threats created uneasiness among the Muslim population in Syria and caused the spread of Anglophobia. The Druze in Syria, who believed they were under the protection of Britain, were encouraged by this attitude and attempted to revolt. Despite the risk of foreign intervention, the Sultan authorised military action and suppressed the rebellions in a short time. This study analyses the causes and suppression of the Druze uprisings based on British consular reports, comparatively evaluates the Ottoman and British attitudes, and reveals that the Sultan's swift and decisive intervention in Syria not only prevented foreign intervention, but also strengthened his legitimacy as Caliph over Muslims. Moreover, the study emphasises that the Sultan did not only focus on Anatolia but also pursued a strategic policy of resistance against British influence throughout the empire.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, England, Hauran, Abdulhamid II, Caliphate.

İsyanı Bastırmak, Otoriteyi Yansıtmak: 1895–1896 Dürzi Ayaklanmaları ve II. Abdülhamid'in İngiliz Nüfuzuna Direnişi

Öz

Ne yazık ki, Osmanlı Devleti'nin 1894–1896 dönemine dair yapılan çalışmalarda genellikle Ermeni meselesi öne çıkmakta, bu da Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in politikalarının Anadolu dışındaki etkilerini gölgede bırakmaktadır. Oysa Sultan, bu yıllarda yaşanan Ermeni olayları nedeniyle oldukça yıpranmış ve özellikle İngiltere'nin yoğun baskılarına maruz kalmıştır. İngiliz donanmasının Osmanlı limanlarına yakın seyretmesi sürekli bir tehdit unsuru oluştururken, bu baskı ve tehditler Suriye'deki Müslüman halk arasında tedirginlik yaratmış ve Anglofobi'nin yayılmasına neden olmuştur. İngiltere'nin koruması altında olduklarına inanan Suriye'deki Dürziler ise bu tavırdan cesaret alarak ayaklanma girişiminde bulunmuşlardır. Sultan, dış müdahale riskine rağmen askerî harekate onay vererek kısa sürede isyanları bastırmıştır. Bu çalışma, İngiliz konsolosluk raporları temelinde, Dürzi ayaklanmalarının nedenlerini ve bastırılma sürecini incelemekte; Osmanlı ve İngiltere'nin tutumlarını karşılaştırmalı olarak değerlendirerek Sultan'ın Suriye'ye hızlı ve kararlı müdahalesinin yalnızca dış müdahaleyi önlemekle kalmadığını, aynı zamanda Halife olarak Müslümanlar üzerindeki meşruiyetini de güçlendirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca çalışma, Sultanın yalnızca Anadolu'ya odaklanmadığını, imparatorluğun genelinde İngiliz nüfuzuna karşı stratejik bir direniş siyaseti izlediğini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı Devleti, İngiltere, Havran, II. Abdülhamid, Halifelik.

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1. Introduction

Druzeism,¹ which originated from the Ismaili branch of Shiism and appeared on the historical scene in the 11th century, rapidly spread across regions such as Vādī al-Taym (the region including Hasbeya and Rashaya) Sayda, Beirut, Damascus, and Hauran (Ismail, 2007: 8; Hitti, 1928: 5). Beginning in 1725, the Druze began to migrating from the mountainous regions of Lebanon to the Hauran mountains in Syria. After this date, the region began to be referred to more often as Jabal al-Druze instead of Jabal al-Hauran. There were several reasons for the increase in the Druze population in Hauran during the Ottoman rule. The most important of these reasons was the disagreement between the Druze of Mount Lebanon and the Druze in Hauran. As a result of the disagreements turning into conflicts, the Druze population in Hauran began to increase under the leadership of the Atrash family from the mid-1750s (Buzpinar, 1997: 539). In 1837, Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Mehmed Ali Pasha, attempted to conscript the Druze of Lebanon and Hauran into military service. The Druze of Vādī al-Taym and Hauran, led by Shibly al-Atrash, rebelled, arguing that this conscription contradicted their life (Hitti, 1925: 8). This uprising resulted in the loss of 15,000 soldiers for Ibrahim Pasha (Firro, 1992: 61-79). During this time, the Ottoman Empire, which wanted to weaken Mehmet Ali Pasha, supported the Druze of Hauran. The Ottoman Empire actively fought against Ibrahim Pasha and, in recognition of the services provided by the Druze of Hauran to the Ottoman soldiers, exempted them from military service after 1840, on the condition that they protect the desert border (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure 1 in No. 247).

Ibrahim Pasha's arming of 7,000 Maronites² to suppress the Druze uprising in Hauran sowed the seeds of the Druze-Maronite conflict of 1840 (Hitti, 1957: 424). France supported the Catholic Maronites for strategic reasons, while Britain backed the Druze.³ Due to their interests in the region, France supported the Catholic Maronites, while the British supported the Druze. The conflicts between the two sides necessitated the establishment of a new administrative system called the Mutasarrifate of Jabal el-Lebanon⁴ (Samur, 2014: 81). As stipulated in the 1864 Provincial Regulation, Hauran was transformed into a mutasarrifate comprising the districts of Jabal al-Druze, Quneitra, and Ajloun, with Suwayda designated as its administrative center, and was incorporated into the Province of Syria (Buzpinar, 1997: 539-541).

The first major crisis in Hauran and its surroundings occurred in 1879 during the governorship of Ahmed Cevdet Pasha in Syria (Buzpinar, 2024: 205). Although there were some conflicts in the region during the governorship of Midhat Pasha, who was appointed after Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, the most significant crisis occurred during the governorship of Ahmed Hamdi Pasha (Samur, 1994: 401). Ahmed Hamdi Pasha, who knew the region well, warned Istanbul that Jabal al-Druze and its surroundings were open to foreign influence and that any turmoil in the area could lead to foreign intervention (Buzpinar, 2024: 216). Sultan Abdulhamid II harbored

¹ The Druzeism is a sect that emerged in the last years of the reign of the 6th Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim bi-Emrillah (985-1021). (Şenzeybek, 2011: 173).

² For the details of the conflicts in the region also see (Talhamy, 2012: 973-995).

³ The Ottoman Empire and England sent Catholic English Agent Richard Wood to the region to win over the Maronites in Lebanon against Mehmet Ali Pasha. However, unlike with the Maronites, Wood was more successful in his interactions with the Druze. Thus, the Druze took part in the Ottoman-English alliance against Mehmet Ali Pasha. After this period, France began to support the Catholic Maronites to balance the English influence among the Druze in Lebanon (Abraham, 1981: 57).

⁴ For the details of the Maronite-Druze conflicts in Lebanon, see. (Churchill, 1862).

suspicious that Britain harbored long-term strategic ambitions concerning Bilad al-Sham and its surrounding regions. In his view, the Druze disturbances were primarily the result of foreign incitement (Buzpinar, 2024: 220). He believed that Britain, under a pretext, aimed to disrupt the demographic composition of Hauran and its vicinity in order to facilitate Jewish settlement in the area. Consequently, Abdulhamid adopted a cautious approach in addressing the uprisings, aiming to restore order without extensive military intervention. This strategy was intended to prevent any justification for potential British interference in the region under humanitarian or political pretenses.

Peace reigned in Hauran until the Druze rebelled against their sheikhs in 1891. After the 1891 conflict, Ibrahim al-Atrash managed to retain his position as Mutasarrif of Hauran, while the power of the sheikhs gradually declined. By 1893, some influential figures in Istanbul proposed to the Sultan to subdue the rebellious chiefs of the tribes in Syria and Arabia through political means. In this context, special envoys were sent to Syria, and a large amount of money was spent on this task. As a result, Sheikh Sattam al-Shaklan⁵ of the Ruwallah Bedouins, who held a strong position in Hauran, along with eight Druze chiefs, came to Istanbul in 1893 with gifts and declarations of loyalty to Sultan Abdulhamid II. Ibrahim al-Atrash, the Mutasarrif of Jabal al-Druze, his nephew Yahya al-Atrash, Mahmud Nassar, Abu Ali al-Hanavy, and four other Druze brought twenty-four horses and various gifts to the Sultan (NA, FO, 78/4623, No. 880, Confidential). In response, Sultan Abdulhamid II aimed to strengthen their loyalty by granting various ranks and decorations to the members of the delegation, and promoting Ibrahim al-Atrash, the Mutasarrif of Hauran, to the rank of Pasha⁶ (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure 1 in No. 549).

The loss of territories after the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War, the leasing of Cyprus to England, and shortly thereafter, England's occupation of Egypt, led to Sultan Abdulhamid II losing credibility in the eyes of the Syrian people. Moreover, the allegations that England would occupy Syria made the situation even more critical. Therefore, the first five years of the Sultan's reign were years of anxiety and uncertainty in Syria (Salih, 1977: 253). However, this anxiety and uncertainty gave way to anger against England due to the Armenian incidents. The Armenian rebellion that began in the summer of 1894 in Sasun led the great powers, led by England, to put pressure on Sultan Abdulhamid II. For about a year, the Ottoman Empire had to deal with the effects of this rebellion and the Armenian uprisings in various parts of Anatolia (Gürün, 2012: 227-238). After the Sasun incidents, the demonstrations at the Sublime Porte by Armenians in Istanbul in 1895 led to the appearance of warships from great powers in the Mediterranean and off the coast of the Dardanelles from September onwards. The great powers thought they could extract some rights from the Ottoman Empire in favor of the Armenians through this naval pressure.⁷ Particularly, England's deployment of its navy between the ports of Thessaloniki and Kavala and its increasing pressure on Sultan Abdulhamid II caused great

⁵ He was given the rank of Pasha following this visit (Gross, 1979: 432).

⁶ The Sultan has repeatedly resorted to this method to increase the loyalty of local power centers in the Arabian geography to the central government, and he has been successful in this. For detailed information, see (Karpas, 2009; Yahya, 2011; Özbozdağlı, 2018).

⁷ Naval pressure, or more commonly known as Gunboat Diplomacy, is used for light warships. Especially the great powers have used these warships as a means of diplomatic pressure. The first example of this was when British Navy Commander George Anson used it to achieve his aims in the Canton region of China in the 18th century (Williams, 1999: 180-195).

anger among Muslims living in the Syrian region (BOA, Y..PRK.EŞA., 22/64). Moreover, rumors that Sultan's regime was about to be overthrown by a British-supported Christian uprising inflamed the emotions of all sides, both Muslim and Christian, in Syria, contributing to the spread of anarchy in the region (Langer, 1960: 158-161).

