

The Institutional Evolution of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Role in Foreign Policy-making (1808-1918)

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Abstract

During the height of the Ottoman Empire's power, it applied and practiced 'unilateral diplomacy' and avoided reciprocity. However, at the end of the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire started to adopt 'mutual diplomacy', sending permanent ambassadors to European capitals. This process became institutionalized with the establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1836. Following the establishment of the Ministry, changes and transformations occurred in its institutional structure, reflecting both the turbulence of the times and changes in the Empire itself. This article examines the evolution of the institutional structure of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry (Hariciye Nezâreti) and explores its changes and continuities between the years 1808–1918 as well as its role in the foreign policy-making process across two levels of analysis, reflecting both internal and external factors.

Keywords

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ottoman Foreign Ministry, diplomacy, Turkish foreign policy, chief scribe

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Introduction

From the establishment of the Ottoman Empire in 1299 to the end of the 18th century, the Ottoman State adopted one-sided/unilateral/non-reciprocal diplomacy. Notably, until the period of Mehmet II in the mid-1400s, Ottoman foreign policy would not actualize within the context of conventional foreign policy form, style and features. Therefore, it is not even easy to distinguish between Ottoman domestic and foreign policies in this period, as many of the Empire's actions in domestic politics had consequences in foreign affairs. The foreign policy functions of this period were mostly fulfilled by the affixer of the cipher (*nişancı*). However, he was not within the circle of decision-makers and was rather a policy implementer. From the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 until the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, all classic Ottoman diplomatic understanding and practices remained the same.

Although the European countries sent permanent ambassadors to Istanbul from the 16th century onwards, the Ottomans did not reciprocate for two main reasons. First, Islam was not only a system of belief but also a method of politics for the Ottomans. Therefore, under the conditions of that period, unilateral diplomacy was adopted as a requirement of the current interpretations of Islam.¹ Second, the Ottomans had a sense of superiority over the Europeans at this time, and thus felt no need to adopt mutual diplomacy.²

In the period between 1699 and 1793, which is regarded as the period of treaties and agreements, unilateralism was still essential in Ottoman diplomatic relations. However, some concessions were made after the Empire's military defeats (e.g., acknowledgment of a multilateral document to sustain a peace treaty, a great increase in the number of temporary ambassadors abroad).³ Consequently, during this period, the office of the chief scribe (*reisü'l-küttâb*) gained more importance and took on some characteristics of an organization responsible for foreign affairs. Some scholars even argue that the chief scribe could be regarded as the "foreign minister" of this period.⁴ With the start of the period of reform-minded Selim III, who ruled from 1789 to 1807, the Ottomans started to establish permanent embassies in European capitals, driven by such factors as their decline in military power, increasing threats to Ottoman territorial integrity and independence and the French Revolution.

The literature on the evolution of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry predominantly focuses on Ottoman diplomacy practices, and very little of the literature examines the institutional structuring of Ottoman foreign policy. To examine the institutional development of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this article divides this period into four separate sub-periods, focusing mainly on the context of changes and continuities in the Ministry's structure. It seeks to answer the question: What are the factors driving the changes and continuities in the institutional structure of the Ministry in the period between 1808 and 1918? In addition, the article seeks to understand the extent of the effectiveness of the Ministry in foreign policy decision-making processes in each of the sub-periods in terms of these changes and continuities.

The Period of Mahmud II (1808–1839)

The Establishment of the Translation Office

The last 18 years of the reign of Mahmud II witnessed a multitude of serious international political crises due to the Greek revolts that spanned from 1821 to 1829, the French invasion of Algeria in 1830, the Mehmet Ali Pasha revolt in Egypt and the subsequent Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi signed with Russia.⁵ In particular, the Greek uprising and subsequent revolt of Egypt's governor, Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Pasha, quickly shifted from domestic squabble to international affair. The political turmoil and sequence of intense crises increased the need for professional diplomacy. The first step taken in this process was to establish a Translation Office.

In 1811, the Ottoman diplomatic authorities were mainly Greek chargé d'affaires (*maslahatgüzar*).

However, immediately after the

Greek uprising of 1821, all diplomatic posts abroad were abolished, as the Phanariot translators themselves had incited the rebellion and leaked the confidential information of the Ottoman State. To ensure that nothing similar would happen again, the Translation Office of the Sublime Porte (*Babiâli Tercüme Odası*) was established in 1821.⁶

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The Translation Office was made up of two departments: a Language Department in which students were taught foreign languages and a Translation Department where advanced students in foreign language worked.⁷ The main purpose of the office was to train Muslims to learn foreign languages and to free the Ottoman State from dependence on Greek translators in foreign affairs.⁸ Although it focused on language training in theory, in practice the office turned into a kind of school to begin the training of future diplomats.

From 1669 to 1821, the chief translator had been under the authority of the Phanariot Greeks, an ethnic minority living in the Greek quarter of Istanbul and playing an important role in the Empire's civil bureaucracy. Thus, the position of the Phanariot Greeks in the Ottoman administration had been strengthened over time. However, after the execution of Constantine Mourouzis in 1821, the procedure of appointing a Greek as chief translator was abandoned.⁹ Subsequently, Bulgarzade Yahya Efendi, a Bulgarian converted to Islam, was appointed to this position, followed by his son Ruh-ul Din Efendi.

