

IN THE LIGHT OF BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE  
DOCUMENTS: HOW ABDUL HAMÏT, THE OTTOMAN  
SULTAN, LEASED CYPRUS TO BRITAIN WITHIN  
FORTY - EIGHT HOURS

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**The Cyprus Convention :**

Article I of the Convention of Defensive Alliance - better known as the "Cyprus Convention" - signed between the Ottoman and British Governments on 4th June, 1878, was as follows:

"If Batum, Ardahan, Kars, or any of them shall be retained by Russia, and if any attempt shall be made at any future time by Russia to take possession of further territories of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan in Asia as fixed by the Definitive Treaty of Peace, England engages to join His Imperial Majesty the Sultan in defending them by force of arms. In return, His Imperial Majesty the Sultan promises to England to introduce the necessary reforms, to be agreed upon later between the two Powers, into the Government and for the protection of the Christian and other subjects of the Porte in those territories. And in order to enable England to make the necessary provision for executing her engagements, His Imperial Majesty the Sultan further consents to assign the Island of Cyprus to be occupied and administered by England".

The above Convention contained provisions of the highest political importance, for by it the British Government had entered into a formal engagement to maintain the integrity of the Turkish dominions in Asia against Russia. The general guarantee of integrity of Turkey incorporated in the Treaty of Paris of 1856 having broken down, Great Britain then acted alone. It was, according to J. W. Headlam-

Morley and W. J. Childs of the British Foreign Office<sup>1</sup>, a far reaching military commitment of a kind to which the British Government and Parliament had in those years been very averse.

The arrangement about Cyprus was subordinate and secondary; the conditional and possibly temporary occupation of the Island appeared merely as providing a convenient base for the maintenance of British influence and authority on the mainland, influence and authority which were to be used for two purposes, viz. 1. for defence against Russian aggression, and 2. for necessary reforms of the Government in Asia Minor.

### **Causes That Compelled the British to Sign the Cyprus Convention :**

There were a number of reasons for which this very important step was taken. The memoirs of two eminent British statesmen who were directly involved in the negotiations for the Convention, namely Lord Beaconsfield (Benjamin Disraeli), and Lord Salisbury, shed ample light upon these causes. Nevertheless, the records of the British Foreign Office<sup>2</sup> are very deficient on these. They seem to contain practically no information as to the preliminary discussions, for Lord Beaconsfield who, as Prime Minister, took an exceptionally active part in the direction of foreign affairs, did not seem to have used the Foreign Office machinery; and Lord Salisbury at the time when he became Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, conducted the most important correspondence privately and there are no copies of his letters in the British Foreign Office Archives; e.g. there are no copies of the correspondence he had conducted during the month of April, 1878, with Mr. Layard, then Ambassador in Istanbul (Constantinople), for it contained a valuable exposition of his motives and point of view<sup>3</sup>.

After Lord Salisbury left office, neither the Foreign Office nor his successor would have, for reference, the full statement of reasons

<sup>1</sup> *Public Record Office*, British Foreign Office Documents, 1924, FO. 371/9897/C 19108, Memorandum by J. W. Headlam - Morley and W. J. Childs, London, 4. 12. 1924.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Record Office*, Foreign Office Documents, Political Series FO. 371.

<sup>3</sup> For further information on this, one has to examine the Layard papers at the British Museum in London.

for which this very serious step was taken. All that was available was the despatch of 30th May, 1878, which was written for publication. Nevertheless the general situation in the spring of 1878 is well known. Russia had conducted a successful war against Turkey, and in February the Russian army was at the gates of Istanbul. The British Cabinet had, therefore, to consider methods they would have to adopt to safeguard British interests in the Balkans, Levant and Asia. The first step, determined on after much vacillation, was to order the British fleet to sail through the Dardanelles and to take up its position in the neighbourhood of Istanbul. This it did on 13th February, 1878. On 3rd March the Russians concluded with Turkey the preliminary Treaty of San Stefano. The terms were not officially communicated to the British Government, but soon they became known. They were quite unacceptable. In Europe, they included the establishment of a Greater Bulgaria, extending both to the Adriatic and the Aegean; this would have implied a complete domination by Russia of the Balkans, including Istanbul and the Straits. In Asia they included acquisition by Russia of Kars, Ardahan and Batum; this would have gone far towards making the Black Sea a Russian lake and would have opened the whole of Turkey in Asia to Russian influence and invasion. The British Government, therefore, demanded that the whole treaty should be submitted to a conference of Powers. In this they were on very strong ground, for there was practically not a single clause which did not imply a modification of the treaties of 1856, and it was an agreed doctrine that a European settlement could not be altered by one party to it without the consent of all others.

