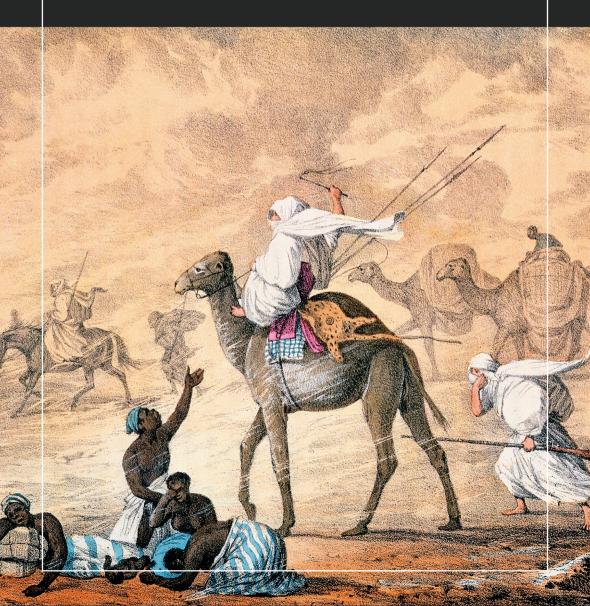# Britain and the Regency of Tripoli

*Consuls and Empire-Building in
Nineteenth-Century North Africa*

Sara ElGaddari

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This book interrogates British imperial activity and ambition in the Regency of Tripoli, an Ottoman province of North Africa, in the early nineteenth century. While charting changing British strategic priorities prior to the British invasion of Aden in 1839, the central focus is the ways in which British power, influence and prestige were established in the Regency of Tripoli. Through diplomatic and consular channels and individual enterprise, the British consul cultivated a protected and influential presence in the Regency. Alongside the successive missions of the African Association to explore the course of the Niger and the African interior, British naval activities along the coast, an expanding network of vice-consular representation in and beyond the Regency, and the development of health programmes by the British consul, all contributed to an evolving but powerful imperial bridgehead in Tripoli in the first half of the nineteenth century. The history of Libya in the early nineteenth century is part of a wider history of British pre- and early colonial engagement in the Middle East. This modern history is one of Ottoman decline and growing rebellions across Ottoman lands. At the same time, British ambitions in the region were primarily driven by cultural and commercial motives within a Mediterranean and wider global context of Anglo-French power rivalry and, at home, a recurrent impulse by the Foreign Office to check its overseas expenditure.

The following chapters will set out the significance of the Regency of Tripoli for British strategic concerns, as well as for British imperial ambitions as defined by the consul as the most senior imperial agent. Building on the concept of 'informal empire', the interests, actions and influence of an autonomous British consul 'acting on the spot' are set out – through the expansion of a vice-consular network and the creation of an influential imperial presence in the Regency. In so doing, a fuller picture is developed of the extent of British engagement in Tripoli, and a revised framework is proposed within which British imperial activity in Tripoli during the first half of the nineteenth century can be usefully analysed.

Drawing primarily on the consular correspondence of British agents in Tripoli during the reign of Yusuf Qaramanli from 1795 to 1832, there is a much needed re-interpretation of both British policy in the region and Tripoli's engagement with the outside world – especially the emerging European powers during the long process of Ottoman decline.[1] Moreover, the dominant view in the historiography of British imperialism in the Regency is challenged. The presumption that Tripoli,

because of its relative unimportance, cannot reveal much about British strategic concerns, policy and ambitions in the Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East during the post-Napoleonic era is no longer tenable.[2] The despatches of British consuls to Tripoli enable us to provide a fuller account of the Regency's relations with its neighbours, Europe and the United States – as well as British imperial policy formulation in the region – whether through the government or individual agents. This is because the agents, driven by both a high sense of duty and personal ambition, were able to reconstruct a relatively detailed depiction of the local social, economic and political life and their own evaluation of their contribution to the effective exercise of British influence in and beyond the Regency of Tripoli. The letters and reports provide an important new dimension to our understanding of Tripoli and British imperial activity when carefully read alongside other sources.

