THE MODERNIZATION OF OTTOMAN DIPLOMACY IN THE TANZIMAT PERIOD

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In the nineteenth century, diplomacy became more important than ever before for the Ottoman Empire. Because of the weakness of the Empire, as compared to the great powers of Europe, defense of its territories and interests depended more on diplomacy and negotiation than on the use of armed forces. Diplomacy was a defensive weapon for the Sultan and the Sublime Porte in more than one way : it could help to avoid injury to the Empire; it could try to attract aid for the Empire; and it could try to persuade the European powers that the Empire deserved support from them because it was improving itself by means of a process of reforms and bringing itself closer to western ways.

Under the pressure of events, the Empire developed a diplomatic system that was more western than the traditional Ottoman methods. The Sultans had always used negotiators and embassies for dealings with other powers, but these had been temporary. From the time of Sultan Mahmud II the Empire sent out permanent ambassadors and ministers to reside in the capitals of other major states, just as the European powers did. Also in Mahmud II's time the office of re'is efendi was changed into that of foreign minister, and after 1836 a more European-style ministry developed slowly under the minister's direction. Likewise a new sort of personnel was attracted to the Foreign Ministry and to a considerable extent trained there, on the job; these were men who

were more conversant with European outlooks and methods, who usually know French, and who were more casily able to deal with diplomats from European countries[1]. These organizational aspects of the modernization of Ottoman diplomacy are well know.

The manner in which the new diplomatic establishment operated is less well known, but this also is important. In a short paper it is impossible to survey the course of Ottoman diplomatic activity throughout the nineteenth century, or even in the Tanzimat period alone. But it is worth while to describe and analyze in general terms the characteristics of Ottoman diplomacy. They are here somewhat arbitrarily divided into principles and methods. The evidence for these principles and methods comes from Ottoman diplomatic documents. A few of them have been published, but most are still unpublished. I have relied principally on the documents, numbering in the thousands, in the Dışişleri Bakanlığı Hazine-i Evrak in İstanbul.

The first principle which guided the actions of Ottoman statesmen and diplomats was, of course, that the Ottoman Empire must be preserved. Fuad Paşa, who was five times foreign minister, emphasized in instructions sent to all Ottoman representatives abroad that "the first and most important task of a Government is to look to its own preservation"[2]. In fact, most of the activity of these officials was in some way related to the struggle to prevent the loss of Ottoman territory, or the loss of governing authority over parts of Ottoman territory, either to minority peoples within the Empire or to European powers. As one late nineteenth-century analysis of

1. Carter V. Findley, *Burcaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire : The Sublime Porte,* 1789-1922 (Princeton, 1980), chapter 4. Encümend Kuran, *Avrupa'da Osmanlı İkamet Elçiliklerinin Kuruluşu ve İlk Elçilerin Siyasi Faaliyetleri*, 1793-1821 (Ankara, 1968) deals with an earlier attempt at permanent embasies.

2. Circular of 20 June 1867, published in Austria, Auswätige Angelegenheiten, *Correspondenzen des Kaiserlichköniglichen Ministerium des Äussern* (Vienna, 1868-1874), I (1867), p. 98.

Ottoman policy put it, "It was necessary to preserve ourselves, to exist, not to let ourselves be violated or dismembered"[3].

A second principle was that the Ottoman empire was a state in which all people, of whatever religion, were equal, although it was also an Islamic state. Through the Tanzimat period these was less emphasis on Islam as the basis of Ottoman foreign relations. Formerly Islamic law was frequently referred to by Ottoman diplomats. In 1807, for example, the re'is efendi explained that "the very structure of the Imperial Government rests on the Muslim Şeriat". The war against Russia (1806-1812) occurred, he said, because "in the face of Russia's tricks, the Imperial Government was forced by Muslim law to resist"[4]. This kind of reference to Muslim law as the basis for foreign policy tends to disappear from the vocabulary of Ottoman diplomats after the Tanzimat Fermanı of Gülhane and the closer association with European powers in the Crimean War. Instead, more references appear to the equality of all Ottoman subjects. During the Crimean War, for instance, Mehmed Cemil Paşa, who was Ottoman ambassador in Paris, asked the French foreign minister not to address Sultan Abdülmecid any more as "Empercur des Musulmans", which was "unfitting for a Sultan who has equal affection for all his subjects". He should be addressed, said Cemil Paşa, as "Empereur des Ottomans", or "Empercur de Turquie", or "Sa Majesté Impériale"[5]. In actuality, the Ottoman Empire was beginning to act in international relations more like a secular dynastic state, on the model of the major European powers. Islam continued to play a part in Ottoman foreign relations, but in a more modern way. It was used by

3. From Aanxli - Pacha, *Testament politique* (Coulommiers, 1910), p. 2. This is not by Âli Paşa, but is an apocryphal document composed in the 1870s or 1880s by some one, perhaps a European in Ottoman employ. Similar sentiments ari in Âli Paşa's genuine memorandum of 3 Şaban 1284/20 November 1867, in Ali Fuad, *Rical-i mühimme-i siyasiye* (İstanbul, 1928), pp. 118-127.