It was necessary for the British Government to determine the precise points to which, whether or not a conference was held, the British Government should object. On 21st March, 1878, Lord Salisbury, then Secretary of State for India, sent a note to Lord Beaconsfield in which he briefly specified what he considered ought to be the British requirements. He did not propose either then or at any future time, by threat of war, to prevent Russian acquisition in Asia, but he suggested that, as compensation for them, there should be secured "two naval stations for England, say Lemnos and Cyprus, with an occupation, at least temporary, of some place like Scanderoun (İskenderun - Alexandretta), for the sake of moral effect".

On 27th March, 1878, there was an important meeting of the British Cabinet at which, to quote Lord Derby's diary:

"The Prime Minister addressed us in a set speech to the effect that peace was not to be secured by drifting, that an emergency had arisen, and that every State must look to its own resources: and that the balance of power in the Mediterranean was destroyed. He said that he proposed to issue a proclamation declaring an emergency, to put a force in the field, and, simultaneously, to send an expedition from India to occupy Cyprus and Scanderoon (Iskenderun - Alexandretta). Thus the effect of the Armenian conquests (by Russia) would be neutralised; the influence of England in the Persian Gulf maintained, and we should hold the posts which are the key of Asia. Cairns and Salisbury both supported the Premier, showing clearly by their language that they were aware of the plan now proposed, and had discussed it with him in detail; others supported more vaguely. I declared my dissent"<sup>4</sup>.

#### **How The Original Proposal to Occupy Cyprus was Put Forward :**

Originally the proposal to occupy Cyprus was connected with the projected despatch of Indian troops to the Mediterranean, and was conceived as a rather high-handed act involving direct aggression against Turkey. It was this which had led to the resignation of Lord Derby. During the following months, however, the plan was radically altered; under the hand of Lord Salisbury, who then became Foreign Minister, it was stripped of its rather melodramatic qualities and became the centre of his whole Eastern policy. In his mind the problem of British attitude towards the Treaty of San Stefano and the great advance of Russian power, which it involved, divided itself into two separate compartments - Europe and Asia. He dealt with each with equal decision and foresight. His proposals for the European problem were incorporated in the important despatch of 29th March, 1878, in which the grounds for opposing the creation of a Greater Bulgaria were urged with much cogency. Here Great Britain did not stand alone.

<sup>4</sup> Money Penny and Buckle, *Life of Benjamin Disraeli* (Lord Beaconsfield), Vol. VI

He could expect, and he received, the support of Austria-Hungary, and as is well known, his policy was crowned with success. It was consummated in an agreement with Russia of 30th May, 1878.

The Asiatic problem was different, for here Great Britain would have to act alone. The policy was matured in Lord Salisbury's mind during the months of April and May. It was explained in a series of letters to Mr. Layard, recently appointed Ambassador to the Porte, and also by Lord Beaconsfield in his correspondence with Queen Victoria. The idea of making the Russian acquisition of Kars and Batum a *casus belli* was rejected. Lord Salisbury, in a letter to Sir Henry Elliot on 3rd June, 1878, observed:

“...The first point in our communications with Austria, which seemed quite evident, was that we should get no help from her as to Turkey in Asia. This was not unnatural on her part, but it forced us to face the question whether we were prepared to go to war for Kars and Batum alone. This expedient on the whole did not commend itself; for it was quite evident that, when we had taken them, unless we were prepared to defend them, we should have done nothing; and if, for the sake of the rest of the Turkish Empire, we were prepared to defend their North-East frontier, was there anything in these particular positions which made them worth a bloody war with a doubtful issue in the first instance? If we had had anybody to help us the matter might have been different. But standing alone, we have thought it better to take the measures (not yet quite complete) for the protection of Turkey in Asia, and not to go to war about the Armenian conquests”<sup>5</sup>.