The aim of this study is to clarify the causes of the Druze events that occurred in Syria and the influence that Sultan Abdulhamid II increased among Muslims following these events. In this context, it focuses primarily on the reports of British consuls in Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem, examining how the hostile stance taken by Britain towards Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1895 affected the events in Syria. The main reason for focusing on Britain and British archival documents in this study is that the interests of the other five major powers shifted in different directions during these years. While Russia was interested in the Far East, Austria-Hungary was focused on the Balkans. France, which was Britain's biggest rival in the Mediterranean, was mostly preoccupied with domestic politics, while Italy's priorities were quite different. Germany had no interest in the region. In contrast, Britain had more political and economic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and Syria compared to the other five major powers, making it the state most closely involved with the region. Therefore, the reports of British officials and Britain's stance on the events have been emphasized.

2. The Metawile-Druze Conflict

The first disturbances in the Syrian Province began in August 1895, when the Druze attacked Muslim and Christian villages and telegraph lines in Jabal al-Druze (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 177/17). Subsequently, the robbery and murder of a Metawile⁸ near Banyas who was carrying approximately 40.000 kuruş by four Druze individuals triggered further unrest in the Meijazun area of Sidon (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 181/25). Acting out of revenge, a Metawile from al-Hiyam killed and dismembered a Druze horseman along with his horse on the same day, escalating the conflict. In response, Druze from Hasbeya, Majdal Shams, Bilad al-Bashara, Marjayoun, Sidon, Tyre, and Baalbek quickly mobilized (NA, FO, 424/184, No. 109), while many Christians, Kurds, and Circassians⁹ joined the Metawile in opposition to the Druze. In Marjayoun, 700 armed Christians, with the approval of the local Maronite Catholic Bishops, took an active role on the side of the Metawile against the Druze. The Metawile, under the leadership of Halil al-Asad from Yayibeh, inflicted a heavy defeat on the Druze. When the Druze religious leader Sheikh Hamad Kais did not receive the reinforcements he expected¹⁰, he ordered the Druze to retreat to their fortresses in Majdal Shams. When all towns and villages in the area were called to arms for a religious war, the number of Metawile quickly reached 10,000, prompting Sheikh Hamad Kais to call for a peaceful solution. According to Shibly Abela, the British Consul in Sidon, the entire region was in a state of great anarchy, and the pressure exerted by both sides to force the

⁸ It is the local name for the Imami Twelver Shia in Lebanon (Öz, 2004: 404-405). In Arabic sources, it is more commonly referred to as Mütâvîle, Mitvâlî, Mütevellî, or Mütevâlî, while in English sources, it appears as Matawilah or Matuali.

⁹ The first Circassian migration to the Syria region occurred in 1861 (Kızılkaya-Akay, 2013: 140). For the reasons behind the Druze-Circassian conflicts in the region of Lebanon and Syria after the second half of the 19th century, also see (Polat, 2019: 77-89).

¹⁰ As a result of the measures taken by the Governor of Beirut, Nasuhi Bey, the Druze of Mount Lebanon did not get involved in the events in Hauran in any way.

Christians living among them to choose sides in the conflict (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 278; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 181/21).

The Ottoman Empire acted swiftly by instructing relevant authorities to have military units prepared by October 9. The British Vice-Consul at Haifa reported that the unrest in Sidon and Hauran was beginning to affect the wider region, noting that some Muslims in Acre and Haifa were holding secret meetings and purchasing firearms in anticipation of a possible “jihad”. Drummond Hay, the British Consul at Beirut, highlighted the situation in the ports, the chaos in the interior, and the increasing lawlessness of the tribes, and suggested urgently deploying a warship in Beirut to protect British subjects in Syria during the current crisis (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 499). Drummond also likened the orders sent for soldiers in Haifa, Acre, and Nablus to come to Beirut to similar steps taken before the events of 1860. He warned London that Ottoman officials in the region were using threatening language, and that the soldiers appeared to be highly agitated (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 501).

In the assessment of Beirut Governor Nasuhi Bey, primary responsibility for the unrest rested with the Druze, whom he accused of repeatedly attacking the Metawile through what he described as lawless acts. At the same time, Nasuhi suggested that the Metawile themselves may have been content to exploit the situation as an opportunity to draw the attention of foreign powers to their grievances. According to his interpretation, the Metawile aspired to be administratively incorporated into the Lebanon region in order to benefit from its special status, including the right to have a Metawile mutasarrif appointed (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 501).

Her Majesty’s Consul-General Drummond Hay was considered the main culprit in the conflict between the Metawile and the Druze. There were rumors that Drummond had passed through Sidon before the events and had secretly met with the Druze. Indeed, Nasuhi Bey also sent a telegram to Porte, expressing his belief that the British, who had visited the Druze villages before the clashes, had a hand in the unrest (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 181/66). Therefore, during his meeting with Drummond, Nasuhi Bey questioned the consul about his travel route, to which Drummond replied that he was completely unaware of the events when he left Beirut and that he had not entered either the Druze or Metawile areas (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure 1 in No. 278).

On October 4, 1895, Porte sent orders to the provinces of Syria and Beirut, requesting the necessary interventions to end the conflicts between the two sides as soon as possible (BOA, BEO, 688/51559). As a result of the measures taken by these provinces and the Vth Army Corps in Damascus (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 181/41; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 181/51), the conflicts were resolved, and the Druze gathered in Quneitra and Hasbeya were dispersed (BOA, Y..A..HUS., 337/78). On October 15, 1895, the parties met for a formal reconciliation at Suk-el Khan in Hasbaya and signed a formal agreement to end the feud and agree to keep the peace. Under the terms of the agreement, the Druze were assigned responsibility for the area east of the Hasbani River, while the Metawile were to oversee the territory west of it. The negotiations were attended by the kaymakams and military commanders of Hasbaya and Cedide, and a copy of the finalized agreement was subsequently forwarded to Istanbul (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 302). In the immediate aftermath of the agreement’s conclusion, the Sublime Porte ordered a cavalry unit to be stationed in Hasbaya as a precautionary measure against a potential Druze uprising (BOA, BEO, 696/52141).

2. The Impact of British Naval Pressure on Syrian Muslims

The Armenian incidents in Anatolia and Istanbul, as well as the conflicts between the Druze and the Metawile in Syria caused the attention of the great powers to turn to the Mediterranean. J. Schmidt, the Her Majesty's Vice-Consul at Haifa, warned his government that the deployment of fleets by the great powers to the Mediterranean and the events in Syria were causing serious unrest among Muslims in Haifa and Acre. Reports from the region indicated that Muslims in Acre had begun purchasing firearms at any cost, driven by growing unrest and anticipation of conflict. In Haifa, similar developments were observed. As stated in Schmidt's confidential report, local Muslims were acquiring weapons and gathering nightly under the leadership of two influential figures, Necib el-Yessin and his brother Hacı Esad. Further intensifying British concerns, the consulate's kavass, Mahmut, informed Schmidt of an alleged plan for a major uprising scheduled for October 15. According to Mahmut, military units had been mobilized on the Sultan's orders to confront a perceived threat posed by the "English," which significantly heightened Schmidt's anxiety. Upon investigating these claims, Schmidt confirmed that local Muslims were indeed preparing for possible action and that, on instructions allegedly coming from Istanbul, they were prepared to raise the Sanjak-ı Sharif, a symbol of sacred warfare. In response to these developments, and in an effort to prevent the outbreak of violence in Haifa, Schmidt formally requested that the British government dispatch one or more of Her Majesty's men-of-war to patrol the Syrian coast (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 277, Confidential).

Continuing his investigations in the region, Schmidt reported that several young men from Tireh, an entirely Muslim village located approximately 10 kilometers southwest of Haifa, were attempting to purchase revolvers and ammunition in Haifa. He also concluded that some Muslims from Acre, led by Sheikh Abdullah Sahli, a prominent and "fanatical" Muslim figure in Haifa, were attempting the same thing in Acre. The consul believed that all Muslims in the country were in consensus and ready to rise up as soon as something happened related to Sultan Abdulhamid II or Istanbul. Schmidt even claimed that the Muslims in Syria were waiting for an order from the Sultan. Indeed, the consul noted that this claim was confirmed by the secret meetings in the city and recommended that necessary steps be taken regarding Nejib el-Yessin and Sheikh Abdullah Sahli, whom he considered the most dangerous Muslims in Haifa (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure 3 in No. 277, Confidential).

Nasif Meshaka, the Acting British Consul at Damascus, also reported on October 18 that there was unrest was growing Muslims in the province, echoing the concerns previously expressed by Consul Schmidt in Haifa. According to Meshaka, the general leniency shown by the Governor-General Syria, Osman Pasha, in handling security matters had emboldened bandits and rendered many parts of the province increasingly unsafe. Almost every day, there were incidents of looting and murder in the surrounding areas, making even Damascus an unsafe place for Christians. Observing that the Armenian incidents in Istanbul and the European pressure on Sultan Abdulhamid II had a negative impact on the Muslims in Damascus, Meshaka recommended taking urgent measures to avert a potential Muslim uprising against Christians (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 368, Confidential).

The Sultan, who closely followed the developments in Syria and its neighborhood, predicted that the Druze might revolt with the provocation of the agents in the region. Therefore, four reserve battalions were called up from Beirut to serve in Northern Syria (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 638). The regions between Marjayoun and Hauran were quite restless, with Druze bandit gangs

making the roads unsafe, while the Metawile were also starting to rearm themselves. The Consul-General at Beirut, Drummond Hay, considering the mobilization of reserves in Syria and Beirut to be an insufficient measure, saw the most urgent step as reestablishing a military post in Baniyas (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 639). Furthermore, reports noted that a significant number of Christians, concerned by the deteriorating security conditions in Syria and Beirut, sought refuge in Mount Lebanon (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 641).

As the situation became increasingly critical, the Governor-General at Beirut, Nasuhi Bey, met with Consul Drummond Hay on October 14, 1895. Nasuhi Bey stated that the presence of the British fleet at the entrance of the Dardanelles and the pressure exerted on Sultan Abdulhamid II personally had a negative impact on Muslims in Haifa, Acre, and other regions, stirring up their patriotism and religious sentiments. Nasuhi Bey openly warned the consul that under these circumstances, there was a need to fear the rapid spread of agitation in the country, which could eventually result in an outburst of fanaticism. Unlike Nasuhi Bey, Drummond Hay saw a British ship stationed in Beirut as an important tool that could be used to exert pressure on the Sultan and strengthen their hand in the event of an urgent disturbance (NA, FO, 78/4629, Inclosure 1 in No. 277).