4. Başbakanlık Arşivi (İstanbul), Hatt-ı Hümayunlar no. 6971, 16 Zilkade 1221/25 January 1807, translated by Halil İnalcık in J. C. Hurewitz, ed., *The Middle East and North Africa in Worl Politics : A Documentary Record*, vol. 1 (New Haven, 1975), p. 176.

5. Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Paris), Mémoires et Documents, vol. 51, no. 16, copy of Mehémmed Djémil to Foeign Minister, 20 November 1855.

Ottoman diplomats as a way of appealing to the modern concept of public opinion, which was much used by other powers of Europe. Not Islamic law, but Islamic opinion became the weapon of the Ottoman negotiators. So, for example, when it was proposed after the Congress of Berlin (1878) that much territory, including Thessaly and the city of Yenişehir (Larissa) with its large Muslim population, be ceded to Greece, the Ottoman negotiators argued that it should not be done because Muslim public opinion would not accept this[6]. The basic principle was that the Ottoman state was a modern state in which all subjects were Ottomans, and as such were equal. But an associated principle was that the opinion of Muslims was of major importance.

A third principle was that the Ottoman Empire was a legitimate European power, a member of the Concert of Europe. In the past, although the Empire had in fact been an important European power since the fourteenth century, it had never been a member of the "club" of Christian monarchies. It had not been represented at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15 or at any of the meetings of great power monarchs or ministers that followed. But in 1840 and 1841, after the Tanzimat Fermanı, the Bab-ı Âli became an active participant in the European state system of the day as co-signer of the London Convention, which provided for action against Mehmed Ali, and of the Straits Convention. Even more significant was the fact that the Ottoman Empire was represented at the Congress of Paris in 1856, after the Crimean War, with all the great powers of Europe. The Treaty of Paris, produced at that Congress, confirmed that "the Sublime Porte is admitted to participation in the advantages of the European public law and of the European concert" (Article 7). Thereafter Ottoman statesmen never let their western counterparts forget that the Empire was a legitimate European power, a member of the exclusive club of great powers. The westerners usually acknowledged the truth of this. In 1868 the French foreign minister said to Cemil Paşa that "Turkey, being one

6. Abdin Paşa note the powers, 26 July 1880, published in Edward Hertsler, *The Map of Europe by Treaty*, vol. 4 (London, 1891), p. 2971.

of the signatory Powers of the Treaty of Paris, is thus admitted to the European concert, while Greece does not have those advantages". On that occasion, the meaning was that the Ottoman Empire would be invited to a conference of the great powers concerning the Cretan question and Greek-Turkish differences, while Greece would not be invited[7]. Despite the insistence of the Ottoman statesmen on the principle of Ottoman membership in the Concert, the other members frequently failed to treat the Empire as an equal. The most gallings sign of inequality was the continuance of the capitulations, giving foreigners special rights on Ottoman soil. In such a situation the Ottoman statesmen used the Concert principle as vigorously as they could. "By the treaty of Paris", says one ottoman memorandum, "the Sublime Porte was admitted to the bosom of the European family. This admission will be nothing but an expression so long as the Capitulations in existence between the Sublime Porte and the European Powers assure an exceptional position to foreigners living in Turkey...."[8]

A fourth principle was that existing legal regimes should be supported and that the principle of nationality, or of national self-determination, should not be allowed to subvert them. Because the Ottoman Empire was made up of nothing but national minoritics -no single ethnic group or language group, not even the Turkish, constituted as much as 50 per cent- its very existence was threatened if the concept of national self-determination were admitted to be valid. Âli Paşa, many times foreign minister and grand vezir, opposed granting autonomy to various regions because "it would be impossible to prevent it from becoming rapidly and generally contagious"[9]. His collecague Fuad Paşa opposed the whole concept of creating homogeneous states based on nationality - the "agglomeration of races", he called it[10]. A later foreign

7. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Hazine-i Evrak, Karton Siyasî 8, dosya 13 mükerrer, Cemil (Paris) to Safvet (İstanbul) no. 5291/593, 24 December 1868. [Hereafter, citations from this archive will be abbreviated, as follows : DBHE, S 8, d. 13, etc.]