The problem then was to find some other means by which the danger of Russian aggression might be impeded. This was to be found in an alliance between Great Britain and Turkey for the defence of her Asiatic dominions. This alliance, however, to be effective, would require a military and naval station, either on the soil of Asia or in close proximity to it. Where could such a station be found, except in Cyprus? The following despatch by Lord Salisbury to Mr. Layard,

<sup>5</sup> Lady Gwendolen Cecil, *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, Vol. II.

British Ambassador in Istanbul, dated 2nd May, 1878, is very interesting:

“The mere presence of the Russians at Kars will cause Persia, Mesopotamia and Syria to turn their faces northward. Then a Russian party will arise - and consequent disorder - and the languid administrative powers of the Porte (Ottoman Government) will be overtaxed and a chaos will follow of which, in some form or other, the Russians will take advantage to reduce the Porte to impotence, and to turn its provinces into Russian satrapies. The presence of England is the only remedy which can prevent this process of destruction from going forward. I think we might very properly enter into a defensive alliance with the Porte, undertaking to join in defending her Asiatic Empire from any attacks of Russia. I cannot, however, say this definitely, for though I find it is agreed to by such of my colleagues as I have seen, I cannot be certain that the Cabinet will sanction it. Personally, I think that such an arrangement would prevent any further encroachment of Russia and would also check that turning Russia - wards on the part of the inhabitants of Western Asia, which I dread. But, to give any strength or value to such an understanding, some port in the Levant would be an absolute necessity. It would be ridiculous to attempt to exercise any such protective office from such a distance as Malta”<sup>6</sup>.

In another despatch on 9th May, 1878, he observed:

“The great problem which the Turk will have to solve as soon as he has got rid of the Russian army off his soil is how to keep his Asiatic Empire together. . . . If he has his own strength alone to trust, no one will believe in his power of resistance. He has been beaten too often. The Arabs and the Asiatics generally will look to the Russian as the coming man. The Turk’s only chance is to obtain the alliance of a great power, and the only available power is England to give that alliance. I cannot speak yet with confidence, but I think so. For England the question of Tur-

<sup>6</sup> *Life of Lord Salisbury*, Vol. II, p. 266 ff.

key in Asia is very different from the question of Turkey in Europe. The only change possible for the Asiatic Christians would be to come directly under the Government of Russia. There can be no question of autonomy - of young and struggling nationalities, and the rest of it. Now, direct government of Russia is pleasant for nobody: but to the Christians of a different rite it is the most oppressive conceivable. Even, therefore, for the sake of the Christians, England would not be restrained by any consideration of humanity from engaging to resist further advance of Russians. And the vast majority of the populations of Asiatic Turkey are Mahometans, to whom the Turkish Government is congenial and as good as any other the Mahometans get, except our own. And while Russian influence over the provinces of European Turkey would be a comparatively distant and indirect evil, her influence over Syria and Mesopotamia would be a very serious embarrassment and would certainly, through connection of Bagdad and Bombay, make our hold on India more difficult. I do not, therefore, despair of England coming to the conclusion that she can undertake such a defensive alliance. But for that purpose it is, as I said before, absolutely and indispensably necessary that she should be nearer at hand than Malta”.

Four days earlier, on 5th May, 1878, to be precise, British Prime Minister Lord Beaconsfield, in a letter to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, was saying:

“If Cyprus be conceded to Your Majesty by the Porte, and England, at the same time, enters into a defensive alliance with Turkey, guaranteeing Asiatic Turkey from Russian invasion, the power of England in the Mediterranean will be absolutely increased in that region and Your Majesty’s Indian Empire immensely strengthened. Cyprus is the key of Western Asia. Such an arrangement would also greatly strengthen Turkey in Europe and altogether she would be stronger barrier against Russia than she was before the war (of 1878). If this policy be carried into effect, and it must be carried, Your Majesty need fear no coalition of

Emperors. It will weld together Your Majesty's Indian Empire and Great Britain. As Lord Beaconsfield is soon to have the honour of an audience with Your Majesty, he will reserve this great subject until that time"<sup>7</sup>.