The pressure exerted on the Sultan as a result of the Armenian demonstrations at the Sublime Porte and the subsequent turmoil in Istanbul caused great excitement in Anatolia and other parts of the state. In this atmosphere of panic, Muslims and Christians, incited by provocateurs, confronted each other in many parts of the country. The Ottoman Empire sent special instructions to the provinces to prevent European intervention in a new crisis. As a result, on October 31, the Porte issued orders to the Ministry of War and the Ministry of Finance to meet the needs of the Vth Army Corps in preparation for the Druze attacks in the districts of Wadi el-Ajam and Marjayoun and other areas. Meanwhile, the authorities in Damascus also evacuated all the Druze from the city to save them from possible attacks by the Muslims (BOA, A.MKT.MHM., 605/1).

The Sublime Porte had received intelligence that an Englishman had been wandering around Quneitra and Hasbaya in Mount Lebanon, visiting some Druze villages and inciting rebellion, and provoking about the annexation of Bechara to Jabal al-Bereket (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 181/66). Indeed, the Governor-General of Syria, Osman Pasha, informed the Ministry of the Interior that an Englishman from Manchester, accompanied by a Druze, had traveled from Jabal al-Bereket to Quneitra, Hasbaya, Rachaya, and the Druze villages in these areas (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 180/105). On November 2, 1895, Osman Pasha requested Ottoman Government to urgently send troops to the region, reporting that the Druze secretly desired to join Mount Lebanon and that the disturbances in Aleppo were being exploited to sow discord between Muslims and Christians (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 183/28; BOA, Y..PRK.UM., 33/73). The Sublime Porte instructed the Ministry of War to take the necessary measures to prevent those trying to incite conflict between Christians and Muslims in the region and to avoid any clashes (BOA, A.MKT.MHM., 605/2).

British Consul Drummond Hay also confirmed the Druze uprisings in the Hermon and Hauran regions. He reported that the conflict had initially been triggered by the killing of several Druze shepherds and the looting of their cattle by Circassians¹¹ and Bedouins. Drummond

¹¹ Significant conflicts had also occurred between the Druze and Circassians a year earlier, resulting in the arrest of 10 Druze (Kiremit, 2023: 257).

emphasized that unless the unrest was not suppressed through military force, the situation would likely escalate further (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 866). However, he placed blamed on Governor-General Osman Pasha, who was widely accused of corruption and greed, for failing to take decisive action against the Druze (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 650, Confidential). Drummond Hay also questioned the rationale behind the Ottoman Empire decision to mobilize such a large military force to suppress what he viewed as a relatively small Druze uprising, expressing concern over the disproportionate nature of the response (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 550).

The Druze, taking advantage of the widespread unrest in almost the entire Ottoman Empire and the presence of the British fleet at the Dardanelles and the Syrian coast, increased their bandit activities in the regions of Wadi el-Ajam,¹² Rasheya, and Hasbaya. Under the leadership of Sheikh Ismail el-Atrash, the Druze of Hauran began to gather in Busra al-Harir and adopt a rebellious attitude. As a result, on November 5, a cavalry battalion and an infantry battalion were sent from Damascus to the region, and reserves (Redifler) from the years 304 and 311 were also called up. Consul Meshaka claimed that Circassians, Metawile, and Kurds were being incited against the Druze by government officials and held the Ottoman Empire responsible for the unrest (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure 1 in No. 549).

On November 3, the Governor of Syria and the Marshal of the Vth Army informed the Porte that the Druze had attacked two villages in Hauran, killed twenty people from the population, burned their homes, and started gathering under a flag (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 183/39). The authorities stated that it was certain the rebellion would grow and demanded immediate action to prevent it. As a result, upon the recommendation of the Damascus Governor Osman Pasha and of the Vth Army Corps, Marshal Ömer Pasha, four battalions were dispatched to the region, and the Nablus Reserve Regiment was also called up, while the Damascus Regiment was mobilized as a precaution (BOA, A.MKT.MHM., 606/1). Sultan Abdulhamid II did not remain passive in the face of the Druze attacks on Muslims in Syria and intervened without delay. On November 9, a telegram was sent to the Governor of Syria, requesting a report within one day on why the Druze had taken such actions, how many Muslims had been killed, and what measures needed to be taken. However, despite the recommendation of the Ministry of War to dispatch eight battalions to Hauran, the Sultan did not initially deem this step necessary. He sought the opinions of the officials in Syria on whether it was possible to suppress the rebellion without dispatching troops from another region (BOA, Y..PRK.BŞK., 43/87). Moreover, the Sultan appointed Mustafa Bey, the District Governor of Shuf, to explore the potential for a peaceful resolution between the Druze and the people of Hauran, avoiding the use of military force (BOA, Y..PRK.BŞK., 43/100). The Sultan was wary of the impact that the deployment of a large military force to the region might have on Britain, especially at a time when he was feeling intense European pressure. The Sultan, who could not remain silent as Muslims were subjected to further oppression by the Druze, gave the order to immediately mobilize twelve battalions, taking into account all risks (BOA, İ..AS., 13/37). Additionally, instructions were sent to the Governors of Syria and Beirut to take precautionary measures aimed at preventing the Hauran

¹² Actually, the events here started in September 1895, and the Governor of Syria, Osman Pasha, requested the necessary military measures to be taken between Wadi'ul Ajami and Jebel Druze. He also warned the concerned parties not to fall for provocations by the Druze (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 179/59).

rebellion from spreading to Beirut and Mount Lebanon, areas with a significant Druze population (BOA, A.MKT.MHM., 606/3, 22.05.1313).

Due to both the Ottoman Empire's military preparations and the consular reports sent from the region, the United Kingdom decided to send a fleet to the coasts of Syria and Lebanon as its first step (NA, FO, 424/184, No. 435). Shortly after, France also decided to send a fleet to the Syrian coast (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 691). The French government warned the United Kingdom that if the Druze, who had raised the British flag, attacked the Maronites and Catholics in the region, they would actively intervene (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 656). Following this warning from France, the British government contacted the Admiral of the Mediterranean Fleet and instructed him to move to the Syrian coast without delay (NA, FO, 424/184, No. 435).

As the consul in Damascus was on leave, Drummond Hay travelled to Damascus on November 14 to closely investigate the events unfolding in the city. He observed that both Muslims and Christians were in a state of panic.¹³ According to Drummond Hay, there was a widespread belief among Muslims and local officials that the British were responsible for the disturbances in Syria (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 720). Indeed, a careful examination of the reports sent to London during this period reveals that there were numerous allegations suggesting that the British had incited the Druze in both Beirut and Damascus (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 673).

An Irish Presbyterian missionary, writing in the context of growing British disapproval of Sultan Abdulhamid II, submitted a detailed report concerning the disturbances allegedly caused by the Druze in the region. The report highlighted the fear prevailing among the Christian population of Ayn al-Shaara, a village located on the eastern slopes of Mount Hermon, with approximately 1,000 inhabitants half of whom were Druze. According to the missionary, the Druze had assumed a hostile stance toward Christians throughout Syria, engaging in livestock theft and crop seizures. These actions reportedly led to the displacement of many Christians, who were compelled to flee their homes and seek refuge in the Zahle region of Lebanon. Similar incidents were documented in the Rashaya area on the western side of Mount Hermon, a region with a population of around 6,000, one-third of whom were Druze. In this locality, the missionary alleged that the Druze had harassed Christian residents and attacked both civil and military personnel (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 549). The missionary's report further noted that these events provoked considerable resentment among local Muslims. British consuls attributed this anger to the public display in Damascus of mutilated bodies of women and children, allegedly victims of attacks by Druze groups on Christian villages. However, in a contrasting interpretation, Drummond contended that the bodies in question may have belonged to individuals who had died from stray bullets or fires and were subsequently disfigured by local Muslims in an effort to incite revenge sentiments (NA, FO, 78/4623, Inclosure in No. 880, Confidential).

British missionaries who had resided in Damascus for many years contacted British consuls due to their growing concern over the increasingly unstable and lawless conditions in the interior regions conditions they claimed to have never witnessed before. The missionaries openly stated that Muslims had offered shelter to Christians in the city in the event of a possible uprising, but they also sent a letter to Drummond expressing that their missions were closely

¹³ At the same time, there were intense demonstrations against local Christians and Europeans in Haifa and Jerusalem (NA, FO, 195/1895, No. 58).

monitored by government spies. According to Drummond Hay, these measures stemmed from suspicions that the British were inciting the Druze and might have supplied them with weapons.¹⁴ Drummond believed that such accusations against the British were initiated by Anglophobic magazines circulating in Syria and almost throughout the entire country. Recently, the arrival of two British officers from Egypt to buy horses and their contact with the Druze further fueled these rumors. Additionally, the frequent visits of the Druze leader from Mount Lebanon to Drummond during this period further heightened existing suspicions (NA, FO, 78/4623, Inclosure in No. 880, Confidential. See Appendix 1).

The Druze of Mount Lebanon refrained from actively supporting the disturbances in Hauran. This was largely due to the warning by Beirut Governor Nasuhi Bey that any Druze who went to the rebellious areas of Hauran would be treated as outlaws (NA, FO, 78/4629, No. 769). Furthermore, Druze sheikhs applied to the Governorship of Mount Lebanon, expressing their loyalty and requesting not to be held responsible for any military action against the Druze of Hauran (BOA, A.MKT.MHM., 606/6). Indeed, the letter written by Nesib Canbolat Bey to the Druze religious leader Sheikh el-Akkal had the desired effect on the Druze outside Hauran (NA, FO, 78/4623, No. 911, Confidential). In his letter, Nesib Canbolat stated:

“I am deeply saddened to hear that some bad characters among the Druze of Hauran have engaged in acts of aggression against the imperial will and the principles on which the Druze were raised, namely, the principles of obedience and submission to our rulers who know our interests better than we do. Therefore, it is the duty of every Druze with an ounce of honor to disapprove of the actions of these bad characters, who darken the face of humanity with their disorderly behavior. As the religious leader of the Druze, I must ask you to instruct every member of your community residing in your region to remain silent and openly reject the actions of these malicious individuals. Furthermore, I request that you add that it is impossible for us to have any relation with them or with those who approve of their utterly destructive actions. It is the duty of every Druze to dedicate their money and lives to the service of the Imperial Government, to whom we owe our existence and who continuously bestows their grace upon us.” (NA, FO, 78/4624, Inclosure 2 in No. 911).

Nesib Canbolat by these statements, he effectively declared the Druze in Hauran to be rebels. Drummond, on the other hand, saw the fact that the Druze of Mount Lebanon, known for their sympathy towards the British, did not get involved in the Hauran incidents thanks to this letter as very valuable for the elimination of the accusations directed at England (NA, FO, 78/4624, Inclosure 1 in No. 911, Confidential).