A nascent institution, the Translation Office remained small and yielded no satisfactory results until the 1830s. The office's growth in size, prestige and importance took place in the intensive diplomatic process that occurred after the treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi in 1833.¹⁰ The salaries of the employees of the office increased to a decent level and Ali Efendi and Safvet Efendi, each of whom would later serve as both Foreign Minister and Grand Vizier, joined the office after serving in the Important Affairs Section (*Mühimme Odası*). Within a few years, Keçecizade Fuad Efendi and Ahmed Vefik Efendi, who had previously served as Grand Viziers, also joined the office.¹¹

The Ottoman State did not have a long-term foreign policy strategy until the Tanzimat period (1839–1876), during which it underwent a transformation both in terms of foreign policy actors and changes in the institutional structure of the Ministry, which reflected strategic changes in foreign policy during this period. Because of the many political, military and economic tensions in play, both at the national/territorial and international level, the changes in foreign policy and diplomatic practices that had begun during the reign of Selim III (1789–1807) continued.

Revitalization of Diplomatic Reform

The incoming sultan, Mahmud II, made significant attempts to re-implement mutual diplomacy, which had ceased to function after 1811, and to resume the reforms initiated by Selim III. The efforts to revitalize diplomatic representations were a way of responding to the pressures of the rapidly growing diplomatic problems of the Ottoman State. Indeed, during the whole of the 19th century, diplomacy was viewed as the only way to save the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, permanent embassies and consulates were re-opened in 1834.¹² In addition to the European capitals Paris, London and Vienna, where embassies already existed, embassies were established in Berlin in 1837, Tehran in 1840, Athens in April 1840, Brussels and the Hague in 1854, St. Petersburg in March 1857, Turin in January 1857, Washington in 1867, Bucharest in 1878, Belgrade in 1879 and Stockholm in 1898.¹³

During the resumption of diplomatic representation after a long period of lapse, many of the same problems that had plagued the period of Selim III emerged once again. The most obvious was the tradition of patronage, favoritism and nepotism in Ottoman bureaucratic life that prevented the rational working of the diplomatic system.¹⁴ The role of personal relations in diplomatic appointments precluded talented and competent persons from being ambassadors, and most diplomatic appointments were shaped by bureaucratic struggles and conflicts in the capital rather than actual diplomatic developments and the state's real and pressing needs. Rather than

being an honor in its own right, the granting of ambassadorship in any European capital was seen as the best way to get rid of an unwanted statesman in Istanbul.¹⁵

While these problems bedeviled both periods, there were differences at least in two important aspects. First, the conditions of the 1830s were quite different from the 1790s of Selim III. In the latter period, people within diplomatic

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organizations were well-prepared for their missions abroad and were foreign-language speakers.¹⁶ The growth of the Translation Office was an important impetus behind this development. Another difference, as Findley notes, was that “the international situation was vastly different, Middle Eastern affairs being now of much greater interest in Europe than they had been forty years earlier.”¹⁷ The collective intervention of the major European powers to remedy the Ottoman-Egyptian crisis in 1839 reveals their common interest in protecting the territorial integrity of the Ottoman State, which they viewed as supportive to their own mercantile ambitions and security.

Domestic Politics and Diplomatic Organization

Mahmud II’s clear aim in supporting diplomatic reform was to ensure centralization and the reassertion of the sultan’s dominance: “Mahmud II was preparing the way for a system of government based on malleable and interchangeable groups instead of powerful and entrenched individuals”—primarily for his own sake.¹⁸ The sultan particularly targeted the Sublime Porte, dismantled the Grand Vizierate (*Sadrâzamlık*) and dispersed most of the authorities of the Porte among newly created institutions. However, while Mahmud II sought to make the sultan the only power and central authority, his actions paradoxically led to the emergence of a new ‘Patriciate of the Pen’, and a new civil bureaucracy (*mülkiye*). The new diplomatic elite differed from those of the previous period not only in terms of their appearance, but also in the form of their education and behavior patterns.

In short, as a result of both the increasing need for professional diplomacy due to international developments and Mahmud II’s domestic centralization policies, significant organizational changes were effected in the administration structure.¹⁹ Although the organizational structure of the Sublime Porte and its dependent offices in the period of Mahmud II was modified right after his death, still it is worthwhile for comparing the organizational chart of this period with the charts of the previous period.²⁰

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Affairs (*Hariciye Nezâreti*) in 1836. Mehmed Akif Efendi, who had been acting as chief scribe since 1832, became the first statesman with the title of Minister of Foreign Affairs after the change.²¹ In a sense, this may seem like nothing more than a title change, as the Ministry had not completed all of the required structural and institutional changes to become a Ministry as we know it

today. Nonetheless, the change marked a significant break from the past. In the following years, components of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were gradually formed, and a clear, professional structure emerged. First, the office of the Undersecretary was created in November 1836. In early 1838, the Offices of Corresponding Secretary (*mektûbî*) and the Receiver (*âmedî*) were divided into two distinct sections: internal and foreign affairs.²² Moreover, with the Translation Office of the Sublime Porte, the Offices of the Imperial Divan (*Dîvân-ı Hümâyun*) along with the section for Important Affairs (*Mühimme Odası*) created in 1797 and reactivated in 1834, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became a fully realized organizational structure as of 1839.²³