**How Abdul Hamit Leased Cyprus to Britain Within Forty - Eight Hours :**

To the Anglo - Turkish project of defensive alliance the British Cabinet gave its approval on 16th May, and the whole scheme was explained in a letter of the same date to Mr. Layard:

"Two conditions, however, are indispensable. If our defensive alliance is to be worth anything, we must not be hampered by divisions at home, and we must have every facility for exercising vigilance and giving assistance in Asia. To meet the first object it will be necessary that the Porte should give us specific assurances of good government to the Asiatic Christians, similar to those given in the treaty to Russia, and should thereby invest us with a special privilege of advice and remonstrance in case of any gross abuse. To meet the other, the Porte should concede to us the occupation of Cyprus. It has the double advantage of vicinity both to Asia Minor and Syria; it would enable us without any act of overt hostility and without disturbing the peace of Europe to accumulate the material of war; and, if requisite, the troops necessary for operations in Asia Minor or Syria, while it would not excite jealousy which the other Powers would feel at any acquisitions on the mainland. We should not desire to acquire it in any way which could indicate hostility to the Porte, or any acquiescence in partition. We should therefore propose to hold it as part of the agreement by which we undertook to defend the Asiatic Empire against the Russians, and we should distinctly stipulate that, as both these engagements were consequent on Russian annexations in Armenia, as soon as this should cease, both our defensive alliance and our occupation of Cyprus should cease also"<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> *Life of Lord Beaconsfield*, Vol. VI, p. 269.

<sup>8</sup> *Life of Lord Salisbury*, Vol. II, p. 269.



The crisis came at the end of May, 1878. In Lord Salisbury's mind and also in that presumably of Lord Beaconsfield, the Cyprus Convention was the key of the whole situation; though the arrangement with Russia regarding Europe was practically complete; it was not signed until after the other part of the settlement - that concerning Asia - had been carried through, and if the Asiatic project had failed, the whole plan, which was the basis for the Congress of Berlin, would have fallen to the ground. This is shown by a telegram which was despatched to Mr. Layard on 23rd May, and which contains his official instructions. The proposal was put before the Sultan as an ultimatum with a time limit of 48 hours; if it was not accepted, then the friendship of Great Britain would be withdrawn, and the result would be the partition of the whole Turkish Empire. This British blackmail was as follows:

“Propose most secretly to the Sultan the following defensive alliance, to secure his territory for the future in Asia: if at any future time, Russia shall attempt to take possession of any portion of the Asiatic territories of the Sultan, as fixed by the definitive Treaty of Peace, England engages to join the Sultan in defending them by force of arms. In return, the Sultan promises to England to introduce the necessary reforms (to be agreed upon later between the two Powers) into the government of the Christian subjects of the Porte in Armenia; and in order to enable England to make the necessary provision for executing her engagement the Sultan further consents to assign the Island of Cyprus to be occupied and administered by England. It is impossible for England to exercise vigilance over Syria and Asia Minor and to accumulate, when required, the troops and material of war in time to be of use in repelling the invasion or frustrating attempts to excite rebellion in Asia Minor or Syria unless she possesses a stronghold near the coast. The presence of the English in Cyprus will enable them to strengthen the Sultan's territory in Syria and Mesopotamia, where, after the late events, it will probably be much shaken. As England has no desire to impoverish the Porte, she will pay yearly whatever is the present excess of revenue over expenditure in the island. This alliance will be conditional on Russia retaining Kars

and her conquests in Armenia. If they are given up, Cyprus will be evacuated and this treaty will be at an end. Press an immediate acceptance of these terms with all the energy in your power. Point out that this arrangement makes safe Asiatic Turkey, the field from which the Sultan's army is supplied with men, and that it must be accepted at once if the Sultan wishes to retain the goodwill of England. The present opportunity, if neglected, will never recur. We are on the point of an arrangement by which the Russian army will be withdrawn from Constantinople (Istanbul), and the autonomous Bulgarian Principality will either be limited to the north of the Balkans, or got rid of altogether. If the Sultan does not consent to the above arrangement, these negotiations will be broken off at once and the capture of Constantinople and the partition of the Empire will be the immediate result. Nothing has saved the Sultan from this extremity, for which not only Russia, but other Powers wished, except the friendship of England; but England will desist from further efforts unless the Sultan agrees to allow her to protect his Asiatic Empire by an alliance on these terms. Make the Sultan understand that you must have the written engagement as above not later than Sunday (it was Friday), and that most absolute secrecy must be observed".