Contrary to the assertions made by British consuls stationed in Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem, the Druze unrest in Hauran and its surrounding areas did not spark any uprisings or disturbances in Damascus. This relative calm was attributed to Sultan Abdulhamid II's prompt and decisive response: he issued clear directives to local authorities to prevent any intercommunal tensions and swiftly dispatched troops to the region. In a confidential report, Her Majesty's Consul in Damascus, Harry Charles Augustus Eyres, expressed concern over what he perceived as an excessive military presence in the city. He regarded the deployment of such a large force and the mobilization of reserve troops as disproportionate to the scale of the rebellion in Hauran. Eyres also observed that the troops suffered from poor discipline and

¹⁴ The fact that the Druze generally used British-made Martini Henry rifles in the uprisings further strengthened these claims.

inadequate nourishment, and warned that logistical shortcomings in supplying the soldiers could result in serious consequences. Given Britain's negative reputation among segments of the local population, Eyres believed that in the event of civil unrest, British nationals and their property would likely be among the first targets. He repeatedly cautioned London about this risk in his correspondence (NA, FO, 78/4624, Inclosure in No. 939, Confidential).

According to Eyres, there were several reasons for the intense resentment towards the British in Damascus. The first was the support extended by Britain to the Armenians; the second was the publication of articles hostile to the British in the Egyptian newspapers *Nil Felah* and *Al-Ahram*. The third reason stemmed from the anger among Muslims over the pressure and interference exerted by the British government on the Sultan in defence of the Armenians. In his report to London, Eyres also noted that an unnamed Pasha had told him that the current crisis could change if the Sultan was replaced and the suspended constitution was reinstated (NA, FO, 78/4624, Inclosure in No. 939, Confidential, See Appendix 2). It is particularly noteworthy that Eyres, who was generally forthright in naming civil and military officials who held such views and who often provided detailed information about their previous positions, personalities, and attitudes towards the administration chose not to disclose the identity of the Pasha in this instance.

3. Measures Taken by the Ottoman Empire Against the Hauran Uprising

After the Governor General of Syria, Osman Pasha, called on the Druze of Hauran to surrender, he made the following demands for the cessation of the operations:

1. The surrender of 10,000 Martini-Henry rifles alleged to be in the possession of the Druze.
2. Payment of 33,000 kuruş in compensation for each life lost during the raids.
3. Compensation for the property damaged.
4. Collection of twenty years worth of back taxes.
5. Military service.

Sultan Abdulhamid II took some measures when incidents began in Syria, but due to European pressure, he was not in favor of a military operation against the Druze (BOA, BEO, 681/51034). This step could lead to greater disturbances and possibly provoke active intervention by the British. However, the Druze's negative response to Osman Pasha's demands and their continued actions left the Sultan with no choice but to launch a military operation (NA, FO, 78/4623, Inclosure in No. 880, Confidential). Thus, the Hauran operation was planned to consist of fourteen regular battalions, ten reserve battalions, three cavalry regiments, each with four artillery batteries, and eight mountain guns. This number was later changed to eleven regular battalions, including one Albanian, eight reserve battalions, two cavalry regiments, each with four artillery batteries, and eight mountain guns.¹⁵ In addition to these units, five reserve battalions were kept ready in Katana, Sassa, Marjayoun, Rashaya, and Hasbaya. The headquarters camp was Sheik Miskin on the Mezerib Railway line, approximately 80 km from Damascus. In the event of any disturbance, five battalions remained in Damascus, consisting of three regular battalions, two reserve battalions, and one cavalry regiment. In the meantime,

¹⁵ The reduction in this number was caused by the Zeytun Armenian rebellion that emerged during the same period.

twenty-seven of the sixty-three reserve battalions recently called from the Vth Army joined the Zeytun forces, and four regular battalions were also sent there. Eyres noted that there were many desertions from the battalions and that the reserve depot lacked any supplies, uniforms, coats, boots, or any other items suitable for winter conditions. Consequently, he claimed that the soldiers left Damascus in a completely unsuitable state for a serious operation (NA, FO, 78/4624, Inclosure in No. 940, Confidential).

Armed confrontations in the Hauran region persisted throughout this period. Following an attack by Circassian groups on the village of Hina, which reportedly resulted in the deaths of approximately 300 Druze, retaliatory assaults were carried out by the Druze against Circassians in Mansura, near Quneitra. In the subsequent attacks, while the Druze suffered heavy losses, the Circassians also lost their leader Ahmed Bey and thirty men, along with about twenty gendarmes (NA, FO, 78/4624, Inclosure in No. 941). The Druze in Mount Hermon and the neighboring regions concentrated in Majdal Shams out of fear of an attack by the Circassians and Kurds. According to Drummond, in this last clash, the Druze were the aggressors. In fact, it was the Druze who first fired upon the Ottoman military units that had positioned themselves between the conflicting parties to prevent the clash. Drummond asserted that, had Naum Pasha, the Governor of Jabal al-Lebanon, not acted promptly to contain the agitation, a broader mobilization involving thousands of Druze could have occurred (NA, FO, 78/4624, Inclosure in No. 946).

Consul Eyres believed that the Hauran operation would end in a complete fiasco. According to him, 5,000 soldiers were more than enough to suppress the Druze, and using such a large force would lead to new problems. According to him, it was inevitable that the troops, inadequately equipped in every aspect, suffering from food shortages and the cold, would be decimated by disease. Indeed, he supported this view with the fact that 150 to 200 sick soldiers were arriving in Damascus from Hauran every evening. Eyres' biggest claim regarding the operation was that the looting and burning of Majdal by the Circassians, Kurds, and Bedouins took place in the presence of Hauran Commander Memduh Pasha and his troops. In these incidents, the Kurds burned the American Mission School, three churches, and several Christian homes, while, unlike the Kurds, the Circassians and Bedouins respected Christian residences and structures (NA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure 2 in No. 866). Eyres further commented that the Druze of Hauran had openly rebelled against the government and had attacked both Muslims and Christians. Eyres characterized the actions of the Druze against Christians in the Hermon region as particularly brutal, highlighting reports of violence that, in his view, intensified sectarian tensions in the area. The Druze, who were heavily involved in banditry throughout Hauran and its surroundings, had been primarily responsible for acts of robbery and assault in the region in recent years, even robbing British travellers on several occasions. Eyres concluded that the Druze sheikhs were nothing more than wild mountaineers, incapable of even reaching consensus among themselves (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 102, Confidential).

While the Druze incidents continued violently in Hauran and Majdal Shams, according to Drummond Hay, the fact that these incidents did not spread to Beirut and that there were no disturbances between Muslims and Christians was largely due to the tireless efforts of Governor Nasuhi Bey. In this regard, Drummond Hay expressed his honor in mentioning the

name of Nasuhi Bey, who played a very important role in establishing peace in the province, in his report to his government on December 26 (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No.64).

4. Agreement Reached Between the Two Parties

The newspapers *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* and *Sabah* announced in their December 24th issue that the Druze had been defeated by Ottoman soldiers in Hauran, publishing the telegram from Marshal Ömer Rüştü Pasha (NA, FO, 424/184, No. 867). On January 8, 1896, Eyres informed the Her Majesty's Government that the military operation against the Druze had ended (NA, FO, 424/186, No. 37). After England exerted pressure on the Sublime Porte to learn the details of the rebellion, the Governor of Beirut, Nasuhi Bey, sent a report on the events to the Grand Vizier on February 8, 1896. Stating that the rebellion was greatly exaggerated by the consuls and missionaries in the region, Nasuhi Bey explained that the root of the disturbances was the Druze's long-standing aggressive behavior towards the Circassians and Bedouins, and the retaliatory attacks against the Druze driven by feelings of revenge (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 173).

The stipulations set forth by the Sublime Porte were explicit: land taxes would be collected, a comprehensive cadastral survey of all lands in the Hauran region would be undertaken, and title deeds would be issued to property owners, alongside the regular payment of taxes. Additionally, military conscription would apply to Druze individuals residing outside Hauran, and all Martini-Henry rifles as well as individuals found guilty of looting or raiding would be surrendered to the government. However, foreign consuls expressed skepticism regarding the enforceability of the conscription clause, arguing that unless the Sublime Porte proceeded with caution, such a measure could provoke renewed resistance among the Druze, resulting in serious political and financial repercussions. Although some Druze groups appeared willing to accept certain provisions, there was widespread opposition to conscription and to the surrender of arms and offenders. As a result, approximately 6,000 Druze who rejected these terms began to regroup in the northeastern part of Jabal al-Druze, a region largely inaccessible to Ottoman troops (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 191). Subsequently, following the arrest of approximately 800 Druze from a village near Damascus, Druze forces launched attacks on neighboring Christian villages (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 217). According to British diplomatic sources, such actions were intended to attract European attention and to elicit British intervention in the region under the pretext that Christians were being targeted.

Drummond Hay, characterized the Druze as a warrior race that would not submit to pressure, and advised London that a governance system similar to that of Mount Lebanon should be provided for the Druze of Hauran before it was too late (NA, FO, 424/186, No. 217; BOA, A.MKT.MHM., 606/13). Whitehall, under the current circumstances, did not find such an initiative suitable given its plans in the Near East. In this regard, England limited itself to calling on the Sublime Porte to end the Hauran expedition, treat the Druze prisoners well (BOA, Y..A...HUS., 345/12), and send a cruiser to the Port of Beirut BOA, A.MKT.MHM., 606/15).

Despite England's pressure, the Sublime Porte, determined to punish the responsible parties, sent approximately 300 Druze arrested in the villages of Mount Hermon to Crete to serve as soldiers¹⁶ BOA, A.MKT.MHM., 606/15). In addition to those sent to Crete, 166 Druze, whom the

¹⁶ In addition, 690 confiscated weapons were also brought to Damascus (BOA, Y..A...HUS., 345/83; BOA., HR.TH., 170/72). On February 12, 1896, England filed a complaint with the Sublime Porte, alleging that

British consuls described as of bad character and believed they fully deserved their fate due to their involvement in recent events, were also arrested and brought to Damascus (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 218). Among the prisoners brought from Sweida to Damascus on February 8, 1896, were thirteen members of the Atrash family, including Shibly al-Atrash, who had been deposed from the governorship of Jabal al-Druze (BOA, Y..MTV., 136/54). According to Eyres, Shibly al-Atrash was a very cunning person who tried to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. He could neither fully commit himself to the Druze nor remain loyal to the Ottomans. Therefore, he fully deserved what happened to him¹⁷ (NA, FO, 424/187, Inclosure in No. 198).

