“It now appears that your Vice Consul was not assassinated”:
Communications Technology and United States-Ottoman Relations circa 1903

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Abstract:
This paper focuses on a specific incident, in which an error in transmitting, encoding, and reading a telegram led to mistaken reports of the assassination of the American vice-consul, William Magelssen, in Beirut, in 1903. Although the error was quickly discovered, President Roosevelt had already ordered the dispatch of three American warships to this Ottoman provincial city. The title of this paper comes from a statement made by Chekib Bey, the Ottoman Minister to the United States, as he sought to distinguish truthful accounts of events in Beirut from the mistakes made by the State Department as well as the anti-Turkish sentiments expressed in newspaper editorials and headlines. In this paper, this specific incident is used to ask more generally how the telegraph accelerated the transmission of news within the Ottoman empire and internationally, to explore the implications of this acceleration on political, diplomatic, and cultural practices and perceptions, and to examine US-Turkish relations in the early twentieth century.