By the early 1820s British policy in the Mediterranean – as manifested by both agents overseas and the government in London – was at a crossroads. Historically shaped by rivalry with France, the course of Britain's future role in the Mediterranean and the 'East' was also directed by concerns over the future of the Ottoman Empire and fears over Russia's ambitions in the Balkans and the Middle East. Since 1795 the Regency and port of Tripoli came to serve a strategically important place in intelligence-gathering and supply for the British government and Royal Navy. With the accession of a friendly Qaramanli dynast, who looked to establish a new era in foreign and commercial relations with Europe and the United States, Britain relied on its consul general to represent, protect and promote British interests in the Regency and wider region. As the most senior imperial agent, the consul ensured that treaty agreements were honoured, and prioritized the protection of British subjects and commercial interests. As the 'man on the spot' the British consul came into his own, and using his abilities fostered the growth and operation of an influential imperial bridgehead that countered the ambitions of rival states, including France and the United States.[3] In this atmosphere of alarm and competition, the consul at Tripoli exercised, in contrast to his counterparts elsewhere, a high level of autonomy that was reflected in both his initiatives in Tripoli and in his influence and intervention in the politics of the Regency.

The paradigms of 'formal' and 'informal' empire cannot sufficiently account for the place and role of Tripoli in Britain's imperial designs in the early nineteenth century. This is because the activities of European agents, particularly those of the British consuls, did not contribute towards the creation of an 'informal empire', but rather towards a more disparate network of alliances and activities that culminated in the construction of an imperial bridgehead at Tripoli. A colonial bridgehead can be 'a commercial, settler, missionary or proconsular presence or a combination of all four. It might be a decaying factory on a torrid coast or, at its grandest, the "Company Bahadur".'[4] Central to the concept of a bridgehead is the notion of a physical 'presence', the importance of access to central resources – military, financial and diplomatic – as well as the importance of context and environment over policy.[5] The network of privileged relationships and the activities pursued by British agents in Tripoli during the reign of Yusuf Qaramanli contributed to a British imperial presence in a strategic North African port. An imperial

bridgehead stresses the core characteristic of a privileged and, by implication, protected presence of an external power in the territory of a 'peripheral' country.

The Regency of Tripoli

As a province of the Ottoman Empire, with key trading ports connecting the ancient trading routes in the African interior to the shores of the southern Mediterranean, the Regency of Tripoli (see Figure 1) reflected a diverse collection of ethnicities, cultures and languages. The ruling Qaramanli dynasts were of Kuloghlu origin and the dynasty was established in 1711 by Yusuf Qaramanli's (1766–1838) grandfather, Ahmad Qaramanli, who reigned until 1745. The Kuloghlu as a distinct social and ethnic group came about as a result of intermarriage between the Ottoman Janissary forces and the local Arab populace. As Figure 1 illustrates, the location of the port of Tripoli, at least since the fourteenth century, was key to its historical prominence and commercial livelihood. Tripoli's position as a frontier state, between Ottoman, African and European worlds contributed to its identity and global outlook. The Regency and its ports acted as a conduit, entry and exit point for the trans-Saharan caravans, Christian and Muslim traders and the annual Hajj pilgrims en route to Mecca and Medina. Tripoli's liminality provided it with strategic advantages and made it a desirable location for the pursuit of economic ambitions.[6]

Figure 1 Map of the Regency of Tripoli, 1707, four years before the establishment of a Qaramanli government and dynasty by Ahmad Qaramanli. Available online: http://upload. wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/22/Royaume_de_Tripoli_1707.jpg.

In the sixteenth century, Tripoli had been under Spanish rule from 1510 to 1530, until it was taken over by the Order of the Knights of St John. The occupation by the Knights of Malta in turn was brought to an end on 13 August 1551, when Ottoman forces invaded Tripoli and made the city-state an Ottoman province until the founding of the Qaramanli dynasty at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Until 1711, the Ottoman Porte maintained a series of governors in Tripoli to see to its effective administration, its revenues and ultimately to secure Tripoli against continuing attacks by Spain and the Order of Malta.[7]

From 1676, as a result of continued disruption to their shipping in the Mediterranean, England and France began a series of bombardments against Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. In this context, and with a weak central government, Ahmad Qaramanli capitalized on the growth in the autonomy of the role of the governor and, in July 1711, mounted a coup and established his authority over the Regency of Tripoli.[8]