8. DBHE, S 47, d. 1, undated memorandum, probably 1890s.

9. DBHE, S 6, d. 11, Âli to Musurus (London), telegram, 16 January 1867.

10. DBHE, S 6, d. 11, Fuad to Ottoman ambassadors in Paris and London, no 18523/15, 27 February 1867.

minister, Safvet Paşa, pointed out to the great powers of Europe that it was immoral to take provinces from one country just to make another country happy. He was arguing against the transfer of territory from Ottoman to Greek rule because of the principle of nationality[11]. The Ottoman statesmen were not using arguments from the past -they were not maintaining that Islamic rule was superior and right. Instead, they were using modern secular arguments on the legitimacy of Ottoman rule, the legal anthority of a government recognized by all the powers, and the right of a government to suppress rebellion. Nationalist rebellion was rebellion, was illegal, and was subversive of the law and order that all governments must uphold.

A fifth principle on which the Ottoman statesmen based their actions was that international law must be observed by all governments. This was western international law -the law of nations- to which the Porte turned naturally because that law tended to support the status quo, which is what the Porte also was trying to do. When in the 1860s Crete was in rebellion and the rebels were receiving aid from Greece, and when at the same time other Greeks were conducting raids into Ottoman Thessaly, Fuad Paşa appealed to international law. Even if Greece is a free country and its citizens can act freely, he said, they still must observe international law. "No country", he continued, "is allowed to make its own laws superior to what is called the law of nations, which alone can serve as the common rule for international relations"[12]. In many other instances the Ottoman diplomats appealed to international law, as a kind of defensive insurance policy. It was an argument that governments understood.

A corollary of the same principle, but so important to the ottomans that it should be listed as a separate principle, a sixth one, is that treaties must be observed. This is a doctrine imbedded in

11. DBHE, S 185, d. D, Safvet circular to Ottoman ambassadors, no. 52007/64, 8 August 1878.

12. DBHE, S 37, d. 13, Fuad to Photiades (Athens) no. 18926/50, 24 April 1867.

western international law, which often used the Latin phrase, pacta sunt servanda. After the Crimean War this principle became particularly important for the Ottoman government, because the Treaty of Paris (1856) gave it a relatively favorable territorial settlement. Âli Paşa once referred to it as "this treaty of Paris that Russia *detests* and that we must do everything possible to preserve"[13]. This was the treaty that barred Russia from having a war fleet or naval arsenals in the Black Sea, and in 1870 when the Tsar's government denounced this clause the Porte appealed, though in vain, to the principle of sanctity of treaties. Other treaties also formed a basis for Ottoman policy. The Paris convention of 1858, which stipulated that Moldavia and Wallachia must be separate provinces although with some common institutions, was appealed to by the Porte on a number of occasions. When, in 1866, Karl of Hohenzollern was elected prince by the United Principalitics of Moldavia and Wallachia, the Porte objected to the convening of a new Paris conference of the powers unless they first agreed on respect for treaties -meaning the agreement of 1858[14]. After 1878, it was the treaty of Berlin to which the Porte often appealed, even though it was not so favorable as the treaty of Paris of 1856 which it replaced in large part. Into the twentieth century the Porte referred for its diplomatic basis to the Congress of Berlin, "whose resolutions can be considered as the Magna Carta still today governing the relations of Turkey with the other Powers", as the legal counselor of the Porte asserted[15].

One provision of the Treaty of Paris of 1856 provided a basis for Ottoman diplomacy that was so important that it also should be mentioned separately. This is the statement of the principle of non-intervention by other powers in Ottoman domestic affairs. One can consider non-intervention as a seventh principle of Ottoman diplomacy. Article 9 of the Paris Treaty stated that the

13. DBHE, SS 32, d. 45, Âli to Ssafvet (Paris), conf. tel. no. 16951/299, 28 June 1868. Âli underlined the word "detests".