After being detained in Damascus for a while, the captured Druze were exiled to different parts of the country. According to Eyres, the Sublime Porte was acting harshly and foolishly by punishing those who had surrendered in this manner because very few of those who had used weapons against the soldiers were among the captives. However, allegations that the battalions stationed in the Mount Hermon region committed some excesses against the Druze had prompted England to take action (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 244). In response, the British formally lodged a complaint with the Sublime Porte on 18 February 1896, concerning the mistreatment of the Druze by Ottoman troops in Majdal Shams and the Hermon region. Nevertheless, this diplomatic protest yielded no tangible results (BOA., A.MKT.MHM., 606/13).

The Druze in the Sweida and Kanawat regions, including the Atrash and Amer families in Hauran, surrendered to the Ottoman Empire when they realized they would not receive the expected support from the Druze in the surrounding areas and England, and they agreed to the following conditions:

1. The surrender of Martini rifles and English revolvers.
2. Compulsory military service.
3. Registration of lands.
4. Payment of all accumulated taxes (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 285).

5. Consul Eyres' Assessments Regarding the Hauran Operation

The Her Majesty Government, which was closely interested in the future of the region, had requested Consul Eyres in Damascus to prepare a detailed report on the events. However, Eyres was getting great difficulty obtaining information because his connection with the Druze had been completely severed since the rebellion began. On the other hand, Eyres believed that it was not the right move to risk maintaining a secret correspondence with the Druze, given that there was a great deal of anger in the public opinion against Britain and the British for being the authors of these disturbances. Because of the Governor-General Syria, Osman Pasha and Vth Army Corps Marshal, Ömer Rüşdü Pasha, believed that England was supplying weapons to the Druze and that Eyres had actively played a role in inciting the rebellion in Hauran (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 102, Confidential). Additionally, the Russian Consul,

Druze conscripts sent to Crete were mistreated by soldiers in Beirut. The accusation was immediately addressed to the Governor of Beirut, Nasuhi Bey, who stated that the claim was unfounded and that the detainees were treated well (BOA., HR.TH., 170/72).

¹⁷ The order for the exile of twenty-five leading Druze families in Hauran meant that approximately 3,000 or 4,000 people would face this punishment.

who visited Governor Osman Pasha, stated that some English officials, wishing to take advantage of the excitement surrounding the Druze issue, were encouraging Christians and Protestants to create disturbances (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 187/71). For these reasons, Eyres' actions were closely monitored by government officials.

Based on the intelligence gathered through British missionaries and local agents, Eyres offered his initial assessment of the situation in and around Hauran. In his report dated late October, he claimed that Druze groups attacked the Muslim villages of Kaheti, Harak, and Nahdi, resulting in numerous deaths, including men, women, and children. These actions, described by Eyres as brutal, reportedly provoked widespread anger among the region's Muslim population. Eyres further contended that, with the exception of the 1890 campaign, the Sublime Porte's failure to maintain firm control over the Druze and its decision to disarm Ottoman troops stationed in Hauran signaled a broader pattern of administrative weakness. He argued that the central government's inaction had effectively paved the way for the recent assaults, thereby making it the principal actor responsible for enabling the violence. Nevertheless, Eyres maintained that the Druze remained the aggressors in the most recent incidents, and warned that any further hesitation by the Ottoman authorities in enforcing Druze obedience would be perceived as a severe loss of imperial authority (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 102, Confidential).

In his correspondence, Eyres expressed the view that the peace terms proposed to the Druze in response to their actions were overly severe. Given their social and economic structure, he considered it unrealistic to expect the Druze to accept regular taxation and conscription. He further noted that, due to their ongoing conflicts with Kurds, Circassians, and Bedouins in the region, disarmament would likely prove impractical. Eyres anticipated that the Druze would offer superficial acceptance of the agreement in order to prompt the withdrawal of Ottoman forces, only to resume resistance soon after. In light of these concerns, he recommended that the British government urge the Sublime Porte to moderate the terms of the treaty, arguing that further oppression of the Druze could destabilize the region. Beyond this diplomatic initiative, however, Eyres warned that deeper foreign intervention would be counterproductive. Consistent with its broader policy of non-intervention in Mediterranean affairs following its occupation of Egypt, the British government deemed active involvement unnecessary and limited its response to a formal request that the Ottoman authorities avoid excessive reprisals (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 102, Confidential).

The Druze had expressed their acceptance to hand over the rifles they had captured from the soldiers at different times and to pay the overdue taxes. However, since only fifty Martini-Henry rifles were collected, this number did not satisfy the Ottoman authorities. Regarding the taxes, the Druze were prepared to pay a significant amount. In fact, they had already paid 38,000 silver medjidiye to Edhem Pasha, Memduh Pasha, and Colonel Ismail Zuhdi Bey of the General Staff. The commanders had suggested that this amount be counted against part of the Druze's tax debt to the local government. However, this situation had caused a civil-military conflict among the authorities in Syria who were managing the Hauran operation. Osman Pasha, who was already in disagreement with the military authorities from the outset and was quite annoyed by the Porte's directly communicating the instructions to the Marshal of the Vth Army Corps, was very angry about the Druze making payments to the commanders. According to Eyres, Osman Pasha was someone who constantly received bribes from all ethnic and religious

elements living in Syria. In fact, Osman Pasha held his position in Damascus in exchange for bribes. He wanted the 38,000 silver coins paid to the commanders to be considered war booty and shared. When he couldn't get what he wanted, he complained to Istanbul about the commanders leading the operation at every opportunity. He did everything he could to weaken the hand of Marshal Ömer Pasha, against whom he harbored a personal grudge¹⁸ (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No.115, Confidential).

Eyres also offered critical evaluations concerning the effectiveness of the Ottoman army involved in the Hauran operation. He noted that, despite deploying a force two and a half times larger than the Druze, supported by artillery and cavalry units and considerable financial expenditure, the operation failed to achieve any tangible success. In his view, a major flaw of the campaign was the complete lack of preparation regarding essential supplies, provisions, and equipment. Eyres attributed the loss of one-sixth of the deployed soldiers to disease as a direct consequence of this negligence. Moreover, he observed that the inability of Ottoman officials to negotiate a dignified settlement greatly angered and disappointed the Muslim population in Damascus. Highlighting what he perceived as widespread incompetence, Eyres remarked that the pervasive disorder across all military ranks, coupled with the ignorance and negligence of officers, rendered such a disappointing outcome unsurprising. According to his assessment, the officers' shortcomings were so profound that the army's ability to function effectively was severely compromised. In this context, Eyres asserted that the Ottoman army would stand no chance of success against a well-equipped European force, even if the latter were only a quarter of its size (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 115, Confidential).

Eyres argued that there was significant discord between the commanders of the military operation, Memduh Pasha and Edhem Pasha, and claimed that this discord had even spread to the lower-ranking soldiers. Eyres noted that Edhem Pasha was not confident in the loyalty of the units under his command and had requested replacement with other units. He claimed that the army was experiencing significant financial difficulties and that these negative conditions would soon lead to a general uprising (NA, FO, 195/1940, No. 18, Confidential, See Appendix 3). Under all these negative conditions, the cost of the operation was very heavy for the state, with many deaths (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No.104) among the soldiers from diseases such as dysentery and fever, and all this had disrupted military discipline (NA, FO, 78/4710, No. 521).

6. The Reflection of the Hauran Campaign on Muslims and Abdulhamid II

The most important point on which the British consuls in Syria and the surrounding areas agreed regarding the outcome of the Hauran operation was that it had put an end to the recent discontent among the Muslims in Damascus towards the Sultan. From the perspective of the Muslims, this operation, which was considered a primary war, had ended successfully, demonstrating that the Sultan was strong enough to challenge European states. Additionally, the fear of European intervention, which always hung over the Muslims like a shadow and limited their interactions with Christians, had been eliminated. Eyres warned England that the consequences of this shift in sentiment could be disastrous. On the other hand, the Muslims in

¹⁸ Governor Osman Pasha sent numerous reports to Istanbul, claiming that the commanders neglected the Hauran operation, that Memduh Pasha failed in the battle with the Druze in Jebel Druze and could not resist them, and that the Commander of the Mobile Division, Ferik Edhem Pasha, was incompetent (BOA, DH.ŞFR., 186/88; BOA, Y.PRK.UM., 34/30).

the region were surprised that those responsible for these crimes were only given exile as a punishment (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 304, Confidential).

Despite some difficulties and shortcomings, Sultan Abdulhamid II's suppression of the Hauran rebellion without leading to major disturbances or European intervention had disturbed British decision-makers. Whitehall was particularly disturbed by Sultan Abdulhamid II, who was under intense pressure following the Armenian incidents, regaining respect among Muslims by calming the events in Syria. The British missionaries in the region also warned the government that the developments in the Arab lands had renewed confidence in the Sultan and that this could harm British interests in the area (NA, FO, 424/186, No. 320). In this context, the expressions in the letter sent by Missionary Dr. Carslaw to the British Prime Minister Marquess of Salisbury were, in fact, the written form of what all the British were thinking during this process.

The most striking aspect of the letter, and the reason it gained credibility with the British Government, was the impact of the campaign's outcome on the local population. Firstly, the support given by the Russians to the Sultan during the recent Armenian incidents in Anatolia and Istanbul had led to a significant loss of their influence over Christians in Lebanon. Therefore, in the minds of the separatist groups in the region, it had become even more certain that the only state they would turn to during a rebellion was England. In contrast, England's inaction regarding the events in Majdal Shams and Hauran had disappointed many ethnic and religious groups, especially the Druze. With the suppression of the rebellion and the possibility of Muslims reuniting under Sultan Abdulhamid II's leadership, coupled with the growing Anglophobia in the country, some steps needed to be taken without delay. The most important move in this regard could be made by threatening Sultan Abdulhamid II with making the Sharif of Mecca the Caliph. As a matter of fact, while the Sultan could be easily checkmated in this way, the mere publicization of this threat would be enough to incite the Muslims and especially the Arabs against the Sultan. Thus, in the event of a possible Caliph change, the British interests in the region would also be protected (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 320).