The eighteenth century marked a shift in commercial relations between Europe and North Africa, as European states began to obtain their staples from the New World rather than from the traditional 'grain stores' of North Africa and the Middle East. At the same time, the ties between the Ottoman provinces and Istanbul became increasingly symbolic, with dwindling support from the local elites in North Africa. While local rulers, including the Qaramanli in Tripoli and the Mamluks in Egypt, had focused on consolidating their power and building stronger ties with Europe, the shifts in global commerce prompted a decline in revenues. The Ottoman Porte undertook numerous direct military expeditions to states such as Tunis (1713 and 1794), Tripoli (1794) and Egypt (1786) in failed attempts to reinstate central authority over its rebelling provinces. There was also another military expedition, in 1756, by Algiers at the instigation of the Porte, to execute and replace Ali Pasha with a new beylical system of governance.

Meanwhile, the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–74 highlighted Britain's position on the Eastern Question, and in particular that its relationship with the Ottoman Porte was ambivalent at best and occasionally strained, particularly during the embassy of John Murray (1712?–1775) from 1766 to 1769. Throughout the eighteenth century, Britain sought to maintain, through the Levant Company, its commercial relations with Turkey and all the ports where 'Levantine' consuls were posted, including to 1825, the North African Regencies.

The Regency of Tripoli held a position of advantage among its North African neighbours as it was a key meeting point and conduit of the four major trade routes crossing the Sahara, as well as connecting to a fifth route through the east of the Regency which linked Wadai to Kufra and, eventually to Benghazi on the coast (see Figure 12 on page 103).[9] These ancient caravan roads provided the life-blood for the economic and social life of North and Central Africa during the nineteenth century. They connected the powerful Kingdom of Kanem-Bornu to Tripoli and the Mediterranean Sea, as well as to the urban and commercial centres that included Timbuktu, Lake Chad, Gao, Kano, Ghat and Murzuq.

A staple, and substantial source of income for the Regency of Tripoli, like its neighbours, was derived from the trade in slaves from the interior. The capture of

Christian, White slaves onboard seized vessels or from piratical raids on coastal populations in the Mediterranean was conducted to a much lesser extent than the trade in Black slaves from the African interior. Nevertheless, the capture of White slaves provided the incentive for a Royal Navy brokered treaty with Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli outlawing the practice in 1816, as well as providing the pretext for a full blockade and bombardment of Algiers, led by Edward Pellew (1757–1833), in the same year.

Yusuf Qaramanli's government (1795–1832) benefitted from the advantages of courting both France and Britain through offering both powers favourable terms of trade. The gradual decline in revenues from prizes since the seventeenth century was ameliorated by the continued trade in African slaves and other goods from the interior, while the export of livestock and provisions steadily increased to satisfy the demand of the reinvigorated British garrisons throughout the Mediterranean following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Despite having maintained a close relationship with European states, the Regency of Tripoli began to struggle with what appeared to be a terminal decline in its economic resources. In turn, the social and political fabric of the Regency came under increasing strain.[10]

What did remain constant for Tripoli was its advantageous position as gatekeeper to the interior, as well as its established connections with both European and African powers. By 1818, Yusuf Qaramanli had clearly defined what he wanted to secure for the future of his Regency and dynasty. His government needed to diversify its revenue base by expanding trade, developing agriculture and lowering Qaramanli's formerly exorbitant demands for annual tribute from parties that desired trade with, and through, the Regency. Within the boundaries of his territories, the Pasha periodically deployed his military assets to quell internal insurrections by various Arab tribes and installed a governor in Murzuq (the urban centre of Fezzan) that was loyal to Tripoli. In an apparently desperate attempt to bolster his government, he also ordered short-sighted military incursions into the sovereign territories of Kanem-Bornu.[11]

Meanwhile, in a still heady atmosphere of great-power rivalry, Britain desired the security of its existing empire, and its newly found regional influence. Beyond ensuring the regular supply of its naval bases across the region, from Cádiz to Valletta, Britain was concerned to check the ambitions of France and Russia in the East. These priorities, however, brought an unexpected role as a mediator with the Ottoman Porte over rebelling Greek subjects in the Ionian Islands. Britain's involvement was designed to avoid any further European wars and to maintain the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, despite the waves of rebellion sweeping across the provinces of the Ottoman Empire.[12]