On Sunday, 25th May, the answer was telegraphed by Mr. Layard that the Sultan accepted the proposed convention, and after this Lord Salisbury proceeded on 30th May to sign a secret agreement with Russia. In this, a paragraph, which at that time was obscure, referred to the Cyprus Convention as follows:

"In consenting not to contest the desire of the Emperor of Russia to occupy the port of Batum and to guard his conquests in Armenia, the Government of Her Majesty do not hide from themselves that grave dangers - menacing the tranquillity of the population of Turkey - in-Asia-may result in future by this extension of Russian frontier. But Her Majesty's Government are of the opinion that the duty of protecting the Ottoman Empire from this danger, which henceforth will rest largely (*d'une mesure speciale*) upon England,

can be effected without exposing Europe to the calamities of a fresh war”.

Certain minor points of detail having been arranged by telegram, Mr. Layard signed the Convention on 4th June, 1878. Meanwhile Lord Salisbury wrote a long despatch to Mr. Layard, containing a very clear exposition of the motives by which the British Government had been influenced. It is to be noted, however, that this despatch, which was drafted entirely in his own hand, was not completed until 30th May, that is some days after the consent of the Sultan had been given. It appears not to have been despatched that day, and could not have reached Istanbul until after the Convention had been actually signed. In short, it said:

“Conference negotiations for some time between Her Majesty’s Government and Russia will probably lead to the modification of the articles of the Treaty of San Stefano about European Turkey to bring them in harmony with the interests of other European Powers and England in particular. But these will not apply to Turkey in Asia. Russia does not wish to withdraw from Batum and the fortresses North of Araxes as given by the Porte. Her Majesty’s Government considers what effect these will have on the Asiatic provinces of the Ottoman Empire and on the interests of England which are closely affected by the condition of those provinces. Her Majesty’s Government cannot be indifferent to these. The defeat of the Ottoman Government may lead to the downfall of the Empire completely. If Batum, Ardahan and Kars are retained by Russia, this will lead to Russian powerful influence in disintegrating the Asiatic provinces of the Porte. We cannot allow this to happen as they affect our Oriental interests. We cannot undertake a costly war to restore the invaded provinces of the Porte. Turkey needs a strong power to protect its provinces. With two conditions that power can be Great Britain: 1. the government of the Asiatic provinces should be improved; and 2. Great Britain should occupy a position near the coast of Asia Minor...”

The last part of the despatch included Article I of the proposed Cyprus Convention.

On 1st July, 1878, an annex to the Convention was signed containing the following clauses:

- “a) the Mussulman religious tribunal shall be continued in Cyprus;
- b) the Evkaf funds shall be administered;
- c) any excess of revenue over expenditure shall be paid to the Porte;
- d) the Sultan shall be empowered to sell or lease lands in Cyprus belonging to the Ottoman Crown or State<sup>9</sup>;
- e) Her Majesty’s Government shall be empowered to acquire by compulsion land required for public purposes; and
- f) if Russia restores to Turkey Kars and other conquests made by her in Armenia during the last war, the Island of Cyprus will be evacuated by England and the Convention of 4th June, 1878, will be at an end”.

Apparently this last clause (f) had been omitted by inadvertence in the original Convention; but it was referred to in the telegram of 23rd May.

#### **Anglo-French Relations and Cyprus :**

In connection with the Cyprus Convention complete secrecy had been maintained, except that Lord Salisbury seemed to have given some information to Count Shouvalov. On 7th July, just before the termination of the Congress of Berlin, Lord Salisbury communicated the text of the convention officially and confidentially to Mr. Waddington, the British diplomatic representative in Paris, in an important despatch. This course was rendered necessary, for it could be foreseen that the French would regard the acquisition of Cyprus as a menace to the privileged position which they had so long occupied in Syria. In this despatch Lord Salisbury wrote:

“Your Excellency is well aware that advice has been from various quarters repeatedly pressed upon Her Majesty’s Government to occupy Egypt, or at least to take the borders

<sup>9</sup> This right was abandoned by the Porte on 3. 2. 1879, in return for a fixed payment of 5,000 pounds sterling per annum.