The partition of the Ottoman Empire's territories, the deposition of the Sultan, and the appointment of a Caliph from the Arab community were topics that had been on the British Government's agenda for some time.¹⁹ In fact, during his years in power, Prime Minister Salisbury (1895-1902) did not hesitate to play on the idea of intimidating the Sultan by supporting a rival caliphate in Arabia and protected Muslim states in the Middle East to replace the Ottomans (Steele, 2014: 53). Indeed, in November 1895, Salisbury even mentioned to French Foreign Minister Hanotaux the possibility of deposing the Sultan, influenced by the Armenian events (HC Deb 19 July 1897 vol 51 cc418-79). However, these were matters that required intense effort and the preparation of all necessary groundwork before taking any steps. In this context, Whitehall requested more detailed reports from the consulates in the region regarding the Druze rebellion, the position of the Ottoman Empire in the area, and the attitudes and behaviors of the civil and military officials towards the events. Despite the operation having ended, the consuls reported that there was still discontent among the soldiers, particularly noting that civil servants and the young officers of the army were restless

¹⁹ In September 1891, British Prime Minister Salisbury wrote to his ambassador in Istanbul that the place from which a dissenting "commander" would be brought out against the Caliphate of Sultan Abdulhamid II was Arabia (Cecil, 1932: 388).

due to unpaid salaries. On March 2nd, an Ottoman officer who visited Eyres mentioned that they had not received their salaries for a long time and, if this situation continued, they would have to collectively resign from their duties because they could not sustain themselves (NA, FO, 424/186, Inclosure in No. 304, Confidential).

On the other hand, the situation of the Druze, whom England could utilize in the region aside from the Arabs, and their potential stance in a possible uprising, was also quite important. However, in this last operation, it became clear that the Druze could not be a sufficient ally for British interests in the region. England was greatly disappointed by the Druze's quick surrender. The Bedouins, over whom Sultan Abdulhamid II had significant influence, were also not an easily attainable group for the British, at least under the current conditions. After returning from Hauran, Marshal Ömer Pasha, in his meeting with Eyres, stated that the Druze who had withdrawn to Safa had returned to their villages on the condition that they would not be harassed. The Bedouins of Safa informing the Druze that they would not join forces with them if they were attacked by Ottoman military units played a role in this outcome. This was evidence of Sultan's influence over the Arabs, contrary to the claims of the missionaries (NA, FO, 424/187, Inclosure in No. 10).

Ultimately, the the Druze came to be perceived as intolerable both by their neighbors and by the Ottoman authorities, a development that led to considerable disappointment among British officials. British consuls attributed the Druze's failure to effectively resist Ottoman military forces and their relatively uncoordinated surrender to internal divisions and the absence of cohesive leadership. According to the British, the responsibility for all this lay with Shibly al-Atrash and the Druze's religious leader. If both had openly declared rebellion against the Ottomans, the soldiers would have faced much greater resistance in Hauran, thereby extracting more concessions from the Sultan (NA, FO, 424/187, Inclosure in No. 10). A few months after these assessments, British observers reported that Shibly al-Atrash and the Druze sheikhs imprisoned in Damascus had taken steps to incite further resistance. In this context, the letters sent by Shibly al-Atrash and the sheikhs to the Druze in Hauran, urging them to continue resisting and engaging in acts of robbery and banditry, were seized as a result of Druze Suleiman's report²⁰ (BOA, BEO, 801/60007).

The shift in public sentiment toward the Sultan in Syria and other Arab provinces combined with the disillusionment generated by the Druze uprising prompted a reassessment among British policymakers. In the preceding years, Sultan Abdulhamid II had faced widespread criticism due to the Armenian massacres, both within the Ottoman Empire and across Europe. However, this trend appeared to reverse in the aftermath of the Druze events, as the Sultan succeeded in consolidating his position among the Muslim population. From the perspective of British officials, this renewed influence was perceived as a strategic concern in light of Britain's broader interests in the Near East and the Mediterranean. As a result, British authorities felt compelled to exert greater pressure on the Ottoman government in Istanbul. While presenting their approach as one designed to preserve the welfare and stability of the empire, British diplomats issued an informal warning to the Sublime Porte following a series of

²⁰ After this event, the prominent Druze leaders detained in Damascus were exiled to various parts of the country.

"friendly" recommendations, asserting that they could not be held accountable in the event of a future crisis (NA, FO, 424/187, No. 16).

Beirut Consul Drummond Hay emphasized in his report that the Sublime Porte, along with local administrative authorities, was closely monitoring developments and that the swift punishment of those held responsible for recent unrest had been well received by the Muslim population. In this context, he noted that the district governors of Hasbaya and Quneitra had been dismissed, and an officer was dispatched to gather information regarding the Druze's demands and grievances an initiative Drummond described as highly appropriate (NA, FO, 424/187, Inclosure 3 in No. 226). According to Drummond, Sultan Abdulhamid II's energetic and proactive approach earned him the respect of diverse communities in the region and strengthened his influence. For this reason, and in light of similar developments, the British Government opted to defer any serious engagement with the Caliphate question and, during this period, refrained from taking active measures in support of the Druze.²¹

7. The Urman Uprising

The killing of a shepherd in the village of Urman, affiliated with Jabal al-Druze, disrupted the calm that had been maintained for a few months in Syria following the Hauran rebellion. On June 14, 1896, a new uprising began when the gendarmerie sent by Suriye Gendarme Commander Hüsrev Pasha to Urman opened fire during the investigation (BOA, İ.AS., 16/33; BOA, İ.AS., 16/31; NA, FO, 424/187, No. 185). On June 16, Eyres warned his government that the Druze had risen again in Hauran and that the situation seemed to be very serious. In a short time, the Druze besieged the Ottoman battalion in Suwayda and set the government buildings there on fire (NA, FO, 424/187, No. 186). After the news of the uprising reached Istanbul, the Sublime Porte mobilized the Baalbek Reserve Regiment along with the Hama and Homs Reserve battalions (BOA, BEO, 796/59628). Additionally, ten battalions from the Syrian Reserves were mobilized, and reinforcements were sent from Thessaloniki to the region. Moreover, 229 soldiers under the command of Tahir Pasha were dispatched from Izmir to Beirut (NA, FO, 424/187, No. 211).

According to Eyres, the renewed uprising in Hauran was primarily a consequence of the replacement of the arrested Druze sheikhs with a strict military administration²², alongside the implementation of what he considered misguided policies by Ottoman officials. Drummond Hay, on the other hand, attributed the unrest to the failure of both parties to uphold the terms of the previously established peace agreement. He further asserted that the Ottoman authorities had exerted pressure on the Druze by deploying Circassian and Kurdish forces and by levying what he described as unjust taxes. Additional contributing factors, according to Drummond, included the exile of Druze leaders and the conscription of certain prominent figures within the community into military service. Nevertheless, the British consuls collectively viewed the principal cause of the renewed rebellion as stemming from the oppressive practices and bribery associated with the Governor-General of Syria, Osman Pasha, and Memduh Pasha's

²¹ Since 1894, England has consistently used the Armenian card to divert the attention of the great powers away from Egypt and the Mediterranean. In fact, in 1895, British decision-makers advised their ambassador in Istanbul to avoid raising any issues related to the Mediterranean and North Africa that could lead to an international matter (Otte, 2007: 703; Miller, 1960: 11).

²² Following the Hauran operation, Hüsrev Pasha, the Commander of the Syrian Gendarmerie, was appointed as the acting governor of Jebel Druze.

administration in Hauran. In light of these circumstances, the consuls advised that, in order to avoid a repetition of past failures, the Sultan's first course of action should be the dismissal of Osman Pasha from his position as Governor-General (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure in No. 34).

When the rebellion began in Syria and its surroundings, the Ottoman Empire was also dealing with a major uprising in Crete. However, to prevent the events in Syria from becoming a European issue, the Sultan took more radical measures compared to the uprising in Hauran. In this regard, Vth Army Corps, Marshal Osman Rüşdü Pasha was dismissed, and Tahir Pasha was appointed in his place. Arriving in Damascus on June 24 as the Vth Army Marshal, Tahir Pasha (NA, FO, 195/1940, No. 21) sent a telegram to Istanbul on June 28 with the heading "special" recommending the urgent dismissal of Governor Osman Pasha (BOA, BEO, 801/60051). Accordingly Osman Pasha, who was thought to have been negligent during the Hauran uprising and also had many negative allegations against him, was dismissed and replaced by the Governor-General of Baghdad, Hasan Pasha (BOA, İ.DH., 1335/55; NA, FO, 424/188, No. 34). Until Hasan Pasha arrived at his post, Governor of Beirut, Nasuhi Bey, who was highly esteemed among the people, was appointed as the acting governor of the province. Eyres considered the dismissal of Osman Pasha to be a prudent move and interpreted it as an important step towards a peaceful resolution of the issue (NA, FO, 195/1940, No. 22). Indeed, Captain Marrack of the British warship HMS *Collingwood*, stationed off the coast of Beirut, reported to Admiral M. Culme Seymour that Governor Osman Pasha, who was negligent in the Hauran incidents, had been recalled to Istanbul due to his role in the rebellion through excessive taxation and bribery (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure in No. 109). Fearing that the Sublime Porte would act with a spirit of revenge, the British Government communicated with the Sublime Porte, requesting clemency for the Druze of Jabal and Hauran who had not participated in the uprising (NA, FO, 78/4710, No. 509).

Arguing that the Druze had lost their courage thanks to the appropriate measures taken by the Ottoman Empire, Eyres had quickly lost faith in the Druze's ability to sustain a potential rebellion. Therefore, he advised his government that there was no other option but to assume a mediating role to initiate negotiations between the two sides. The Ottoman Empire's refusal to back down under any circumstances, and even the claims that the force in Hauran would be increased to fifty battalions, compelled Eyres to make such a recommendation (NA, FO, 195/1940, No. 22, See Appendix 4).

As in the Hauran rebellion, not all Druze participated in this uprising. Due to the prompt and appropriate measures taken, many Druze dispersed, while some sought to demonstrate their loyalty by providing supplies to the besieged garrison in Suwayda. According to the British Consul in Beirut, Drummond, these actions represented a significant step toward restoring order. He also expressed optimism that swift progress could be achieved under the temporary leadership of Nasuhi Bey in Damascus, attributing this potential to Nasuhi Bey's prudence and conciliatory approach. However, Drummond expressed serious reservations regarding whether the military authorities would follow Nasuhi Bey's recommendations (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure in No. 19). While the commanders advocated for an immediate advance to defeat the Druze militarily and reassert the army's authority, Nasuhi Bey insisted that instructions from the Sublime Porte should first be awaited. Soon after, Nasuhi Bey received explicit orders from Istanbul to prioritise a peaceful resolution by all possible means (NA, FO, 424/188, No. 25). Meanwhile, the Suwayda Garrison (BOA, Y..A...HUS., 354/14), which had been under siege

since June 28, was liberated from the Druze on July 11 after a two-hour struggle, thanks to the reinforcement units sent from the Vth Army.