In focusing on the relationship between Britain and Tripoli, the spotlight is turned to three consuls to Tripoli – Simon Lucas (1793–1801), William Wass Langford (1804–12) and Hanmer Warrington (1814–46), who were appointed as successive 'Consuls General & Agents' during the reign of Yusuf Qaramanli.[13]

Consul Warrington's term witnessed a profound change in British relations with North and Central African states. The consul's activities in the Regency interrogates our understanding of the role of the 'man on the spot', and in turn,

the creation of a powerful, influential and interventionist British presence in the region through the operation of an imperial bridgehead at Tripoli.

In contrast to Egypt, the Regencies to the west have not attracted the same attention because of their ambiguous status on the periphery of empires. This, in turn, reflects the schism created by imperial history in its treatment of colonial and non-colonial territories. The prospect of increased trade and profit remained a prime motivating factor for British agents in these 'ambiguous regions'.[14] The consuls to Tripoli were no exception. Apart from a few works, there is a need for a more in-depth interrogation of the diplomatic relationships and connections between France, Britain and the North African states in the early nineteenth century.[15] The history of economic development and political and social change cannot be understood in isolation from Tripoli's engagement with the newly ascendant powers in the region – Britain and Egypt.

British interests during and after the tumultuous years of the Napoleonic Wars remained diverse, with the British government facing an array of competing priorities across the globe. This 'European' change coincided with a time of economic and political upheaval in Tripoli, and in North and Central Africa more generally, as well as in the eastern Mediterranean. The decline in the caravan trade, and in turn in revenue for the government of Tripoli, necessarily changed the dynamics of the relationship between Britain and the Regency. The concerns of the British government over French and Russian ambitions in the region remained justified, while in Tripoli a power vacuum was created that the British consul exploited for personal and official ends.

Chapter 2

BRITISH IMPERIAL HISTORY BEFORE 1839

Throughout the turbulent wars of the Napoleonic era (1803–15) and in the cautious post-1815 political climate, British priorities focused on the protection of British subjects and interests, which included the maintenance in the supply of provisions from North Africa, including the Regency of Tripoli and Egypt. Britain's efforts initially concentrated on countering French manoeuvres in Egypt and Napoleon's ambitions in the Levant. As fierce competition over access to resources and valuable trade routes continued into the nineteenth century, Britain initially occupied Aden in 1807, more than thirty years before the widely recognized occupation of 1839.[1] Britain's 'will to empire' was shaped in the eighteenth century by the desire to commercially expand, fierce rivalry with other European powers and by an ever-increasing global portfolio of geostrategic concerns, not least the security of British Empire in India. By the early nineteenth century, Britain's growing overseas interests and concerns reflected its power, prestige and influence across both the Old and New Worlds. Despite a vagueness of purpose in its overseas policy, pre-emptive interventions nevertheless became the norm for an expansive empire with the greatest military largesse ever witnessed in the modern era.

The Seven Years' War

The Seven Years' War (1756–63) brought about a profound and irrevocable global change in the Ancien Régime system. The conclusions of the Treaty of Paris at the end of the war replaced Spanish influence with British global ascendency. The independence of the North American colonies thirteen years later, in 1776, forced a change of course in British strategic priorities and at the same time reasserted the primacy of empire in India. Despite the loss of its American colonies, by the close of the eighteenth century, Britain had solidified its position as one of the foremost colonial powers alongside France, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal. The inconsistent policy of evacuating the British naval fleet from the Mediterranean in the final decade of the eighteenth century was a result of the 'vacillation' of the government, prompted by the reconquest of Corsica and Elba by Napoleon Bonaparte.[2] Through the War of the Second Coalition and the Treaty of Campo Formio in 1797, France had also acquired Corfu and the neighbouring Ionian