In order to neutralize the office of the Grand Vizier, Mahmud II turned its former steward (*kahya bey*) into the first Minister of Civil Affairs (*mülkiye nâzırı*), later changed to Minister of the Interior (*dahiliye nâzırı*), and transformed the position of chief bailiff (*çavuşbaşı*) into the Minister of Justice (*divan-ı deâvi nazırı*). Mahmud II abolished the title of Grand Vizier outright and replaced it with Prime Minister (*başvekil*) to eliminate the traditional role of the Grand Vizier as ‘absolute delegate’. Lastly, he created two new councils—the Consultative Assembly of the Sublime Porte (*Dar-ı Şura-yı Bab-ı Ali*) and the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances (*Meclis-i Vâlâ-yı Ahkâm-ı Adliyye*).²⁴

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Role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Foreign Policy Decision-Making

The foreign policy of the period in question was shaped by both internal and external factors. Indeed, it is quite difficult to distinguish between the domestic and foreign policy of the era, as political crises at the domestic level easily turned into international problems, as in the cases of the Greek rebellion and the insurrection of Mehmed Ali Pasha. These internationalized problems changed Ottoman foreign policy and led to the need for operative diplomatic activities and institutions. In response, Mahmud II reactivated permanent bilateral diplomacy in 1834 and created European-style political institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 1836. While aiming at dismantling the Grand Vizierate with these newly created, European-style institutions, he gave rise to the emergence of new bureaucratic elites. In other words, while Mahmud II wanted to implement centralization policies, he paradoxically created a new, elite bureaucratic force.

In this period, the influence of the Grand Vizier was removed from the foreign policy decision-making (FPDM) process, since his powers were dispersed among the newly created ministries.²⁵ Therefore, in the field of foreign policy, the strength and effectiveness of the officials working under the Minister of Foreign Affairs increased as of 1836. Compared to previous periods, it can easily be deduced that foreign policy officials were stepping into a more professional, institutional identity and were more active in the FPDM process. Thus, the effectiveness of the newly established Ministry in foreign policy increased as a result of institutional centralization at the internal political level and the needs arising in foreign policy strategy due to cross-border developments at the external level.

Tanzimat Period (1839–1876)

Foreign Policy Principles and Ambassador Appointments

The Ottoman Empire entered a new era with the declaration of the Tanzimat edict, which gave rise to some changes in the diplomatic understanding of the Ottoman State. Before the Tanzimat period, the Ottoman State had no pre-determined, long-term foreign policy strategy.

The most important innovation of this period in terms of foreign policy was that state officials began designing the basic principles of diplomatic activities by considering the interests of the State. During this period, certain basic principles and priorities of foreign policy shaped and changed the State's diplomatic practices; these paved the way for a process of integration with European diplomacy and adoption of the principles of international law. The basic principles of the period are outlined below.

The first and foremost aim of the Ottoman statesmen was to protect the independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman State through diplomacy. Fuad Pasha, who served as Foreign Minister five times, instructed all Ottoman ambassadors abroad to achieve this goal.²⁶ Second, during the Tanzimat period, the emphasis on Islam in foreign relations gradually decreased. Especially after the Crimean War of 1853-1856, the Ottoman foreign policy, which was traditionally built on Islamic law, changed and the concern to harmonize it with the European state system came to the fore. Article 7 of the Treaty of Paris, which was signed after the war, declared that "the Sublime Porte admitted participating in the advantages of the public law and system (Concert) of Europe."²⁷ Islam continued to play a role in Ottoman foreign relations but in a more unobtrusive and modern way. Another, related goal that Ottoman diplomats wanted to achieve was to preserve the status quo, i.e., the integrity of the State, and neutralize the principle of self-determination related to the fomenting of nationalist groups. Finally, Ottoman diplomats strived to prevent European states from interfering in the Empire's internal affairs.

From the Tanzimat period to the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923, the general rule was to appoint non-professional ambassadors. During this period, 135 diplomatic officers were appointed, only 43 of whom had progressed through all the stages of the profession. Mahmut Esat, who was the first ambassador to pass all the stages of the profession, was appointed to Athens in 1872.²⁸ Of these 135 diplomatic missions, 30 were non-Muslims; 2 were Greeks, 4 were Armenians, 4

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were Levantines, 3 were Romanians, 3 were Ottoman Europeans, 2 were Christian Arabs, 1 was Bulgarian and the remaining 11 were of varying backgrounds.²⁹ Prior to the Tanzimat period, favoritism and nepotism had prevalence over competence as members of some families had served as ambassadors of the State for three generations. There were even times when father and son were ambassadors at the same time. Until the Constitutional Monarchy (1908), Muslim diplomats were forbidden to take their spouses to foreign countries. This prohibition in diplomatic practices naturally caused some trouble and some of the diplomats married foreign women.³⁰ As for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 52 people served as foreign ministers in the period between 1836 and 1899. Although most were Muslims, there were a small number of non-Muslim ministers as well.³¹

The Institutional Structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which had been established in 1836 during the reign of Mahmud II, continued its organizational development during the Tanzimat period. In 1871, the Ministry was the most advanced and modern organizational structure of the Porte's components.³² The Foreign Minister had an Undersecretary (*müsteşar*) to assist him; this office was re-established during the Crimean War after having been abolished several times before.³³ Under the Minister and his Undersecretary, the Office of Imperial Divan still occupied a central position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this period, the Department of Imperial Divan (*Dîvân-ı Hümayun Dairesi*) consisted of six sections. The Section of Imperial Divan was in charge of "receiving and responding to communications from foreign ambassadors in Istanbul and raised with the relevant provisions of the international agreements and concessions then in force."³⁴ One of the newly created sections in the Department of Imperial Divan was the Section for Religious Affairs (*Mezâhib Odası*). This section dealt with non-Muslim affairs, including matters of constructing schools and churches and repairing them. "Keeping records on the status of the non-Muslims inside the empire" was also among the duties of this section, which were shifted to the Ministry of Justice in 1877.³⁵ It is thus clear that this new unit was established in the context of rights and freedoms as a result of the Tanzimat reforms.