According to Eyres, the resurgence of rebellion in Hauran was primarily attributable to what he described as the greed and injustice of the local Ottoman administration. He regarded this uprising as significantly more serious than the earlier unrest during the winter months, when the Druze had appeared divided, hesitant, and lacking the will to resist. In contrast, he noted that the Druze now demonstrated greater unity and determination, driven by a combination of vengeance and desperation. Eyres, who had hoped that the Druze might have gained strategic insight and political maturity over the preceding months, argued that they should seize the opportunity to strike Ottoman forces before reinforcements could arrive. He further speculated that if Arabs and other Muslim communities in the region were to join the Druze in rebellion, the Ottoman Empire would be compelled to grant the Druze a degree of independence (NA, FO, 78/4710, Inclosure in No. 506). However, events did not develop as Eyres had anticipated. No disturbances occurred outside of Hauran neither in Damascus, Beirut, nor in other Druze-populated areas and the Druze residing in these regions chose not to intervene in the ongoing conflict in Hauran (BOA, Y..PRK.UM., 35/15).

British consular reports attributed one of the causes of the renewed Druze unrest to an alleged incident involving Memduh Pasha and the niece of Shibly al-Atrash, a figure referred to in local narratives as the “bella of Hauran.” According to these reports, the woman approached Memduh Pasha to request the release of her imprisoned husband. The Pasha reportedly received her favorably and proposed marriage. Recalling the fate of another Druze woman who, under similar circumstances, had allegedly been sent to a harem in Damascus, she pretended to accept the proposal but requested ten days to collect her belongings. When she failed to return at the agreed time, Memduh Pasha allegedly used a nearby conflict between a Druze tribesman and a Bedouin in Urman as a pretext to send troops to the village, demanding the woman’s surrender. Upon being told that she had escaped, several prominent Druze were arrested, and others were injured in the ensuing confrontation. In retaliation, villagers reportedly killed the gendarmerie forces that entered the area and freed their detained sheikhs during the clash. Some accounts claim that the woman subsequently assumed a leadership role in the rebellion and laid siege to the Suwayda Garrison, even going so far as to cut off its water supply (NA, FO, 195/1937, No. 49, Confidential).

Drummond expressed strong criticism of the Sublime Porte for its failure to dispatch an investigative commission to the region in response to the serious allegations emerging from Hauran. He argued that such a commission would likely uncover misconduct by government officials in the province an outcome he believed the central authorities sought to avoid, thereby explaining their reluctance to take action. In a related report, Eyres recounted his conversation with Nasuhi Bey, who had arrived in Damascus as acting governor. During their meeting, Eyres emphasized that it would be unlikely for the Druze to disarm unless a fully empowered and impartial commission was appointed to examine recent events. He further suggested that, if the commission were composed of individuals genuinely committed to justice and fairness, the Druze would likely be exonerated from the accusations leveled against them. British consular representatives regarded the formation of such a trusted investigative body as the only viable pathway to a peaceful resolution (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure in No. 69).

According to British reports from the region, the overall outcome of the conflict was the expulsion of the Druze from Jabal and their retreat in Ledja. Both sides suffered heavy losses, and it was alleged that, with a few exceptions, high-ranking Turkish officers displayed “pathetic” cowardice, resulting in the deaths of nine majors. While Marshal Tahir Pasha was conducting the campaign quite correctly, one of his two subordinates, Memduh Pasha and Agah Pasha, had proven to be a capable assistant. Additionally, Colonel Bedri Bey of the Hauran Mobile Corps General Staff also proved to be a skilled officer during these events. However, the harsh criticism from the Governor General of Syria towards Marshal Tahir Pasha, for allowing Sheikh Sattam al-Shaklan Pasha of the Ruwallah²³ Arabs who assisted the soldiers, as well as the Circassians and Kurds, to plunder villages that did not participate in the uprising, caused unrest between the civil and military branches (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure in No. 114). As in the Hauran campaign, the lack of many essential supplies in the army caused the Ottoman soldiers to suddenly retreat from the Ledja borders to Busrulharir. The shortage of water and provisions was so severe that constant fights and disobedience broke out among the soldiers (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure in No. 115). Marshal Tahir Pasha also reported to Istanbul on July 9 that soldiers brought from cooler regions, who were wearing winter clothes, experienced some difficulties due to the excessive heat during their march from Sheikh Miskin to Suwayda (BOA, Y..PRK.ASK., 112/77).

8. Establishment of the Commission and the Outcome of the Uprising

The Sublime Porte, both to investigate England’s allegations and to restore calm in the region, took the step Drummond claimed they wouldn’t dare to take, and sent a Commission of Inquiry to Syria to the reformation of Jebel Druze and investigate the incidents. The Commission of Inquiry consisted of Şevki Efendi, President of the Criminal Chamber of the Court of Cassation, The Sublime Porte Legal Advisor Hakkı Bey; and Yenişehirli Malik Efendi (BOA., BEO, 810/60679). The commission arrived in Beirut on July 28 and immediately proceeded to Damascus (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure 1 in No. 118). To prevent civil-military conflict, the Sublime Porte instructed Vth Army Marshal Tahir Pasha to provide every possible convenience to the Jebel Druze Commission of Inquiry to carry out their duties in the best possible way (BOA, BEO, 831/62306). According to Eyres, the commission’s initial finding was that the problem was too great to handle (NA, FO, 424/188, No. 128).

On July 22, the Sublime Porte communicated with the great powers and informed them that the war in Druze Mountain had ended. It was also announced to the relevant states that a three-person commission authorized to resolve land ownership disputes in the region and to build a mosque and school was sent.²⁴ However, according to England, the commission was sent to

²³ They are a large Arab tribe living in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula, including Jordan, and the Syrian Desert. In 1895, they sided with the Ottoman Empire during the Druze uprising but in the following years did everything in their power to hinder the development of Ottoman influence in the region and the construction of the Hejaz Railway. During World War I, under the leadership of Nuri bin Hazaa Al Shalaan, they actively participated in the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire (Bidwell, 2010: 378-379). For detailed information on the activities of the Arab tribes in the region during World War I, see (Tauber, 2013).

²⁴ Another task of the commission was to investigate the allegations made by the Governor of Nablus, Cevad Pasha, and the Beirut Police Commissioner against Nasuhi Bey (BOA, MV., 88/59; BOA, Y.A.RES., 80/84). Due to the increasing allegations against them, the Governor of Beirut, Nasuhi Bey, and the Prosecutor of the Beirut Appeals Court, Hamdi Bey, were dismissed from their positions on December 4, 1896 (BOA, Y..PRK.BŞK., 48/114).

appease the Druze. The financial crisis in the Ottoman Empire, the rebellion in Crete, and concerns about Macedonia made it imperative for the Sublime Porte to find an urgent solution to the Hauran issue (NA, FO, 424/188, No. 72).

By the end of July, the Druze resistance was largely broken. On July 30, Vth Army Marshal Tahir Pasha reported to the Yıldız Palace that the Druze no longer had the strength to resist, and that even two Druze bandits had come to the camp, pleading for mercy on behalf of the remaining resisting Druze (BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 113/58). Finally, on the evening of August 6, ten Druze sheikhs came to the camp, pleading for mercy and expressing their readiness to negotiate (BOA, Y..MTV., 144/158; BOA, Y.A.HUS., 356/72). The commission, which began its work immediately after arriving in Damascus, first examined the situation of the army and sent a report to Istanbul on this matter. Later, the commission president Şevki Bey and his companions met with three Druze sheikhs in Busrulharir and proposed the following conditions.

1. The Druze will hand over 2,600 Martini-Henry rifles, 400 mules, and 200 horses to the army.
2. The perpetrators of the attack on the gendarmerie units in Urman will be handed over to the Sublime Porte.
3. The Druze will comply with the regulations and orders of the Sublime Porte and respond to these demands within ten days at the latest (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure in No. 154).

The Druze sheikhs refused to accept the commission's demands, claiming they were too harsh. The Sublime Porte, noting that the Druze had seized every opportunity to take up arms for nearly a hundred years and had pleaded for mercy whenever they saw the military, warned the commission not to trust the sheikhs' words and delays (BOA, BEO, 824/61771). Consequently, Vth Army Marshal, eager for a swift resolution, offered amnesty to all Druze who laid down their arms and accepted the authority of the state. However, the Druze in the northern part of Jebel and the Salkhad region refused the Sublime Porte's demands as they did not want to serve in the military. Meanwhile, the commission advised the Sublime Porte to urgently reach a compromise to prevent the provision and health problems in the army from causing new issues.²⁵ Finally, the firm stance of the Ottoman Empire led to the acceptance of the agreement (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure 2 in No. 186).

According to consular reports from the region, the local government was very eager to resolve the Druze issue as quickly as possible because the troops were losing large numbers every day due to intestinal infections and dysentery. Between August 8 and 18 alone, more than five hundred patients had arrived in Damascus. According to Eyres, the Druze did not see themselves as defeated and were still courageous. In fact, the Druze had recently raided a supply train about 40 km from Damascus and looted the corn inside.²⁶ Eyres especially harshly criticized the Druze living in the Suwayda area for having a more submissive character compared to their brothers in the mountainous regions (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure 2 in No.

²⁵ According to Eyres, the main source of the diseases was the lack of water and supplies. Every day, around forty patients with high fever symptoms were arriving in Damascus, and Mushir Tahir Pasha himself was suffering from the fever that was common among the soldiers (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure 1 in No. 186).

²⁶ The main reason for this pressure was supposedly to prevent any Druze from surrendering to the government.

186). According to Drummond, it was necessary to appoint a more capable Marshal who would understand and respect the Druze. He also saw the replacement of those involved in recent acts of extremism with reliable civilian and military officials as a top priority for restoring order in the region. Another measure that could be taken was not to assign Circassians and Kurds to any duties in areas where the Druze were concentrated (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure 1 in No. 247).

On September 2, Marshal Tahir Pasha summoned twelve Druze sheikhs, questioning why the weapons, horses, and the perpetrators of the Urman incident had not yet been handed over, and subsequently had them imprisoned. According to Eyres, this action would not have a positive effect on the Druze who continued to resist. Eventually, the Druze agreed to pay their accumulated tax debts and to be subject to a reasonable tax. They were also ready to hand over the perpetrators of the Urman incident in exchange for a promise of fair trial.²⁷ However, they were not willing to comply with military service, arguing that they would not be able to defend themselves against the Bedouins, Circassians, and Kurds. Eyres believed that this demand would cause the Druze to lose trust in the state (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure 2 in No. 247, Confidential).