Islands, while Britain at the time only had Gibraltar as a base for its Mediterranean expeditions.[3] As 'irresistible' as imperial and military expansion became, British activity was paradoxically a result of a lack of an explicit or coherent policy in the region beyond the protection of loosely defined 'British interests'. The protection of existing strategic concerns, however, usually necessitated invasion, occupation or annexation. In turn, the numbers of British subjects and interests inexorably increased across the globe. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the rise of the 'Eastern Question' and the future of the Ottoman Empire inevitably focused the gaze of the British government upon the 'East'. This focal point of imperial power and ambition was sharpened by French motivations in the Middle East and Asia, and crucially, access to resources and commercial wealth through the gateway of Egypt. As Consul Lucas wrote, in April 1797 to the Duke of Portland, William Bentinck:

> The growing power of this Bashaw [*sic*] must require a little more attention from the different European powers, this free trade and commerce in the Mediterranean and Levant Seas … the Americans, have concluded their Treaties with all the Barbary states … [and] now bids fair to rival the French in very lucrative trade.[4]

Invasion of Naval Commerce

A notable feature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the use of navies as instruments of state policy.[5] Britain's Royal Navy was no exception. A clear policy shift was prompted following Russian annexation of the Crimea in 1783, in response to the conclusion of the Treaty of Kuçuk Kainarji of 1774, whereby the British government prohibited British seamen from entering Russian military service.[6] Thereafter, Russia continued in its policy of aggressive expansion to acquire more territories, including Georgia in 1804 and neighbouring Qajari provinces.[7] In the Mediterranean, despite some failures, such as the evacuation of Toulon in December 1793, Britain's occupation of the island of Corsica in June 1794, 'foreshadowed in Minorca and Gibraltar – of an Anglo-Mediterranean order in the making'.[8] The increased targeting of British commerce also necessitated a greater British naval presence in the Mediterranean.

In some measure, the nineteenth century represented, for Britain, a continuation of the concerns and priorities of the late eighteenth century, with a focus on India and access to its resources. The ascendency of the British Royal Navy globally and in the Mediterranean confirmed Britain's sense of cultural and military superiority in the region. British control of commerce and traditional patterns of trade from the Middle East and Asia across to the Americas underscored its global hegemonic position. Since the eighteenth century, British chartered companies, including the East India Company, the Levant Company and the Royal African Company, dominated trade in the region. Following the conclusion of the Seven Years' War in 1763, Britain also asserted its control of

trade across the Red Sea. At the same time, following the loss of its colonial possessions in the West Indies, France moved to counter British influence in the Middle East and Asia, and directed its energy to the occupation of Egypt. As the gateway to India, the British government and its agents stationed in Egypt attempted to counter these French manoeuvres in the region, and in 1799, a British military force occupied the island of Perim (Mayyun, Yemen), a strategic port at the southern entrance to the Red Sea. Britain's exploitation of commerce was reinforced in treaty provisions, primarily through preferential tariffs and duties on the import and export of goods. When force was required, European powers, particularly Britain and France, resorted to blockading harbours and ports. The blockade system became a notable feature of the early nineteenth century and, after being deployed successfully in Malta in 1798, was later used against North African states, including Algiers and Morocco, to force those powers to accede to terms they would not have otherwise accepted.[9]

On the ground, at outposts throughout the world, the government relied on the initiative and influence of its locally stationed agents. In turn, favourable treaty provisions relied on the character and diplomatic skills of individual agents. Local powers, from time to time, were forced to acquiesce diplomatically or by force when a demand from a European power would not be accommodated.[10] In August 1816, a joint Anglo-Dutch squadron bombarded Algiers and forced the Dey, Omar Agha, to agree to an end to the capture and enslavement of White slaves and to release the thousands held in Algiers. Just over a decade later, in 1828, two British ships of war blockaded the port of Tangier to obtain compensation in a case which, according to the British government's own legal counsel, was one without merit. Although the Sultan of Morocco, Mawlay 'Abd al-Rahman was well within his rights to detain two British ships with uncertain papers, the Royal Navy continued to blockade the port until the Sultan acceded to Britain's demands.[11] This tactic later made way to the 'gunboat diplomacy' so prevalent in the late nineteenth century.