While other departments of the Foreign Ministry were more specialized and “fixed in their organizational affiliation with the ministry,” the Office of the Imperial Divan was the only department/section subordinate to the Foreign Ministry dealing with heterogeneous responsibilities unrelated to foreign affairs.³⁶

Another office was the Translation Office of the Sublime Porte (*Babiâli Tercüme Odası*), which replaced the Translator of Imperial Divan (*Divân-ı Hümayun tercümanı*). This office was a fundamental component of the Ministry and very effective in the institutionalization of foreign policy. It was presented to the Ottoman bureaucracy as a product of conservative thought and became one of the most respected units of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry with its language-learning and training activities.³⁷ It also trained bureaucrats who approached Western ideas with a moderate understanding.

Another element of the Foreign Ministry was the Chief of Protocol (*hariciye teşrifâtçısı*) created in 1847. The main duty of this officer was to greet foreign civil servants and officials coming from abroad with a ceremony. Thus, the Ministry’s protocol activities were institutionalized.

The Secretary for Foreign Affairs (*hariciye kâtibi*) had to deal with cases between Ottoman subjects and foreigners. In 1877, “the title of the head of this office was enlarged to secretary for foreign legal affairs (*deava-i hariciye kâtibi*), the title of his assistants being changed accordingly.”³⁸

One of the most important offices of the Ministry was the Turkish Correspondence Office (*mektûbî hariciye kalemi*). Most likely, the name of this office was inspired by that of the relevant secretary of the Grand Vizier. This office was responsible for conducting Turkish correspondence regarding minorities living within Ottoman borders, and consular affairs in the country.³⁹ This unit was also established in the context of the minority rights promised in the Tanzimat reforms.

The diplomatic intensity incurred by the political environment before the Crimean War increased the need for a Foreign Correspondence Office (*Tabrîrât-ı Ecnebiye Odası*).

This new bureau was by origin an outgrowth of the Translation Office, founded to cope with the increasingly voluminous correspondence in French with foreign ambassadors in Istanbul and Ottoman representatives abroad. From the end of the

Crimean War, the role of the Translation office thus appears to have been limited to the translation of documents coming into the ministry in languages other than Turkish while the Foreign Correspondence Office assumed responsibility for the correspondence of the ministry in French, as the Turkish Correspondence Office did for that in Turkish.⁴⁰

In addition, a new office called the Records Office (*Hariciye Evrak Odası*) was established in 1868–1869 to handle paperwork. In 1869, a Bureau of Nationality (*tabiiyet kalemi*) was created. The main purpose of this office was to search for the nationalities of persons alleged to be under the auspices of foreign powers and identify those who were naturalized through non-formal/unofficial procedures.⁴¹ The fact that non-Muslims were under the influence of foreigners brought nationalist-based thoughts and actions to the agenda. This constantly damaged the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, which enjoyed a multinational social structure. The Bureau of Nationality was set up to prevent such separatist attempts to some extent. In other words, this unit was established to maintain unity and solidarity at a time when nationalist tendencies were increasing in the international arena.

In 1869 and 1871, the Ottoman administration succeeded in carrying out the institutionalization of foreign policy in the provinces. Provincial Foreign Affairs Directorates (*İl/Vilayeti Hariciye Müdürlüğü*) was established to coordinate relations with consuls working in the Ottoman provinces and to solve problems arising from the subject of nationality. Taking the demands of the governors into account, directors and translators were assigned to the provinces where foreigners were concentrated. Thus, the demographic distribution of the population, which depended on the sociological structure of the Ottoman Empire, also affected the institutional structure of the Ministry. The central organization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took its final shape with the establishment of the Accounting Office for the Foreign Ministry (*Hariciye Muhasebe Odası*) in 1871.

To sum up, the ideological movements that gained momentum in the international arena, the domestic reforms announced due to the pressure of foreign powers and the sociological structure of the State itself were influential in the formation of the institutional structure

of the Ministry. The new institutional units created in this context represent a change from the past.

The Role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process

The Ottomans were in a defensive position in the field of foreign policy during the Tanzimat period and mainly pursued a ‘balancing policy’, which essentially meant using one great power against another.⁴² The diplomatic reforms and the institutional development of the Ministry took place in this atmosphere.