of the Suez Canal. Such an operation might not have been at variance with English interests and would have presented no material difficulties. But this policy has never been entertained by Her Majesty's Government. We had received an intimation from the French Government that any such proceeding would be very unwelcome to the French people, and we could not but feel the reasonableness of their objection under the existing circumstances. Her Majesty's Government have constantly turned a deaf ear to all suggestions of that kind. They have been likewise recommended to occupy some port on the coast of Syria, such as Alexandretta, but they felt that, however carefully guarded, such a proceeding might, in present temper of men's minds, be construed as indicating an intention to acquire territory on the mainland of Western Asia; and they did not desire to be suspected of designs which are wholly absent from their thoughts. They have, therefore, preferred to accept from the Sultan the provisional occupation of a position less advantageous indeed, but still sufficient for the purpose and not exposed to the inconveniences I have mentioned. How long the occupation will continue it is impossible to foresee, but Her Majesty's Government are not without hope that the Russian statesmen will in due time satisfy themselves that the territory they have acquired is costly and unproductive, will recognise the futility of any plans which in any quarters may have been formed for making it a stepping stone to further conquests, and will abandon it as a useless acquisition"<sup>10</sup>.

Mr. Waddington, in communicating this to the French Government, took the opportunity of placing on record the importance of French interests in Syria and laid special stress on Lord Salisbury's repudiation in the name of his Government of "a policy which might tend towards material occupation, whether of Egypt or only on the banks of the Suez Canal, or on the continent of Asia".

<sup>10</sup> *State Papers*, Vol LXIX, p. 1347.

### **British Landing In Cyprus:**

Immediately after the Cyprus Convention was made public on 8th July, a British squadron under the command of Lord John Hay, appeared before Larnaca, and on 11th July the administration of the island was formally taken over from Turkish authority. Naturally, the publication of this Convention and the sudden occupation of Cyprus caused much sensation both in Britain and abroad. On the whole, public opinion seemed to have approved of the step. During the prolonged crisis there had been violent outbursts of Nationalist and as it was called "Jingo" feeling which was not entirely satisfied by the other parts of the settlement made at Berlin until the Cyprus Convention was known. It was to a very large degree this which enabled Lord Beaconsfield to claim that he had secured "peace with honour". But Mr. Gladstone, the Turcophobe leader of the Liberal Party, characterised it as an "insane" Convention. It elicited the warm approval of Prince Bismarck who, twenty years earlier, had regarded the voluntary cession of the Ionian Islands to Greece as a clear indication of British political decay.

### **The British Had Their Eyes on Cyprus Before:**

The suggestion of acquiring Cyprus for Great Britain was not a new one, and even had this crisis never arisen, it might well have been thought desirable to strengthen the British position in the Levant, and to secure some vantage ground for watching over the development of Syria and Mesopotamia; both might be of fundamental importance for safeguarding the road to India. From 1830 until the opening of the Suez Canal, the question of constructing a railway from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, and thereby providing rapid communication with India, had, from time to time, occupied the attention in Great Britain. Between 1830 and 1840, this project was in the first flush of novelty and attractive enterprise. Early surveys of the proposed route were made by General Chesney, and the Euphrates Survey Expedition was sent out by the British Government in 1835. From 1830 to 1840 the project was discussed several times in both Houses of Parliament, was subject of much press comment, and caught the public imagination.

There is evidence that it was regarded from this point of view both by Lord Salisbury and Lord Beaconsfield. To Lord Salisbury, anyhow, the demand for a naval station at Lemnos or Cyprus and the temporary occupation of Alexandretta, presented no new idea. The acquisition of some strategic post as a means of securing England's influence in the Eastern seas had been under discussion in the Cabinet for the whole of March 1878. It had been in the thoughts of Lord Salisbury for a longer period. More than a year earlier, when he was at Istanbul, he had discussed it as a step desirable to be taken in the event of the Turkish Empire's collapse. Colonel Home, an officer of the Intelligence Department, in whom he had great confidence, and who was at Istanbul at the time, had suggested Cyprus - or it had turned up in the conversation between them - and the idea had so far developed that Lord Salisbury had instructed him to explore and report upon the island from this point of view - instructions which were never carried out, owing to the officer's being called elsewhere<sup>11</sup>. In March, 1878, while he was still Secretary of State for India, Lord Salisbury made arrangements for an officer to set out at once in strict secrecy to investigate the situation on the spot.