14. DBHE, S 30, d. 44, Âli to Paris ambassador no. 15962/87, 27 February 1866.

15. Gabriel Noradounghian, *Recueil d'actes internationaux de l'empire ottoman* (Paris, 1897-1903), vol. 3, p. iv.

communication of the Hatt-ı Hümayun of 1856 to the powers "cannot in any case, give to the said powers the right to interfere, either collectively or separately, in the relations of His Majesty the Sultan with his subjects or in the internal administration of his empire"[16]. The European powers had interfered on many occasions in the domestic affairs of the Ottoman Empire, often in favor of religious groups or national minorities, as well as individuals. After 1856 the Porte had a basis in treaty for its efforts to uphold the principle of the non-intervention by one state in the affairs of another. Article 9 of the 1856 treaty was therafter often referred to by Ottoman diplomats in their communications to governments of the great powers of Europe. Cemil Paşa once even got the French foreign minister to agree that "the Ottoman Empire is a territory rendered sacred by the Treaty of Paris and on which no encroachment is allowed"[17].

The seven principles that have been mentioned were all familiar to contemporary Europeans and were accepted as valid by the European powers. The first one -preservation of the Ottoman Empire- was not a new principle, but it was modern as well as being traditional. The other six principles, or at least the form in which they were expressed, had been developed during the Tanzimat period: equality of Ottoman subjects, along with a special regard for Muslim public opinion; Ottoman membership in the Concert of Europe; the preservation of legitimate sovereign regimes and opposition to nationalist rebellion; the upholding of international law; respect for the sanctity of treaties; and non-intervention in Ottoman domestic affairs. Only the last of these principles, non-intervention, was not thoroughly accepted by all of the powers, since Austria and Russia still believed that on occasion intervention might be not only a right, but a duty. This is not to say that all, or even any one, of the great powers of Europe lived up to professed principles in their international relations. It is to say

16. Text of treaty, *ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 70-79.

17. DBHE, S 8, d. 13 Mükerrer, Cemil (Paris) to Safvet (İstanbul), unnumbered, 31 December 1868.

bowever, that the Ottoman statesmen and diplomats were speaking the same language and arguing from the same principles as other great power representatives. In principles, in attitude, in modes of expression, Ottoman diplomacy was being modernized.

The methods used by Ottoman statesmen and diplomats also accommodated themselves to the contemporary European situation. The most important method was not at all new -it was, simply, to win the support of whatever major powers would back up Ottoman interests. In the nineteenth century Russia was the most consistent opponent of, and threat to, the ottoman Empire. Prussia, which after 1871 became Germany, was the least interested of all powers in the Eastern Question, Therefore, it was from Britain, France, and Austria that the Porte sought assistance, time and time again. These three had actually guaranteed the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire in 1856. They often failed to live up to this promise. Nevertheless, the Ottoman records are full of appeals to these powers to support the interests of the Empire in this question or that. These records also convey the distinct impression that Ottoman statesmen as a rule believed British help was more likely and more efficacious than any other. From the 1830s onward, they were often successful in securing British backing, which of course the London government gave for its own reasons, because British and Ottoman interests often coincided. The hope placed in British support was particularly urgent at the time of the defeat by Russia in 1877-78, a hope partly deceived during the armistice and peace negotiations and the Congress of Berlin[18]. Nevertheless, until it became clear in the late 1880s that Britain would not soon evacuate Egypt, which had been occupied in 1882, the general method of Ottoman statesmen seemed to be : when all else fails, seek British support.

A second method of Ottoman diplomacy was to avoid participation in international conferences except in circumstances that were closely controlled. This may seem like a strange method

18. DBHE, S 120 and S 185, with many documents on these events.

of doing international business, by avoiding it. But the Ottoman view on international conferences was born of experience. The great powers of Europe, when meeting in conference, tended to make demands of the Ottoman Empire, to interfere in its internal affairs with proposals of reform, or to plan for its partial dismemberment. In the days of Napoleon III and Cavour, between 1856 and 1870, conferences were doubly dangerous because the fertile imaginations of these two nationality-minded statesmen were full of map-changing schemes to remake Europe, almost always at Ottoman expense[19]. Even if the Porte were not represented at a conference, what the other powers did might injure Ottoman interests, and so the Porte sometimes tried to discourage such meetings. Only if the conference agende was limited and if the results were determined by an *entente préalable* was the Porte completely happy with an international conference. An example arises in 1864, when Âli Paşa actually himself proposed and convened a meeting of representatives of all the powers. Here the agenda was limited to approving an agreement already reached by Âli with Prince Cuza of Moldavia-Wallachia, the conference met at Âli's house in İstanbul, and agreement was assured in advance[20].