As a result of the reforms made by Mahmud II, paradoxically, the political activities of the new civil bureaucratic elite increased in the Tanzimat period. Prominent figures of this new elite, Mustafa

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Reşit, Sadık Rifat, and Ali and Fuad Pasha, established a monopoly on the important positions of the Porte, especially in the Foreign Ministry and Grand Vizierate, for two main reasons. First, these were statesmen who had been trained in the Translation Office and developed their political leanings by studying abroad in a secular and practical way.⁴³ The second reason was the character of Mahmud II’s successors. Abdülmecid (1839–1861) came to the throne in an extremely dangerous period as an ill-prepared sixteen-year-old. An inexperienced sultan, he could not directly interfere in the work of the civil bureaucracy.⁴⁴ He was followed by Abdülaziz (1861–1876), who was willing to dominate but had no capacity to do so, and finally, Murad V (1876), who had a mental disorder and was overthrown within three months.⁴⁵

Mustafa Reşit Pasha continuously held the Grand Vizierate in the period between 1846 and 1852. In the period between 1852–1854, he took charge of the Foreign Ministry. Later on, he became the Grand Vizier three more times from 1854 until he died in 1858. Ali Pasha became Foreign Minister in 1846 and Grand Vizier in 1856 for the first time. Fuad Pasha likewise served in both positions several times.⁴⁶ Their

oligarchic control of the two leading positions in the civil bureaucracy paved the way for their dominance of almost the entire administrative system: “The linkages of grand vizier and foreign minister became the central element in the political system that the leaders of new elite gradually built up to fill the political vacuum created by the weakness of the sultans.”⁴⁷ Under these circumstances, foreign affairs assumed central importance, and the Foreign Minister became the second man after the Grand Vizier at the Porte. In essence, for the first time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became a central component of the foreign policy-making process and administration due in large part to the weakness of the sultans in the executive role.

The Abdulhamid II Period (1876–1909)

The political character of the Tanzimat period was exemplified in the domination of the Porte over the Palace. The sultans of this period lagged behind the Grand Viziers in foresight and capability. However, the death of Fuad Pasha in 1869 and Ali Pasha in 1871 caused a significant change in the structure of the political power that prevailed during the Tanzimat period. After the death of Ali Pasha, Sultan Abdulaziz, together with the Grand Vizier Mahmud Nedim Pasha, began to reestablish the influence of the sultanate by overthrowing the bureaucratic system of the Tanzimat period. However, the beginning of the rebellion in Herzegovina and the subsequent spread of the rebellion to the Balkan lands raised serious problems—including the threat of foreign intervention and war.

The situation worsened in the following years. In 1876, we see the rule of three different sultans. When Sultan Abdulaziz was overthrown, Murad V took his place but was deposed within three months. Then the little-known prince Abdulhamid II ascended the throne on August 31, 1876.

Abdulhamid II’s main preoccupation was to keep the civil-bureaucratic elite of the Tanzimat period under political control. In part to create a structure for this control, a new constitution was promulgated in 1876 with the impetus of the Young Ottomans. However, the constitution was found to be unworkable and was suspended in 1878 due to the economic and political crises of the period (especially the 1877–1878

Ottoman-Russian war). In the subsequent process, the sultan started to establish his own system and personal dominance.

In this period, economic backwardness, dependence on European financing and expertise for development, the incapability of Ottoman armed forces to defend the State against aggressors, the disloyalty of a large section of the population to the State, political turmoil and foreign interventions were instrumental in determining new strategies for the field of foreign policy.⁴⁸

Ottoman leadership exhibited a profound sense of insecurity and isolation in a world dominated by hostile Christian states. Almost every one of the Empire's neighbors was regarded as a potential enemy with designs on its territory and independence. This sense of insecurity and isolation was rooted in the experience of the Eastern Crisis of 1875–1878 when the Empire had been abandoned by all in the face of a Russian attack and then subjected to what appeared to be a form of preliminary partition by the Great Powers at the Congress of Berlin.⁴⁹

Under these circumstances, the sultan, who brought “the civil-bureaucratic pyramid back under effective political control,”⁵⁰ gathered almost all power into his own hands in the new headquarters called the Yıldız Palace, and personally determined the state's foreign policy strategies. Abdulhamid II's priority was to preserve the integrity and independence of the State through diplomacy.⁵¹ The most important element of his diplomatic understanding was the emphasis on the caliphate claim that he had inherited by birthright. His interest in the idea of Pan-Islamism was an attempt to unite all Muslims, including non-Ottomans, against potential enemies to preserve the integrity and independence of the State.⁵² The discourse of Islamic unity was an approach to increase the Empire's diplomatic bargaining range against the Western imperial powers.⁵³ Yet caliphate politics was a defensive and very cautious orientation; Abdulhamid II was very keen to develop his influence on non-Ottoman Muslim public opinion. Following this logic, he could present himself as the religious leader of all Muslims, and by the prestige he achieved, increase the bargaining power of the Ottomans in diplomacy with the great powers. For this reason, representations and consulates were opened in many parts of

the Islamic world. Additionally, Abdulhamid II presented the Hijaz Railway project, which would carry the prestige of the caliph to the top in the eyes of the entire Muslim community, as the most important indicator of his Pan-Islamist policy.

Abdulhamid II's diplomatic strategy was based on two principles: balance and non-conflict/ non-confrontation. The principle of balance "implied that the Ottoman Empire/[State] must neither draw too close to nor alienate any power,"⁵⁴ and thereby maximize its diplomatic leverage. The principle of non-conflict "implied that the Ottoman Empire/[State] must avoid all situations where it might be exposed to threats of coercion, especially military coercion."⁵⁵

All in all, Abdulhamid II determined the foreign policy priorities of the State himself and applied his diplomatic understanding by gathering all the administrative power into his own hands. Eventually, "Abdulhamid kept his Empire substantially intact and diplomatically independent for thirty years."⁵⁶ In other words, the change in the balance of power in the domestic political sphere (breaking the power of the civil bureaucracy) was the main determinant of state strategy and the foreign policy of this period.