In July 1798, the Battle of the Pyramids was accompanied by the arrival of Napoleon in Cairo and marked the start of France's 'Eastern project' or 'Oriental Expedition' and military campaign to Syria.[12] The Napoleonic expedition to Egypt and Britain's subsequent occupations of Alexandria, Aden and Perim signified a new era in British and French colonial ambitions and the rise of European cultural imperialism. For France, the possession of Egypt could revive the trade route through Suez, strengthening the connection with India and countering the 'growing commerce of Atlantic born trade'.[13] Access to the Middle East and Asia hinged on access to the overland routes through Egypt. Napoleon's ambitions stoked British fears about losing its strategic advantages and ultimately, India. France's occupation of Egypt from 1798 to 1801 served to emphasise Egypt's deeply symbolic and strategic purpose for Britain. As a consequence of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the Porte issued a declaration of war against France, while Britain hastened to form an alliance with Turkey and Russia against French policy in Egypt. Napoleon and the French Directory's decision to seize Egypt was fundamentally about countering British power and imperialism in the region.[14]

Militarily, Britain became entangled in Egypt following the Battle of the Nile in August 1798. The scene of the naval operations in Abukir Bay marked the return of Britain to the Mediterranean and its 'resumption' of control of the Mediterranean from the 'Straits to the Levant'.[15] Crucially, the success of the British naval fleet checked Napoleon's ambitions in the East and India.[16] The victories of the Royal Navy were followed in the same year by Britain's reoccupation of Minorca and the blockade of Malta, which had the unilateral support of the Porte. In expression of Britain's closer friendship with Turkey, pro-Ottoman diplomat Sir Sidney Smith (1764–1840) was appointed as minister plenipotentiary to Istanbul.[17] Meanwhile, in Tripoli, Nelson demanded an end to friendly relations between Tripoli and France, and the expulsion of all French subjects and agents in the Regency. On 28 April 1799, Nelson wrote to Yusuf Qaramanli:

> I was rejoiced to find that you [Yusuf Qaramanli] have renounced the treaty you had imprudently entered into with some Emissaries of General Buonaparte – that Man of Blood, that Despoiler of the weak, that Enemy of all good Musselmen; for like Satan, he only flatters that he may the more easily destroy; and it [is] true that, since the year 1789, all Frenchmen are exactly of the same disposition.
>
> … It is now my Duty to speak out and not to be misunderstood. That Nelson which has hitherto kept your Powerful Enemies from destroying you, can, and will, let them loose upon you, unless the following Terms are, in two hours complied with – Viz., That the French Consul at Tripoli Vice Consul and Every Frenchman are delivered on Board Her most faithful Majesty's ship 'Affonço'.[18]

The following month, in May 1799, Britain roundly defeated France's staunch ally Tipu Sultan at Seringapatam. Naval power was vital in establishing British hegemony in far-off lands separated by expansive seas. In the same month came the turning point in France's Eastern campaign when French forces were beaten in the Siege of Acre. Acre was significant as the gateway into Palestine and symbolic of the continuance of Napoleon's expedition to the Levant. Despite the resounding destruction of France's naval strength in the Mediterranean, Napoleon still believed in the superior strength of his land forces.[19] Smith, with the assistance of General Louis-Edmond Antoine le Picard Phélippeaux (1767–99) led an Anglo-Turkish defence of Acre and caused French troops to withdraw, retreat to and successively evacuate, Jaffa, Gaza and Al-Arish.[20] The initial British occupation of the island of Perim in 1799 and Aden in 1807 – Perim was subsequently reoccupied in 1857 and Aden in 1839 – was designed to counter the threat posed by Napoleon's ambitions in the east.[21]

The two-year British blockade of Malta in 1798–1800 ended in the evacuation of French troops from that island on 5 August 1800, and Malta was promptly placed under British administration. The combined British occupation of Malta and the destruction of the French fleet at Abukir signified the end of Napoleon's campaign in Egypt and Syria. While the Treaty of Amiens which concluded the following year marked a temporary peace, the treaty provoked an outcry in Britain in its stipulation that Britain withdraw from Malta. This public reaction highlighted the British government's adjustment of its affairs in the Mediterranean.[22] By the time of