Eyres claimed that the Ottoman Empire was determined to crush the Druze at all costs, and if the troops in Hauran could not achieve this goal, they would use Bedouin tribes. In this regard, Sheikh Settham Pasha of the Ruwallah Bedouins had promised that if Jabal al-Druze was given to him and his tribe as property, his entire tribe would assist. Therefore, Eyres wanted immediate assistance to be provided to the Druze, who always saw themselves under England's protection. In this sense, the step to be taken was to send Marshal Hüseyin Fevzi Pasha²⁸ of Thessaloniki, the only man the Druze trusted in the Ottoman Empire and believed in his justice and moderation, to the region. This step would suffice for the Druze to immediately and unconditionally surrender (NA, FO, 424/188, Inclosure 2 in No. 247, Confidential).

The statements in the report prepared by Eyres on September 18 are more striking. The commission, which stayed in Hauran for ten days, was occupied with nothing but conducting an imaginary census of the Druze. Contrary to what he had previously reported, Tahir Pasha proved to be an extremely incompetent leader, allegedly being lax, careless, and prone to drunkenness. Additionally, there were significant differences of opinion between Tahir Pasha, the commission, and the Governor of Syria regarding the measures to be taken. This led to constant conflict among them and prolonged the resolution of the issue (NA, FO, 424/189, Inclosure 1 in No. 44).

The British Ambassador also made an informal appeal to the Sublime Porte due to the rebellion in Hauran and the health problems in the region, and recommended a quick resolution of the issue. Otherwise, if the Druze issue remained unresolved and caught the attention of Europe, the British Ambassador threatened that the interests of the Ottoman Empire would be significantly harmed (NA, FO, 424/188, No. 247). Additionally, the Ambassador advised the Grand Vizier to send Hüseyin Fevzi Pasha to Hauran, as suggested by the Damascus Consul Eyres, but this advice was not accepted (NA, FO, 424/188, No. 270).

²⁷ Eyres, on the other hand, believed that the punishment of the Urman perpetrators was unfair.

²⁸ He had once served in Syria as the Vth Army Mushir.

The Druze, who continued their resistance, submitted a series of demands to Marshal Tahir Pasha. These included the establishment of an impartial administration composed solely of military officials unlike the perceived partiality of the British consuls alongside the construction of schools in Jebel, the implementation of the planned railway line from Sheikh Miskin to Suwayda, and the replacement of the gendarmerie, predominantly comprised of Kurds, with regular army soldiers. The decision to establish ten additional schools in Jebel Druze, supplementing the five already in operation, was positively received by the Druze population (NA, FO, 424/189, Inclosure 1 in No. 57). Tahir Pasha, who believed that the resolution process was being unnecessarily prolonged, advocated for stricter measures to expedite outcomes. However, the Sublime Porte did not share his position and remained committed to resolving the issue through peaceful means (NA, FO, 424/189, Inclosure 2 in No. 44, Confidential). Furthermore, the Commission of Inquiry advised the Porte that the ongoing military operations were inadequate and highlighted that deficiencies within the army had reached critical levels, recommending that urgent reforms be undertaken to address these shortcomings (BOA, BEO, 834/62532).

Taking into account the allegations against Tahir Pasha, the Sultan appointed Abdullah Pasha, who had accomplished important tasks in Crete, as the Marshal of the Vth Army. Following this appointment, Tahir Pasha left Damascus on October 9 (NA, FO, 424/189, Inclosure in No. 101). When Abdullah Pasha arrived in Damascus, he was respected in the region for his desire to resolve the issue without resorting to more military force. However, the Governor of Syria argued that if the Druze were not crushed, they would always pose a danger to Muslims and the government. Willing to solve the issue before winter set in, Abdullah Pasha invited sixty Druze sheikhs to Suwayda, but only fourteen attended the invitation. The sheikhs accepted Marshal Abdullah Pasha's demands for 900 soldiers, 3,000 Martini-Henry rifles, and a number of horses and mules to replace the soldiers killed in Urman (NA, FO, 424/189, Inclosure in No. 195).

Finally, the Sublime Porte informed England that a peaceful agreement had been reached with the Druze, who had agreed to pay their taxes without delay and to allow their names to be registered in preparation for military service (NA, FO, 424/189, No. 44). However, the complete surrender of the Druze in the mountainous areas and the full restoration of peace in the region took until the early months of 1897. In particular, the desertion of Druze conscripts sent to battalions near the border (BOA, MV., 90/6), who fled to British-controlled Cyprus, and England's refusal to extradite these individuals, caused issues between the two countries (BOA, BEO, 885/66337). On the other hand, in 1897, there were claims that all the Druze in Syria and Mount Lebanon, taking advantage of the Ottoman Empire's preoccupation with the Crete and Greece issues, were uniting to march on Istanbul. Due to such claims, the Sublime Porte had to maintain tight control over the region for a while longer (BOA, Y..PRK.ASK., 120/64). During this period, the investigation commission remained in the region, continuing their work. As a result of the events in Syria, the Sultan strengthened his position among Muslims, while England managed to keep the great powers away from the Eastern Mediterranean by refraining from active intervention in the events (Pearce and Stewart, 2002: 168).

9. Conclusion

The Druze uprisings of 1895–1896, while often overlooked in broader studies of late Ottoman politics, reveal the complex interplay between local resistance, imperial authority, and international diplomacy in the eastern Mediterranean. This study has demonstrated that the Hauran crisis was not merely a provincial insurrection but a significant test of Sultan Abdulhamid II's capacity to project centralized authority under the growing pressure of European particularly British intervention.

British archival documents, especially the reports of consuls such as Drummond Hay and Eyres, illuminate how the Druze unrest was shaped by the Sultan's broader policy of cautious resistance to foreign interference. The uprisings occurred at a time when the Sultan's legitimacy was under severe strain due to the Armenian crises and the visible presence of European navies near Ottoman shores. Nevertheless, Abdulhamid II managed to suppress the Druze rebellion without provoking full-scale European military intervention an outcome that not only restored order but also enhanced his standing among Muslims in Syria and beyond.

From a strategic perspective, Abdulhamid II's ability to mobilize military force, control the narrative through loyal local administrators like Nasuhi Bey, and contain sectarian conflict underscores his pragmatic approach to governance. Moreover, his reluctance to initiate harsh military campaigns unless provoked, coupled with his emphasis on symbolic gestures of authority (e.g., distributing medals, hosting tribal leaders in Istanbul), exemplifies a politics of calculated restraint.

The failure of the British to galvanize local support among the Druze, combined with the absence of wider Muslim-Christian unrest in major urban centers like Damascus and Beirut, also illustrates the limitations of British influence in the region at this time. The exaggerated hopes of British diplomats regarding the potential for rebellion—contrasted with the Druze's eventual surrender highlight a misreading of local dynamics and an overestimation of Britain's protective image among regional minorities.

Ultimately, the suppression of the Druze uprising served not only to reassert imperial control over a volatile region but also to re-legitimize Abdulhamid II's rule in the eyes of his Muslim subjects. By preserving order and avoiding European entanglement, the Sultan managed to portray himself as a leader capable of resisting foreign imposition while maintaining religious and political unity. This episode, therefore, must be understood not as a peripheral disturbance, but as a key moment in the recalibration of Ottoman sovereignty at the twilight of empire.

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Appendix

incited the Druzes and provided them with arms: a report started I believe by Anglophobe Egyptian journals, which are allowed free circulation in Syria. It has now been published throughout the country and may have grave consequences should disturbances arise, where British subjects are not adequately protected by the authorities.

The arrival lately of two British officers from Egypt gave further occasion for extraordinary rumours although the sole object of their visit was the purchase of horses.

It is the general opinion of persons thoroughly acquainted with this country that the safety of Europeans and all Christians depends entirely on the line of conduct pursued by the authorities and military commanders.

The Syrian Mussulmans are not likely to

Appendix 1: There were many allegations that the British incited the Druze and might have supplied them with weapons. Drummond Hay's report stated that such accusations against the British were initiated by Anglophobic magazines allowed to circulate in Syria and almost throughout the country.

time is due firstly to the
ignorance which is so sedulously
fostered by the Ottoman Gov^t, secondly
to the evil effects of certain newspapers,
whose tone is most hostile to us—
notably the Egyptian papers
"Nile Felah" and "El Ahran"—and
thirdly to the resentment the
Muslims feel on acct. of the
interference of our Gov^t on behalf of
the Armenians, whom the Ottomans
consider as beneath contempt. He
added however that if the present
crisis resulted in a change of

Appendix 2 : According to Consul Eyres, there were several reasons for the intense anger towards the British in Damascus. The first was the support the British provided to the Armenians. The second was the publications of Egypt's *Nil Felah* and *El Ahran* newspapers, which were hostile to the British. The third was the anger felt by Muslims due to the pressure and interference the British government exerted on the Sultan on behalf of the Armenians.

N^o 18
Confidential

Damascus,

17th June 1896

Sir,

With reference to my Despatch N^o 14 of the 18th ultimo addressed to Sir Philip Currie, I have the honour to state that I have had full confirmation of the fact I then reported viz: that Edhem Pasha was uncertain of the fidelity of the troops under his command and had demanded other troops to take their place.

Nothing was done however to give effect to the

Appendix 3: Eyres' report stated that he was not confident in the loyalty of the troops under the command of Edhem Pasha and requested other units to replace them.

It appears from the above letters that the Druses are not prepared to fight the matter out to the bitter end that their courage has again failed them. I venture therefore to suggest that it would be advisable for the Imperial Ottoman Government to enter into negotiations with the Druses, as it seems probable that such negotiations would have a successful issue. At present there is no sign that any methods but that of force are to be employed and in military circles it is asserted that

Appendix 4: Consul Eyres of Damascus advised his government that the Druze, having lost their courage, had no choice but to take on a mediatory role in negotiations with the Ottoman Empire.

Suedah.

According to accounts that have reached me from fugitives in the Lebanon, Memdoh Pasha commanding the troops of Djebel Hauran is accused of having brought about the recent occurrences by an attempted abduction of Druze women and especially of a niece of Shibly el Atrash known as the "belle" of Djebel Hauran whom he sought to

Appendix 5: According to British consular reports, another reason for the Urman Uprising was the attempt by Memduh Pasha, who commanded the Hauran troops, to kidnap the niece of Shibly al-Atrash, known as the "belle" of Hauran.