The Foreign Ministry's Institutional Structure

When compared with the previous Tanzimat period, the main central offices of the Foreign Ministry continued to exist even in 1908. Thus, the institutional structure of the Ministry exhibits continuity.⁵⁷ It is noteworthy that more than twenty Foreign Ministers were replaced between 1871 and 1885. However, it is also notable that only two ministers were changed from 1885 to 1909; Kurd Said Pasha served

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between 1885–1895, and Ahmed Tevfik Pasha then served until 1909.⁵⁸ This continuity in the institutional structure of the Ministry is mostly due to the sultan's fortified power over the administration and bureaucracy. Since he was able to determine the target and strategy of foreign

policy with his own political charisma, he did not need institutional change. As a result, the institutional structure of the Ministry remained intact, albeit with a reduction in actual power.

Three bureaus from the Tanzimat era mainly responsible for written work continued to function during Abdulhamid II's reign: Translation Office of the Sublime Porte, Turkish Correspondence Office and Foreign Correspondence Office. Although the duties of these offices did not change, they grew only in terms of size, internal differentiation and composition; for example, in the Foreign Correspondence Office, which had been an Armenian enclave, underwent significant personnel changes.

The official policies of this period were effective in ensuring continuity in the institutional structure of the Ministry; specifically, Abdulhamid II's policy of breaking the political influence of the European states on the Ottomans prevented institutional change, and the basic institutional units of the Ministry remained intact.

Additionally, the offices that existed in 1871, those of the *chef de protocol* of the Foreign Ministry, of Nationality, of Accounts and Foreign Press continued to exist in this period. The most basic function of the last office was to correct false statements in the European press and to inform foreign countries about the policies and progress of the Ottoman Empire.

The functions of the Records Office (*Hariciye Evrak Odası*), which had been established in 1871, were dispersed into separate sections in several other offices. As Findley notes, "the Turkish Correspondence Office had one section, headed by the Foreign Ministry records director (*hariciye evrak müdürü*). There were also records directors in the Translation Office, Foreign Correspondence Office, Directorate for Consular Affairs, Foreign Press Directorate, Directorate of Nationality, and the Office of Legal Counsel."⁵⁹ The main responsibilities of these record sections were to control the flow of information and secure documents relating to current events.

The Secretary for Foreign Affairs (*hariciye kâtibi*) was replaced by the Office of Mixed Legal Affairs, which was accountable for "producing legal opinions on certain types of cases arising between Ottoman subjects and foreign nationals."⁶⁰ Some offices were formed by differentiation

among the functions of other bureaus. For example, the Office of Consular Affairs was created in 1873 and then attached to the Foreign Correspondence Office. This new offshoot office was supposed to be responsible for the correspondence of the Ministry with the consular corps.

Another new office to emerge in the early 1880s was the Office of Legal Counsel (*İstişare Odası*), headed by two senior juris consults; these were the legal counselors of the Sublime Porte (*Babıâli hukuk müşavirleri*), and had several assistants and staff working directly under them. Although it is difficult to distinguish the responsibilities of the Office of Legal Counsel from those of the Offices of Mixed Legal Affairs, the basic duty of the Legal Counsel was to offer opinions about the problems occurring between the Ottoman State and other states. “In modern terms, the legal counselors were the advisors of the Ottoman government in international law.”⁶¹

The last unit added to the Ministry was the Directorate of Commercial Affairs, established in 1908 as a branch of the Directorate of Consular Affairs, and thus part of both the Foreign Correspondence Office and the Translation Office.

In addition to these offices and directorates, two more special commissions were added to the central organs of the Ministry as of 1908: Commission for the Selection of Foreign Ministry Officials and Administrative Commission, “of which members consisted only of the director or top supervisory officials of the other offices of the ministry.”⁶² These branches were accountable for the control of appointments and other personal actions in civil bureaucracy.

The Role of the Foreign Ministry in Foreign Policy Decision-Making

From the 1830s onward, especially throughout the Tanzimat period, the Foreign Ministry had a considerable impact on government policies. However, the influence of the Ministry on government decisions changed during the reign of Abdulhamid II. In this period, the power of bureaucrats was severely diminished and the Yıldız Palace became the real center of administration. Naturally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was affected by these developments.

In this period, Abdulhamid II became the most influential identity in diplomacy and decisions taken, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs entered a stagnant period in policy-making. The loss of foreign ministers' power in policy-making during Abdulhamid II's reign is evident in the dismissal of more than 20 foreign ministers in the 14 years between 1871–1885.⁶³ The role of the Foreign Ministry during the period was limited to bureaucratic activities, such as the implementation of decisions and the gathering of information, rather than making decisions.⁶⁴ Last of all, while power shifts between political actors at the internal level created continuity in the institutional structure of the Ministry during the reign of Abdulhamid II (1876–1909), it also led to a weakening of the prestigious position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and transformed foreign ministers into policy implementers rather than policy-makers, as they had been in the previous Tanzimat period.