Napoleon's retreat from Russia in 1812, however, France had lost 'all power to dispute the control of the [Mediterranean] sea' and 'this Important Intelligence has been communicated to His Highness [Yusuf Qaramanli] and the same has been rendered as public as possible'.[23] In addition to Gibraltar, British influence was now also firmly established in Sicily and Malta. After 1814, Malta gave the British fleet a 'central position in the Mediterranean from which it could strike at every coast, and from which it could easily withdraw westward should its position become untenable'.[24] The successive invasions of Egypt in 1801 and 1807, the arrival of Mohamed Ali (1769–1849) as Pasha in Egypt in 1805, the occupation of Malta and later Sicily in 1806, and entanglement in the Peninsular War (1807–14) emphasized Britain's rapidly expanding role in the politics of the region as well as marking a period of upheaval for Europe and Russia. This is exemplified in the Treaties of Tilsit concluded in 1807, whereby Europe was divided between Russia and France and where France gave its support to Russia in its conflict with Turkey. As a result, these agreements 'virtually gave the French a free hand in Europe and the Russians in Asia'.[25]

By 1808, Britain's naval superiority was utilized by Foreign Secretary George Canning (1770–1827) in an array of political negotiations, including British diplomatic efforts to restrain Spanish and French ambitions during the Peninsular War.[26] In 1809, Britain took possession of the Ionian Islands. The occupation of the Ionian islands enabled a further extension of British influence into the eastern Mediterranean. For Ionians, a new constitution for the islands was drawn up in August 1817. The earlier capture and occupation of Malta and Sicily signified the 'huge explosion' of British power in the region.[27] Three years previously, in March 1814, British troops occupied Parga in the northwest region of Preveza in Greece, before eventually handing the town to Ali Pasha (1740–1822) of Ioannina/Tepedeleni's troops, in a political settlement that was hard to justify given the numbers of Christians that felt they had no choice but to flee. Those Christians sought refuges in places such as Kalamas 'as late as August 1829'.[28]

While merchant companies appointed by royal charter no longer held sway in the trade of the Mediterranean or the Middle East, on the back of the might of the Royal Navy, Britain's sense of moral and cultural superiority was reinforced through a succession of treaties of peace and commerce. Diplomatic protocol, outlined in those same treaties, detailed the preferential political and commercial treatment demanded by Britain. British agents, including those in North Africa, did not hesitate to suspend cooperation at the slightest provocation or perceived lack of due respect. The diplomatic mission of Sir William à Court in 1813–14 to the Regencies of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli emphasizes Britain's exploitation of its dominant position to obtain peace settlements in its own national interest and to the distinct disadvantage of the other signatories. To their own detriment, in 1813, the Regencies of Tunis and Tripoli acquiesced to much smaller debt settlements than originally owed by the Spanish government.[29] On 5 May 1822, when asked to clarify points of the settlement and Convention reached with Tripoli, Sir William à Court confirmed to Robert Wilmot Horton: 'The Convention, I am ready to admit, was a disadvantageous one to the Bashaw [*sic*], but it was one the nature of which he certainly never misunderstood.'[30]

Britain and North African states were heavily reliant on the slave trade as the principal source of their revenue. British agents at stations along the west African coast took firm advantage of the trade to the Americas and the West Indies. Despite the rising public anti-slavery sentiments across Britain, the wealth accruing from the slave trade was integral to the maintenance and growth of the British Empire. In turn, the British government prioritized the maintenance and oversight of its forts along the Gold Coast (all located in modern-day Ghana) and granted the Royal African Company the funds for the repair and upkeep of these forts.[31] The British settlements continued to be governed by the Royal African Company until 1821. Despite anti-slavery legislation being passed by British Parliament in 1807 – the Slave Trade Act – British agents continued to monopolize the slave trade from West Africa.[32] As an eighteenth-century pamphleteer extolled,

> How great is the importance of the [slave] trade to Africa … so that both for exports and imports, the improvement of our national revenue, the encouragement of industry at home, the supply of our colonies abroad, and the increase of our navigation, the African [slave] trade is so very beneficial to Great Britain, so essentially necessary to the very being of her colonies, that without it neither could we flourish nor they long subsist.[33]