There can be little doubt that these considerations were also in the mind of Lord Beaconsfield. Disraeli visited Cyprus in 1830 as a young man of six - and - twenty. He spent only one day there, but has recorded his impressions of the island in romantic and appreciative phrases. He thence passed direct to Beirut, Syria, Jerusalem and other parts of Palestine, a visit which stirred him as a Jew, influenced him deeply, and provided him with scenes and material for his novel *Tancred*, written fifteen years later.

The conquest of Syria by the Egyptian forces of Mehmet Ali, under his son Ibrahim Pasha, began in 1831. The war in Syria, in which France strongly favoured Mehmet Ali, while Great Britain and Austria eventually gave armed support to the Sultan, was practically ended by the bombardment of Acre and the capture of that place on 4th November, 1840, by a combined British, Austrian and Turkish fleet. During this period and for many years afterwards, Syria and Palestine in their every political and religious aspects - as an important part of the Ottoman Empire as a country across

<sup>11</sup> *Life of Lord Salisbury*, Vol. II, p. 214.

which lay the short route to India, as a country holding the key to the East, as a country in which French ambitions completely traversed and threatened British interests, as the land of biblical scene and prophesy - commanded much attention in England. Should Palestine, it was asked, after the capture of Acre, be restored unconditionally to Turkish rule, or should some change securing better government be made? It was a time when the question of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine was already a subject of discussion in various sections of the British press<sup>12</sup>.

From the combination of the Egyptian withdrawal and British interests in Palestine, there presently emerged a very curious proposal. Nothing less than that Great Britain should annex Cyprus and Acre by way of compensation for having ejected the Egyptians and thus recovered Syria for the Ottoman Empire. The proposal met with wide approval in England where public opinion was still robust and stood in fear of none on such matters. It was argued that annexation would provide material guarantees for the future safety of Syria and Palestine, give confidence to the peoples of the Ottoman Empire, and ensure the stability of that Empire.

The arguments used by Disraeli and Lord Salisbury in support of the occupation of Cyprus in 1878 bear a significant resemblance to those used in 1840-41. It seems that the two British statesmen, in shaping their policy in 1878, drew upon the proposals of 1840-41, which international jealousies had then brought to nothing. It may even be suggested that in this, boldly adopting and giving effect to earlier proposals, they were not unmindful of public approval that the scheme had won before and were encouraged to hope for similar approval then.

Some of the avowed motives for British annexation in 1840 can hardly be distinguished from the motives of latter-day Zionism. It was declared that, with England in possession of Cyprus and Acre, the way would be open for the return of the Jews to Palestine, and the "restoration of biblical truth to the Holy Land". These considerations appear to have carried much weight in England at the time. In secur-

<sup>12</sup> Sokolow, *History of Zionism*, Vol. I, Section XIX ff.; see also *Times*, 9. 3. 1840, 17. 8. 1840; and *Globe*, 31. 6. 1840.



ing Cyprus for Great Britain, Disraeli felt that sooner or later the step would bring Palestine and Syria within the orbit of British control.

### **Cyprus Annexed By Britain :**

The great scheme foreshadowed in the Cyprus Convention was never realised. The whole project broke down when Lord Beaconsfield's Government fell in 1880 and was succeeded by a Turcophobe Liberal Administration. Soon after Egypt was occupied by Great Britain which made Cyprus much less important. The military effect and diplomatic complication resulting from the occupation of Egypt absorbed the whole available energy and inevitably Cyprus and Asia Minor were neglected.

During the first 26 years of British rule, no steps seem to have been taken to develop Cyprus either as a naval or military base; little was done even for the port of Famagusta. The British Administration wished to spend as little as possible on the island, and to run its affairs according to its own income; but the Cyprus Convention had stipulated the payment of an annual tribute to the Sultan to the tune of £95,000. This sum was collected in Cyprus.

In 1914, when Turkey entered the World War on the side of Germany, the British published, on 5th November, 1914, an Order-in-Council annexing the island and thenceforth administering it as a Crown Colony. This British *fait accompli* was, perforce, accepted by Kemalist Turkey in the Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed on 26th July, 1923.