Committee of Union and Progress Period (1909–1918)

Political developments at both the international and domestic level in the early phase of the 20th century forced Abdulhamid II to re-declare the constitution. First, Russia's transition to the constitutional system, characterized as the gendarme of absolutism, followed by Iran in 1906 and China in 1908, set an example for the Ottoman State, which had just suffered a military defeat by Japan in 1904–1905.⁶⁵ Second and more importantly, the opposition of the dissident group called the Young Turks, who demanded expansion in political participation and adopted a liberal philosophy, played a key role in this process. By 1908, the constitution was re-enacted with the support of the Young Turks. Following the suppression of the March 31 rebellion, Abdulhamid II was dethroned by the parliament. In the following process, the role of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in the administration increased, and the effectiveness of the sultan in the administration decreased.⁶⁶

The foreign policy of this period was an extension of domestic politics.⁶⁷ Domestic policy and foreign policy were quite intertwined, making it difficult to distinguish one from the other. In this period, the Foreign Ministry was preoccupied with balancing domestic problems and foreign intervention;⁶⁸ Ottoman foreign policy focused on two

The all-out efforts of the CUP were to align the Ottoman State with the Triple Entente, consisting of Britain, France and Russia, as they deemed it necessary for the liberation of the state.

principles: ensuring the territorial integrity of the State and preserving its autonomy against the great powers.⁶⁹

The all-out efforts of the CUP were to align the Ottoman State with the Triple Entente, consisting of Britain, France and

Russia, as they deemed it necessary for the liberation of the state. As Ahmad remarks, “After they restored the constitution in July 1908, the Young Turks expected a sympathetic response from the Great Powers, especially from Britain and France. Instead, they found themselves facing one crisis after another culminating in their virtual expulsion from Europe.”⁷⁰ It was then that the CUP turned to Germany as a last resort.

From 1908 onward, the Ottoman State went through a series of political and diplomatic crises and failures that paved the way for the collapse of the Ottomans.

On the international scene, first, the distraction that the revolution of 1908 created in Istanbul served as a signal to Austria for the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to Bulgaria for the proclamation of its independence, and to Greece for the annexation of Crete. With scarcely an interlude, the sequence of troubles continued with the Italo-Turkish War of 1911–1912, the First and Second Balkan Wars, the First World War, and then the Turkish War of Independence. As on earlier occasions, the new period thus opened with an exceptional series of disturbances. This time, they did not end before the six-hundred-year-old empire had finally collapsed.⁷¹

In the midst of these political crises both internal and external, the transition to a constitutional order caused changes in the organizational structure of the State’s bureaucratic institutions.

Institutional Structure of the Ministry

The Ministry underwent institutional changes with new regulations just before World War I. However, a full structural and operational analysis of the Ministry is difficult to undertake, as there are some uncertainties about the Ministry's operational and hierarchical relationships.⁷² The new regulations united the agencies of the Ministry into groups and defined the connection of some groups to either the Minister or the Undersecretary.

The Undersecretary belonged within the close circle of the Minister, along with two other elements directly subordinate to the Minister: a private secretarial staff (*Kalem-i Mahsus Müdüriyeti*) and a Cipher Directorate (*Şifre Müdüriyeti*). Some of the agencies of the Ministry were attached to the Undersecretary as a group that included the Directorates of Personnel Records, the Press, Nationality Affairs, Records, Translation, Accounts and two other agencies—the Reception Office and the Superintendency of the Offices—whose functions are not clear. The Reception Office may have served to reduce outsiders' access to the Ministry's offices and the Superintendency may have been responsible for the security of the Ministry.

Some agencies directly affiliated with the Undersecretary were divided into sub-sections. For example, the Directorate of the Office “into which the former Domestic Press Directorate (*Matbuat-ı Dahiliye*) had been integrated in April 1913” had a director, an assistant to the director and other branches that included the Public Information Office (*İtibbarat Kalemi*), liable for the dissemination of government information; Reconnoiter Office (*Tedkikat Kalemi*) responsible for analyzing and translating foreign and domestic press; and Administration Office (*İdare Şubesi*) accountable for the enforcement of laws on the press and keeping statistics on the Ottoman Press.⁷³

The other directorates attached to the Undersecretary were also subdivided. The Directorate of Nationality Affairs was divided into the Nationality Office (*Tabiiyet Kalemi*) and the Verification of Nationality Office (*Tasdik-i Tabiiyet Kalemi*); the Accounts Directorate was separated into the Investigation of Accounts (*Tedkik-i Hesabat Kalemi*) and Balance Sheets (*Muvazane Kalemi*); the Records Directorate was divided into the registration of documents and the maintenance of dossiers

(*Kayıt ve Dosya Kalemi*), maintaining the archives (*Hazine-i Evrak*) and receipts and the dispatch of communications (*Mersulat ve Mevrudat Şubesi*).⁷⁴ The last agency directly linked to the Undersecretary was the Translation Directorate, which was the successor of the Translation Office of the Sublime Porte.

Another organizational grouping was the Directorate General, split into two parts. The two directorates general typify the regrouping of “elements of the central organization of the Ministry dealing with diplomatic business, on the one hand, and consular affairs, on the other.”⁷⁵ Some of the customs agencies of the Ministry, whose duties were in the same line, became dependent on one of the new Directorates General.

The Directorate General of Political Affairs included the Important Affairs Office (*Mühimme Odası*) and Circulars Section (*Tamin Şubesi*). The directorate general also included a Directorate of Political Branches split into three sections called first, second and third; the difference between them is uncertain.