While maintaining a powerful influence on the commerce of the Mediterranean and the slave trade out of West Africa to its colonies in the West Indies and the Americas, the British government and philanthropic societies supported and funded successive missions and naval initiatives to survey, map and acquire knowledge of the countries and peoples across the globe. With commercial dominance a primary concern, merchant companies constituted an important arm of British colonial power and influence. These companies cemented British hegemony by altering traditional trading patterns from the Middle East, in staple goods such as cotton and coffee and opening new markets of export in South America and British colonies in the West Indies. The amount of freedom permitted to the Levant and East India Companies was symptomatic of Britain's unwillingness to define a clear set of policies for its overseas engagements. This lack of articulation of a 'foreign policy' of sorts enabled British imperialism to spread in unexpected ways through individual initiatives of British agents, from La Plata to Africa to Burma over the course of the nineteenth century. Correspondingly, however, the sheer scale of British activity across the globe made the task of management from London impossible. The British government's attempts at reform and regulation of companies, agents and branches of the government proved to be a long process which was never completed before the final loss of India in 1947.

Rebellions of the Ottoman Pashas

After the 1790s, British imperial manoeuvring in the Mediterranean and beyond – including in the Red Sea – is best understood within the context of the 'Eastern

Question'. The losses incurred by the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 1783 and the port of Ochakov (Ochakiv, Ukraine) in 1791 marked the beginning of a gradual erosion of the sovereign integrity and political stability of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the losses incurred by the Porte laid the foundations for the growing power vacuum in the eastern Mediterranean. The 'Eastern Question' that occupied ministers in London into the nineteenth century centred around the future of the Ottoman Empire and its provinces. At the same time, Britain was concerned to counter Russian imperial ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean. Russia continued to intervene in the affairs of the Porte and wanted to secure control of the Straits – the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus.[34]

The British government was deeply concerned over the increasing instability of the Ottoman Empire and about both French and Russian ambitions in the region. In Tripoli the rebellion against the rule of the Ottoman Porte began in 1711 with the establishment of a local dynasty, the Qaramanlis, and again in 1795 with the ousting of Ottoman officer Ali Borghul and the reinstatement of dynastic Qaramanli rule in Tripoli. With much relief, on 6 February 1795, Consul Lucas wrote to Henry Dundas informing him of the fortunate occurrence for 'European trade' that 'we are not only freed from the despotism of an arbitrary Tyrant [Ali Borghul], but once more restored to the peaceful enjoyment of our former rights and privileges, by the restoration of the lawful Princes of the Qaramanli Family to the Throne of their Ancestors'.[35] Rebellions by Pashas and Beys were also underway in other Ottoman territories, including Osman Pazvanoğlu (1758–1807) in Bulgaria, who repeatedly rebelled against Sultan Selim III until his (Pazvanoğlu's) death in 1807. As early as 1793, Pazvanoğlu led military expeditions throughout Eastern Europe, along and beyond the course of the Danube and as far north as Bucharest. Meanwhile, Ali Pasha of Ioannina challenged the authority of local Beys loyal to Istanbul and by 1809 had firmly established his rule in southern Albania and over extensive territories in modern-day Greece. His powerful reign continued until 1820 when Sultan Mahmud II besieged Ioannina with 20,000 Turkish troops. Meanwhile in Egypt, Mohamed Ali (1769–1849), asserted his absolute authority in March 1811 by ordering the massacre of the mamluk ruling elite in the citadel of Cairo. As the Pasha, he had transformed Egypt from an Ottoman province into an expansive empire. Along the coast, another provincial ruler, Hussein Dey (1765–1838) of Algiers, also fought to assert his independence from outside influence, particularly following the demand for the settlement of debts from France in 1827, until the formal occupation of the Regency by French forces in 1830. In the same year, the Pasha of Tripoli militarily prepared the Regency for what was believed to be an imminent invasion by French and Egyptian troops, as part of a greater scheme to conquer all the Regencies of North Africa. On 10 March 1830, Consul Warrington, in a letter to R. W. Hay, described the escalating situation in Tripoli:

> It is true that Merchandise was relanded at Leghorn [Livorno], having been previously shipped for this Port [Tripoli], merchants have arrived to endeavour to close their accounts, and I apprehend His Highness [Yusuf Qaramanli] must have more solid grounds from the steps He is adopting. Hagge Mohamed and