A third Ottoman method, common to all governments in modern times, was to seek to influence public opinion in other countries, especially through the press. In 1858, because of calumnies in the European newspapers, the Porte created a Publicity Bureau to furnish regular news bulletins on current questions to all Ottoman representatives abroad[21]. The bulletins had an irregular life, disapperiaring and being revived several times into the next century. The Ottoman diplomats also learned how to get European newspaper editors to publish storics favorable to their government, and how to place news stories with newspapers and

19. For example, the Porte argued against a five-power conference that was proposed in 1860 : DBHE, S 46, d. 5.

20. DBHE, S 30, d. 36, Âli circular to Ottoman representatives in Britain, France, and Italy no. 10336/55. 29 June 1864.

21. DBHE, S 126, Mükerrer, Fuad circular to Ottoman missions no. 1910, 22 December 1858.

press sercices. Musurus Paşa, for instance, as Ottoman ambassador in London, was able to furnish news despatches to Reuters[22]. Perhaps the Porte was less effective in these efforts than the western powers, but it learned rapidly and was competing on Europe's own terms.

A fourth Ottoman method, used only once, was to send the Sultan on a good-will visit to other powers. European monarchs in the nineteenth century often visited each other, doing business of state as well as traveling for pleasure. Ottoman rulers had traditionally gone beyond the frontiers of their own empire only at the head of an army. In 1876, at the strong urging of his ministers, Sultan Abdülaziz traveled to Paris, London, an Vienna, and made a stop in Germany too. The trip was a success; the Sultan evidenty made a good impression, and his minister Fuad along with the Sultan was able to counteract influence that Russia was exerting in Paris. But Abdülaziz never got the habit of European trips, as did his contemporaries Shah Nasreddin of Iran and Khedive Ismail of Egypt. His successor, Sultan Abdülhamid II, was probably too fearful for his own safety to travel abroad. Abdülhamid did, however, play an active role in diplomacy, and was willing to write personal letters to other moranchs, as for example early in 1878 asking Queen Victoria for aid in the face of the Russian threat to İstanbul itself[23].

There were many other methods used by Ottoman statesmen and diplomats in their conduct of the empire's foreign relations. A large number of them can be grouped together as exemplifying the adoption of European techniques. Ottoman foreign ministers and their representatives in foreign capitals soon became familiar with the ways in which western diplomats operated, and adopted them,

22. DBHE, S 121, d. 60, Musurus (London) telegram to Safvet no. 7245/207, 25 April 1878.

23. DBHE, S 6, d. 11, Fuat (London) to Âli, telegram private and confidential, unnumbered, 13 July 1867. Sultan Abdülhamid's message was sent as a telegram to the Queen : DBHE, S 120, d. 58, Server (İstanbul) to Musurus (London) no. 50069/12, 10 January 1878.

using the formal diplomatic note, the informal suggestion à titre personelle, the despatch to read to a foreign minister of which copy may be left if desired, the circular despatch, the formalities of conference procedures, compte-rendus, procès-verbaux, protocols, and the other minutiae and niceties of European diplomatic practice. Some of the Ottoman ministers and ambassadors excelled in using the best diplomatic French, precise and polite phraseology. They became accustomed, especially in posts abroad, to the social amenities that facilitate diplomatic intercourse: receptions, dinner, balls, polite notes, etc. After the telegraph system of Europe was extended to İstanbul in 1855, Ottoman diplomats quickly became used to employing that channel for urgent messages, and to using cyphers as well to keep their communications secret. In the Foreign Ministry in İstanbul western-style procedures gradually came into use for drafting documents, reviewing them, numbering them in both general series and in particular series by destination, writing précis of despatches, registering incoming and outgoing communications, and filing. It is interesting to see in the Foreign Ministry the evolution of printed forms to make the work of the ministry, and the flow of paper within it, more regular and more efficient[24]. When documents were finally filed, they were at first apparently tied in bundles, and presumably then placed in torbas. But at some point the Foreign Ministry began using folders, and then cartons, in a western fashion, leading to greater efficiency in the location of documents. All these techniques may seem like small matters. Individually, they are. But, taken together they helped the Ottoman statesmen and diplomats to work as effectively as they could in the world of the European great powers. That was the world in which they had to work if the Ottoman Empire was to survive.

These principles, methods, and techniques of Ottoman diplomacy, largely adopted or adapted from nineteenth-century

24. See, for example, a single carton with documents extending over a quarter of a century, from 1861 to 1887, showing changes in forms : DBHE, S 531, on Bosnia.

European models, and developed primarily in the Tanzimat period, did not succeed in saving the Ottoman Empire in the long run. But they did help to prolong its life and to make it a more comfortable and acceptable participant in the international state system in the pre-1914 days, when that system was dominated by the European powers.