The second of the directorates general contained the Directorate of General Consular, Commercial and Mixed Legal Affairs. The Directorate of Consular and Mixed Legal Affairs operated two component offices. The last central agency was the Legal Counsellorship (*Hukuk Müşavirliği*) in charge of serving the entire Ottoman government.

However, from the overthrow of Abdulhamid II to the dissolution of the Empire, the influence of not only the foreign ministers but also the sultan in foreign policy decisions decreased to a great extent.

The diplomatic corps of the State consisted of eight embassies (*büyükelçilik*) and eight legations (*ortaelçilik*). The consular service of the State was made up of honorary and salaried consuls. The salaried consuls were divided into first and second classes;

however, the hierarchical relations between the consuls and diplomatic officials of the Ministry in Istanbul are not obvious.

The Role of the Foreign Ministry in Foreign Policy Decision-Making

To reiterate, the foreign policy of the Young Turks period was an extension of domestic politics, and was shaped and determined not only by dynamics and political settings within the country but also by developments in the international system, as it had been for the last two centuries of the Ottoman Empire.

In the Tanzimat period, foreign ministers enjoyed the second most prestigious position after the Grand Vizier at the Porte. In contrast, during the reign of Abdulhamid II, who ruled the State himself, foreign ministers lost their former importance. However, from the overthrow of Abdulhamid II to the dissolution of the Empire, the influence of not only the foreign ministers but also the sultan in foreign policy decisions decreased to a great extent.⁷⁶ In the post-Abdulhamid II periods, two foreign ministers, Mehmet Rifat Pasha (1909–1911) and Mustafa Asım (1911–1912) acted upon the orders of the CUP and did not go beyond the basic principles determined by the party.⁷⁷ When the CUP took absolute control of politics with another coup in 1913, foreign policy principles took shape around the decisions of the six most influential members of the party—Halim, Cavid, Halil, Enver, Cemal and Talat.⁷⁸

In the period of the Unionists, who held power in the final years of the Ottoman State, foreign policy bureaucrats were found to be unreliable, as they had been in the reign of Abdulhamid II. For this reason, the Unionists preferred to send their loyal members to meetings with foreign representatives, rather than sending professional officials of the Foreign Ministry. Thus, during this period, the Ministry lost ground both in foreign policy decision-making and implementation. This is clearly the result of the CUP's control of all political, bureaucratic and civil actors at the internal level.

Conclusion

To understand the roots of Turkish diplomacy, it is important to take a closer look at the evolutionary process in the institutional structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the main pillars that led to its evolution and how the effectiveness of the Ministry in foreign policy

decision-making processes developed based on the Ministry's evolution within the context of changes and continuities in the domestic and international realms. It could be argued that it is not possible to categorically distinguish between the influence and effects of the internal and external levels in the absolute sense. That is, the phenomena of change and continuity in the institutional structure of the Ministry are and were open to developments from both internal and external levels. For example, the nationalist movement spread by the French Revolution affected the Ottoman State due to its sociological structure and multi-religious, multinational cosmopolitanism. The measures taken against the Revolution's ripple effects led to the establishment of new units in the institutional structure of the Ministry, especially in the Tanzimat period. As seen in this example, although the change in the institutional structure depended on the external development due to the French Revolution, it was also driven by the internal situation of the Ottoman State in terms of sociological structure.

Moreover, as Ottoman military defeats led to a loss of the Empire's sense of superiority, the understanding of diplomacy changed and new institutional revisions were made at the Ministry to keep pace with developments in the West. Since this change was due to military defeats, it can be considered the result of developments at the external level.

Along with the evolution in the institutional structure of the Ministry, its role and effectiveness in the foreign policy-making process remained volatile, constantly increasing or decreasing. It should be noted that changes and developments in the institutional structure of the Ministry did not necessarily translate into an increased role or greater effectiveness in the foreign policy-making process. While the needs driving the changes in the Ministry's institutional structure were almost equally tied to developments at both the internal and external levels, the factor that determined the effectiveness of the Ministry in the foreign policy decision-making process rather depended on changes in power balances at the domestic political level. Therefore, there is not necessarily any causal relationship between the institutional development of the Ministry and its role in the foreign policy-making process.

This is not to imply, however, that the institutional evolution of the Ministry in no way affected its role in policy-making. For example,

during the Tanzimat period, when the institutional structure of the Ministry first changed, the role and effectiveness of the Ministry in the foreign policy decision-making process increased. However, this upsurge was due to the decrease in the sultan's power in the executive role, rather than to changes in the institutional structure as such. As a matter of fact, when the institutional structure of the Ministry changed during the CUP period (1889-1906), the role of the Ministry both in the foreign policy decision-making process and the process of implementing decisions was almost non-existent. In this period, the CUP had taken all political, bureaucratic and civil actors under its own control. Although there was a change in the institutional structure of the Ministry in both the Tanzimat and CUP periods, the role of the Ministry in the foreign policy decision-making process increased in the first period and decreased in the latter, being tied primarily to shifts in the balance of power at the domestic political level.

To take another example, the role of the Ministry in decision-making during the reign of Abdulhamid II, when continuity was observed in the institutional structure of the Ministry, significantly decreased compared to the previous period (i.e. Tanzimat). Taken collectively, these examples indicate that the effectiveness of the Ministry in foreign policy decision-making processes is not directly related to changes and continuities in its institutional structure, but rather to power changes among actors at the internal political level.

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